

Boston Harbor Islands Partnership
Meeting Minutes
WilmerHale, 60 State Street, 26th Floor, Boston, MA
January 10, 2015, 3:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Attendees: Maureen Cavanaugh, Charlie Norris and Elizabeth Solomon—Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council; Phil Griffiths—Boston Harbor Island Alliance (BHIA); City of Boston—Austin Blackmon; Susan Kane and Commissioner Jack Murray—Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); Massachusetts Port Authority (MASSPORT)—Andrew Hargens; Fred Laskey and Marianne Connolly—Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; Giles Parker—National Park Service (NPS); Jim Scully—Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center (TIOBEC); LCDR David O’Connell—United States Coast Guard (USCG).

Commissioner Murray, Acting Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed all. A quorum was present.

There was a motion made to approve the minutes of the November 18, 2014, meeting. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Long Island Bridge

Susan Kane said the City of Boston is soliciting bids to demolish the Long Island Bridge, and explained that the project affects utility service to Spectacle Island. She said that DCR is preparing to be without utilities at least through June 15. Water service has already been shut off and power is expected to be down next week. There are already new generators in place on Spectacle Island that will power the lechate system and island needs, with a more permanent back-up system to follow pending approvals from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Phil Griffiths asked if it would be helpful if Partners wrote support letters. It was suggested that Partners comment during the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review process. It was noted that the transport of water and fuel is logistically complex, tide dependent, and the cost substantial.

Water Transportation

Phil Griffiths gave a recap of the 2014 ferry service and an update on water transportation plans for 2015. The presentation is attached. Boston Harbor Cruises (BHC) returned to island service in 2014. Phil said it was a successful season for the ferry with the highest number of riders in the park’s history, but there were reduced riders to camping islands. Phil reminded all that BHC operated in 2014 without the subsidy for the interisland ferry that had been provided in previous years and that it remains a challenge to make the interisland ferry service self-sustaining. He said park managers want to keep fares affordable and add Peddocks as a third hub as well as optimize service to camping islands. Phil reported Boston Harbor Cruises proposes a fare structure that will allow for higher capacity boats and this type of expanded service, which would involve a proposed \$2 raise in ticket price and new discounted rates for students and active military.

Suzanne Gall Marsh, Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands, asked if there were plans to extend the camping season into the spring and fall seasons. Susan Kane said the islands are a great location for that, Peddocks in particular. Extending the camping season was explored, but won’t happen this season, the challenges are many and include water transportation. Alison Nolan, BHC, added that the proposed increase in fares comes close to covering the cost of adding more runs to Peddocks and providing better service to camping islands in the summer. Giles Parker said that the ferry schedule is much improved and will be easier to communicate to visitors. Fred Laskey said it seemed a reasonable plan, particularly to be able to continue and increase service despite the loss of subsidy. Jim Scully added that Thompson raised fares to \$17 and it went smoothly, without complaint. Charlie Norris shared his general support since the fare increase came with an increase in service. He said

that regular visitors might not feel the increase as much because the discounted Family Pack stayed the same rate, and asked if it was feasible to keep the 10-ride ticket cost the same per ride as last year. Alison said they will look into it, but thought it seemed possible. Charlie also asked if reduced gas prices had any positive impacts. Alison said the ferries used for the islands are the larger, slower boats and don't burn as much fuel as the faster, hi-speed ferries, so the cost of fuel is less dramatic. She also said BHC purchased fuel up-front at a fixed rate, so did not enjoy a direct benefit of the recent dip in prices. Alison said that BHC is looking for another catamaran with a capacity of 349 passengers to add to its fleet that would provide Harbor Islands service. She also mentioned that it is a great benefit to have the MBTA commuter boats service Georges and Grape islands.

The partners discussed island capacity and how the switch in open-return ticketing went in 2014. It was found that people do not like to be locked into a return time. Susan noted that it was common to have 2700 on Georges on a Saturday, and they liked to stay throughout the afternoon. Alison added that the later trips were always crowded and back-up boats were required to bring everyone home. They are working with groups to schedule returns. Suzanne requested that the full schedule get on the web as soon as possible as campers are already planning their trips.

A motion was made to endorse the proposed 2015 ferry schedule and the management goals for the fare restructuring. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Isles Arts Initiative

Liz Devlin, independent curator, art consultant, and founder of FLUX.Boston, an online resource for artists and art enthusiasts in the Boston area, gave a presentation on an Isles Art Initiative that is proposed for the upcoming season. She is working with DCR, NPS, and Boston Harbor Island Alliance to plan the program. The presentation is attached.

The partners discussed. Fred noticed the timing was during high season on the already busy islands, and wondered if it could also be a way to drive visitation. Charlie Norris said it is an exciting proposal, but mentioned concerns, particularly around the amount of fundraising needed in such as sort time and cost and logistics of island installations. He recommended using a phased approach, and focus on the parts that can move forward. Liz said that there is flexibility built in and fundraising is underway. Liz was invited back for an update as plans solidify.

Little Brewster Island

CDR O'Connell reported that contractors are scheduled to complete work started last year at Little Brewster Island. Because of the extent of the work that still needs done, they expect it to impact the early weeks of the visitor season, but it is hoped to be open for an abbreviated season. Funding has not yet been identified for the needed repairs to the boathouse. NPS applied for grant funding, but has not yet heard anything. Planning for the 300th anniversary of Boston Light continues.

Marketing and Communications

Giles gave a presentation that offered a quick review of some 2014 marketing successes and offered some recommendations for 2015. The presentation is attached. He said that the park name was identified as a source of confusion, with at least 6 different names used in media. He recommended that a standard name be used, the byline "A national park area" be phased out, and Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park be considered as a way to increase name recognition. He said the name honors both legislated designations and may help minimize confusion. The partners discussed. The current thinking is to keep the lighthouse logo, but drop the associated bylines, as Boston Harbor Islands is the fundamental identity. Marianne Connolly raised the concern that MWRA designed all their signage with national park standards and so did other partners. Fred Laskey asked if there was a plan in place to provide updated signs. Giles said he expected there to be a phased approach and that

the shift could happen over time. Susan Kane said she is supportive of the change and that it was an accurate description. Phil Griffiths added that the name change would be helpful to gain support from the state legislature and that it also takes advantage of the national park brand that has global reach. There was a question of what the name change would have on islands the City of Boston owned, Rainsford, Long, and Spectacle.

Advisory Council

Elizabeth Solomon, Chair, said the Council held a meeting on December 10th. Ethnographer Cathy Stanton gave a presentation on her research of the Peddocks Island cottages. They also finalized the bylaws and continue work on building membership and clarifying what their goals are. She requested that there be presentations about the name change and art initiative at future meetings of the council. The annual meeting will be held on March 11.

Public Comment

Suzanne Gall Marsh said that the new interpretive signage on Thompson Island was great. Commissioner Murray announced the new Secretary of Energy and Environment, Matthew Beaton will start the next week.

The meeting was adjourned.