

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION

Public Information Session

August 22, 2022, Summary (DRAFT)

The Mount Washington Commission (MWC) held a Public Information Session on its draft Master Plan for the Summit at the North Conway Community Center. PRESENT were Sen Jeb Bradley/MWC Chair, Dir Phil Bryce/Div Parks and Rec, Greg Gustina/WMNF, Jack Middleton/MWObs, Wayne Presby/Cog Railway, Drew Scamman/TownSquare Media, Chris Thayer/AMC, Rep Karen Umberger/House, and Howie Wemyss/Auto Road. Also in attendance were Rep Steve Woodcock, Councilor Joe Kenney, DNCR Commissioner Stewart, Mark Lucas/DOJ for the MWC, Rob Kirsch/MWObs, and Patrick Hummel/Mt Washington State Park. Approx. 75 public attendees were present.

Chair Bradley called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. He welcomed the public and said that written comments on the draft Master Plan are due by August 31st. The MWC members introduced themselves.

Mark Lucas provided a brief overview of the draft Master Plan which is a “living” document near finalization and can be amended. He reviewed the MWC statutory requirement to submit a master plan to the Governor every 10 years for approval by legislature. The Master Plan encompasses the summit circle owned by the State and provides the basis for capital projects and funding. Accordingly, the MWC is recommending that a summit assessment be completed as a baseline for planning.

The public was informed that the Cog Railway project known as Lizzie’s Station is not within the jurisdiction of the MWC. Comments on Lizzie’s Station, which is a proposal located within the Railway’s Right-of-Way, should be directed to the Coos County Planning Commission and the White Mountain National Forest.

Chair Bradley recognized Director Bryce, who is retiring from the Division of Parks and Recreation next week. Dir Bryce said that the Master Plan outlines the process used to guide the MWC in its work. The challenges and partner relationships are complex. As a self-funded operation, state parks must achieve financial stability but, by statute, revenue generated by Mount Washington State Park does not contribute back to the park system. The Master Plan balances conflicting goals, such as capital improvement needs, the mix of historical and modern facilities, environmental impacts and natural resource preservation, the tourism economy and providing access for those visitors who would not otherwise have access to the summit. Mr Hummel confirmed that visitors came from 30 different countries in July, as recorded in the visitor log.

Chair Bradley called upon the public to provide comment on the draft Master Plan:

Michael Callis, Conway recommends the use of switchbacks rather than stairs to improve accessibility.

Joe Egan, Brownfield, ME said he has spent 52 years in the Mt Washington area, is an AMC member, and helps maintain two hiking trails on Mt Washington. He recognizes the value of the Auto Road and Cog Railway but said there should be no further development. Existing facilities may be improved, but facility expansion would be detrimental.

Abby Evankow, Gorham said environmental and climate assessments, including the flora and fauna, are needed. The Commission should hire a facilitator to incorporate the environmental assessment. The preservation of the summit should take higher priority.

Rick Davis, No. Conway has lived in the Mt Washington valley for over 70 years. Continued growth and development will bring more people to the summit and cause more traffic. The Mt Washington system is already over stressed. He asked about the 18 railcars proposed by the Cog Railway. Chair Bradley reiterated that the Cog project is outside the jurisdiction of the MWC, and comments should be directed to the Coos County Planning Commission and the WMNF. Mr Davis said the Cog project will impact the summit, that hurricane forces will impact the railcars, and that there is an endangered bird species at the summit.

Nick Aiello, Conway said he has operated as a mountain guide for 10 years and understands groups profiting from the mountain. He thinks we should reduce the physical presence on the summit: when structures are at its end-of-life they should be removed, and the summit should be restored to its natural environment.

Donna Veilleux, Madison said that the Master Plan calls for an environmental assessment for the summit funded by legislature. She thinks that the Coos County and WMNF should ask for an assessment of the Cog project. Chair Bradley clarified that the MWC recommendations are not binding on legislature, but that the commission's unanimous support for the assessment makes a strong case.

Commissioner Stewart said that the purpose of tonight's public session is to solicit comments on the summit Master Plan. The Cog's proposal is separate from this effort. The Master Plan will provide legislature with MWC's united support for the assessment and funding request.

Lucy Wyman, Lancaster said that the MWC has some influence beyond their jurisdiction of the state park. She asked if the MWC had any interest in the Cog project. She thinks the project will bring more people to the mountain.

? Brown has served on the Conway Planning Board and is 7th generation on the land. She asked who speaks for the mountain, the impacts of weather, the birds, and other species? She said that we should work towards having people who speak for the mountain.

Commissioner Stewart said that the Governor and Council approved an MOU between DNCR and the Cog that would clarify the Cog's Right-of-Way easement at the summit by limiting its future use if Lizzie's Station were approved.

Chocorua Lake Conservancy representative said that people need to learn to wait for what they want. If it is too crowded, one should come back later. There are a limited number of people that can be on the mountain and a full environmental assessment needs to be completed.

Teresa M. Egan, Brownfield, ME thanked the MWC for the Master Plan and its deliverables that includes summit aesthetics. She said that Lizzie's Station railcars will have an aesthetic impact and are dangerous. She added that those who stay overnight may not be prepared for the elements that may occur.

Ellen ?, Conway said that she did not know about the MWC, and thought that their meetings should be more widely announced. Chair Bradley responded that the meetings are noticed in the Senate calendars.

Elizabeth Seabury, No. Conway said that climate change is an issue, and the energy efficiency measures deserve more attention in the Master Plan. She observed that the MWC members are mostly male.

Jonathan ? said that the Master Plan should include alternatives for visitors that are off summit. Chair Bradley said that the Master Plan is essential to support the funding request for the environmental assessment. The Master Plan can be amended based upon the findings of the assessment.

Mr Jack Middleton, who is stepping down from the MWC, was recognized for his long-standing work on the MWC since its inception in 1969. Thank you, Mr Middleton!

Written comments are due by Aug. 31st. The MWC will act on the Master Plan at a meeting in the fall. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.