

MOUNT WASHINGTON COMMISSION

Public Information Session

August 23, 2022, Summary (DRAFT)

The Mount Washington Commission (MWC) held a Public Information Session on its draft Master Plan for the Summit at the Legislative Office Building in Concord. 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 DNCR Commissioner Stewart, Mark Lucas/DOJ for the MWC, Donna Dunn/MWObs, and Patrick Hummel/Mt Washington State Park. Rob Kirsch/MWObs arrived later. Approx. 25 public attendees were present.

Chair Bradley called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. He welcomed the public and announced that the public session to solicit comments on the draft Master Plan for the summit would start at 10 a.m. The MWC members introduced themselves.

Mr Middleton MOVED to accept the minutes of June 10, 2022; SECONDED by Mr Presby. The minutes were APPROVED, as written.

Ms Dunn asked the MWC to approve the use of \$2,500 from the MWObs restricted funds for summit museum exhibit improvements. Mr Presby MOVED to approve the request; SECONDED by Mr Middleton. The motion was APPROVED, unanimously.

Commissioner Stewart said that she spoke to the UNH Survey Center about conducting a visitor survey. UNH could send a survey to its existing participant list or developed a survey specific for the MWC. Following a brief discussion, Commr Stewart was asked to obtain cost proposals from UNH that outlines the two options and includes sample questions. The MWC will discuss the proposals at its next meeting.

Mr Wemyss asked how the State and Cog Railway developed an MOU that was approved by the Governor and Council without having first discussed it with the MWC. He said that the State is an abutter to the Cog's Lizzie's Station project, yet the MWC had no say or input into the MOU. Commr Stewart said that the Cog proposed its summit track extension project to the MWC and did not get the MWC's support. The Cog worked on a new proposal and presented it to the MWC in March and obtained feedback. The State worked with the Cog that would provide the State with additional protections at the summit. The resulting MOU would, if Lizzie's Station is constructed, restrict the Cog from expanding its footprint at the summit.

Mr Wemyss thought the MWC should have been able to comment on the MOU as one of its duties. Mr Presby commented that the MWC did not review the NDA (Non-Disturbance Agreement) between the State and the Auto Road that has a 15-year term. Dir Bryce said that the Master Plan addresses the MWC's review of agreements and recognizes the complexity of the summit relationships and their interests. The Cog's original proposal to expand its track would have had a negative impact on the visitors and the partners.

The meeting was recessed at 9:50 a.m. until the 10 a.m. start of the public information session.

At 10 a.m., Governor Sununu gave his remarks. He thanked the MWC for bringing forward new ideas for investments in support of the state's travel and tourism, and future opportunities at the summit. He thanked the public for their interest and participation in the process. Governor Sununu recognized Jack Middleton for his continuous 50+ years of leadership and service to the MWC and the Mt Washington Valley region. He read *An Accommodation* honoring Mr Middleton.

Mr Lucas provided a brief overview of the draft Master Plan, which is close to final, following public comment. The MWC's jurisdiction relates to the summit and not Lizzie's Station. Those who wish to provide comment on Lizzie's Station should direct their comments to the DNCR, the Cog Railway, the Coos County Planning Commission and their elected officials. In accordance with statute, the MWC is targeting Jan. 1, 2023, to submit the Master Plan to the Governor and legislature.

Allen Brooks is collecting photos and icons for inclusion in the final Master Plan. Mr Lucas reminded everyone that the Master Plan is a living document that may be amended. He highlighted each section of the Plan and the deliverables table. The goal is to submit the final Master Plan and request a capital appropriation from legislature to fund the summit assessment. The results of the assessment may result in modifications made to the Plan.

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

Roy Schweiker, Concord said that the Master Plan references only two 4,000 footers with non-hiker access. He suggested that Wildcat be added to the list. He said that we should stop encouraging more visitors with too many people already on the summit. Perhaps there should be a parking fee at the hiker lots. A summit loop trail will help to disperse people. He thinks the Auto Road and Cog will increase their fees if there are limits placed on the number of visitors. A reservation system could be used, but hikers should be given a week-long “window” of dates to allow for scheduling adjustments due to inclement weather. The National Parks Service’s reservation system has problems with “no shows” and a reservation system needs to be fair.

Wilfrid Mott-Smith, Loudon asked if a legislative change needs to be made to give the MWC a stronger role than just consultation, including the jurisdiction over the Cog’s Lizzie’s Station project. Chair Bradley read RSA 227-B:1 that established the MWC “to manage the summit of Mount Washington property owned by the state of New Hampshire.” He said that the Coos County Planning Commission would have jurisdiction over the Cog project.

Bruce Berk, Pittsfield (?) asked about the cost of the environmental assessment. Chair Bradley reviewed the scope of the assessment found in the draft Master Plan, pg. 5. He and Rep. Umberger will advocate for the funding in legislature, and the unanimous support of the MWC for this work is essential. For comparison, the assessment of the Yankee Building was \$200K, resulting in a report for building replacement at a cost of \$15M. Chair Bradley hoped that the public would also testify before legislature in support of the summit assessment appropriation.

Zack Porter, Exec Director of Standing Trees, Montpelier, VT said his organization was established two years ago for the protection of public lands. He suggested that these meetings be held on Zoom to allow greater public participation. The WMNF 2005 Forest Plan identified the flora in the alpine range to be most interesting and unique. He thinks the Cog project will have a negative impact on the alpine flora. The management goals of the Master Plan are not co-equal. The summit flora and natural resources should be honored and given legal protections. Lizzie’s Station will increase visitation and overnight lodging is a new use on the mountain. He questioned why the Master Plan needs to be finalized before the environmental assessment is done. A Master Plan hasn’t been submitted in over 50 years and it may be harder to amend the Plan. The Master Plan should include alternatives for options that meet the MWC’s statutory obligations. The summit is an amazing place and a lot is at stake. He appreciates the efforts of the MWC and providing public access to the summit.

Written comments on the draft Master Plan are due by Aug. 31, 2022. The MWC will act on the Master Plan at its meeting on October 7, 2022, at 1 a.m. at Cannon Mountain Peabody Lodge.

Chair Bradley thanked Jack Middleton for his work with the MWC and the State and presented him with a Senate Resolution. Chair Bradley recognized Director Bryce for his positive impact to the state park system and presented him with a Senate Resolution.

Rep Umberger MOTIONED to adjourn; Mr Wemyss SECONDED. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy, MWC clerk.