

**Boston Harbor Islands Partnership
Meeting Minutes
WilmerHale, 60 State Street, 26th floor, Boston, MA
January 18, 2011, 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM**

Attendees: Greg Ketchen and Charlie Norris—Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council; Tom Powers—Boston Harbor Island Alliance (BHIA); James Hunt and Richard McGuinness—Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA); David Cash and Susan Kane—Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); Marianne Connolly representing Fred Laskey—Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; Bruce Jacobson—National Park Service (NPS); Peg Wheeler—The Trustees of Reservations; CDR Nathan Knapp—United States Coast Guard (USCG).

Chair David Cash welcomed all, called the meeting to order, and announced a quorum was present. Partners and the audience introduced themselves. There was a motion made to approve the minutes of the December 14th meeting. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

2011 Highlights

Bruce Jacobson reported on progress of Partnership goals as stated in the 2016 park strategic plan.

He stated specific goals to increase visitation, ferry riders, free boat trips, public programs, small craft visits, and he reported significant progress in all those areas. Ferry ridership was up 25% from 2010, and island managers are preparing for it to rise again in 2011. Improvements for small boaters are in the works. Public programs grew substantially this past season, and new initiatives like “Let’s Move Outside” and the Civil War 150th Commemoration are planned for the coming years. Programs for underserved populations continue to grow. Gateway improvements are underway at both Long Wharf and Hingham. Bruce mentioned a stated goal of developing performance standards for the ferry that should begin this season.

Progress was also made in the interpretation and youth categories of the strategic plan. Exhibits on Georges Island visitor center are complete and upgrades to exhibits are planned this year on Spectacle Island. The number of youth brought to the park and the number of them participating in programs, curriculum-based activities, and the number of youth employed have all grown substantially.

Significant advancement was also made in the environmental leadership, stewardship, and planning/administration categories as well. The goal for the mine storage building to be in “good” condition was exceeded with the opening of the new visitor center and concession area. Stabilizing Fort Andrews on Peddocks Island will begin this year and studies are underway for understanding the scope of remediation needed to open Gallops Island. Three Native American ethnography studies are in progress and should be complete in 2011. One vital signs protocol for breeding waterbirds is solidly in place, and other vital signs monitoring efforts are under development. The goal to double the number of species identified is well on its way; currently stands at more than 3,000. Bruce said a resource stewardship strategy should be completed this year and he intends to make progress on funding an analysis of an affordable system of park-wide

transportation. Cooperative management agreements (CMA's) between NPS and each Partner agency are planned. The first CMA with DCR was completed and signed in December 2010. Island Alliance continues to make progress on marketing efforts; the park's Facebook page now has 870 "friends." NPS has plans to develop an "Ask the Superintendent" newsletter to inform the public about park happenings.

Park Staffing

Tom Powers said Boston Harbor Island Alliance has gone through a recent transformation. Jane Ellis is the new Director of Finance and Administration. She manages contracts for boats, concessions, marina and mooring operations. Connie Saienga is the newest hire and replaces Jessica Conaway as Director of Corporate and Foundation giving. Marc Gleicher is Operations Manager. Laurie Jackson Cormier, Director of Individual Giving is expected to return from maternity leave next week. Rebecca Smerling continues as Community Programs Director as does Emilie Kendall as Marketing Director.

Susan Kane reported DCR is struggling with the loss of 2 full-time staff dedicated to the islands. She said they will try to make up some of the loss with seasonal help. Susan said the islands typically get 26 seasonal rangers, far more than other state parks are allocated. Due to the nature of the island park, it is more cost-effective to staff the islands then to leave them unprotected. She hopes to retain the same number of seasonal staff this year, and continue staffing the visitor center at Georges and information kiosk at Hingham as well as assist at the Boston Harbor Islands Pavilion. It is part of an effort towards integration of Partnership staff in all areas of the park.

Bruce Jacobson said NPS funding levels are unclear. The federal government is working under a continuing resolution until March. There is speculation parks may be subject to budget cuts, but he hopes to retain 2010 staffing levels. A spring education technician position will soon be posted, as will jobs for summer rangers and visitor use assistants. He announced that after 10 years of service at the islands, Kelly Fellner accepted a permanent position as Regional Coordinator of Youth and Volunteer programs for the Northeast Region. She will be stationed in Philadelphia. He asked for suggestions on ways to thank her. Susan Kane said that since one of Kelly's initiatives was multi-agency seasonal staff training, it would be great to bring her back for a significant event on-island this year.

CDR Nate Knapp reported the USCG internship devoted to the Partnership for Boston Light Programs was lost. He will keep Tom Powers updated about any potential student or summer hires that might be available through USCG.

CDR Knapp announced he will be reassigned to Colorado Springs in July and expects Paul Arnett to take his place on the Partnership. Paul works with harbor light houses and navigation, is familiar with the park, and has attended Partnership meetings, so he expects an easy transition.

Operations Committee

David Cash announced Susan Kane agreed to become Chair of the Operations Committee. The Partnership thanked Jim Scully, the former Chair, for his service.

Susan reported the Operations Committee began discussion of instituting special “dog days” in the park. Early in the conversation, it became evident that it would be very challenging to bring a dog from Boston. Dogs are only allowed on leash outside of Fort Warren on Georges Island and not allowed on Spectacle Island. If special dog days were set aside, it seemed this would work best from Hingham. There were still several concerns about highlighting a program that is so limited in scope, and ferry operators were not completely engaged in discussions about policy. Tom hoped that there will be some leeway for boaters using the marina on Spectacle Island. Susan said rangers routinely handle such things on an individual basis and expects that to continue. There was some discussion that it was still important to state a clear policy.

Water Transportation

Tom Powers suggested having the ferry operators attend the next Partnership meeting and give a presentation. David Cash requested Boston’s Best Cruises (BBC) be prepared to report on specific details regarding operations last year: things that worked; things that didn’t work; how operations functioned on peak days; as well as their plans to improve service this coming year. Susan Kane suggested they present ridership data with snapshots of specific busy times, as opposed to just averages.

David Cash asked if there was data collected on wait times, as he and others had experienced long wait times at both departure and return trips. Bruce Jacobson said Al Hebb, NPS Supervisory Visitor Use Assistant, has started getting reports of where the boat is at particular times, but it can be difficult to interpret. Susan reminded all that times of boats are subject to a variety of factors, for instance, the boat log may show an LNG stopping traffic. She said anything less than 10 minutes late is considered “on time.” Susan said her office has received notably fewer complaints this year about wait times, and mentioned that communication between BBC and park staff has improved.

David suggested boat status be posted or available to visitors as a text message. Susan said better signage at the island docks will also help reduce confusion about which lines to wait in for a particular boat. Tom added there are two types of waiting times, waiting for a boat and waiting for a ticket. He had the sense the new ticket center helped speed the ticketing process at Long Wharf. He said 3,000 people were managed on Free Ferry Day with a minimum of wait time. The timed-tickets and online ticketing also seem to help. Charlie Norris said it often takes a few seasons for online ticketing benefits to take hold. He added it was very important to identify and rectify issues promptly. Bruce mentioned the online system was used for a recent cruise and there were several visitors that reported having issues, and not being able to pay online.

Tom reminded all that he participates in weekly calls with the ferry operators during the season, and invited all to contact him with feedback. A motion was made to request that BBC managers attend the March Partnership meeting and report on last season’s operations and about their plans for the upcoming season. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Climate Friendly Parks Action Plan

Bruce Jacobson announced the *Climate Friendly Parks: Boston Harbor Islands Action Plan* is now available on the park’s website. He said a good first step would be to establish a “green team”, a sub-committee of the Operations Committee to continue

work on the effort. Representatives from NPS, DCR and Thompson Island will sit on the sub-committee to start with. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Park Communication Guide

Bruce Jacobson reminded all that at the last Partnership meeting, Susan Kane requested more time for DCR's regional or main office to review the Communication Guide. Bruce said he has not received any feedback from DCR and asked the Partnership to adopt the Communication Guide as presented, with the proviso that the Superintendent have authority to make minor revisions for DCR or the other Partners as needed. A motion was made to approve the Communication Guide with the above provision. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Advisory Council

Charlie Norris invited all to the Council's annual meeting on March 2. Phillip Marsh, NPS Park Ranger, will give a talk on Boston Harbor Islands during the Civil War and an update on programming plans around the sesquicentennial. Greg Ketchen mentioned that there will also be elections held for Chair and Vice-Chair positions, as well as a formal recommendation to fill a Voting Alternate position on the Partnership. David Cash mentioned he was interested in attending.

New Business

Bruce Jacobson mentioned that Thompson Island was selected as one of very few sites for a pilot program to provide outdoor, off-site, curriculum-based summer learning opportunities for underperforming Boston Public Schools. NPS partnered with Thompson Island Outward Bound in this effort, and it was a very successful program. Bruce passed out results from an external evaluation of summer learning partnership outcomes. The evaluation showed extremely positive results from the program on Thompson Island. Bruce said the Bringing Youth to the Islands Committee plans to meet in February.

Bruce said National Geographic Maps presented draft text for a spring publication for the Partnership to review. Their planning group will visit the islands in February.

Bruce reported the "Get Out and Bird" trip was successful. About 200 people joined staff and expert volunteer guides and saw over 34 species of birds and 2 species of seal. He noted that BBC, park staff, and volunteers all did a great job.

The Partnership meetings for 2011 were approved as follows: March 15, May 17, July 19, September 20, and November 15.

Public Comment

There was no additional public comment.

The meeting was adjourned.