

Boston Harbor Islands Partnership
Meeting Minutes
WilmerHale, 60 State Street, 26th Floor, Boston, MA
November 17, 2015, 3:00 PM – 4:45 PM

Attendees: Maureen Cavanaugh, Charlie Norris and Elizabeth Solomon—Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council; Richard McGuinness—Boston Redevelopment Authority; Phil Griffiths—Boston Harbor Island Alliance (BHIA); Susan Kane and Samantha Overton—Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); Fred Laskey and Marianne Connolly—Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; Michael Creasey and Giles Parker—National Park Service (NPS); CDR David O’Connell for CDR Marc Knowlton—United States Coast Guard (USCG).

Giles Parker, Acting Chair, opened the meeting and welcomed all. A quorum was present.

There was a motion made to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2015 meeting. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Water Transportation

Phil Griffiths reported that the 2015 ferry season was a successful one. There was increased capacity on the ferries which also included an increase of service to Peddocks Island. The interisland shuttle remained free for visitors despite the loss of subsidy. Ridership was slightly down from 2014, which had been the record breaking year for the highest number of riders in the park’s history. Phil introduced Alison Nolan from Boston Harbor Cruises (BHC). Alison gave an overview of the season (presentation attached). She said weather was a major factor in the decrease of ridership. There were more weather-related cancellations this year and 42% of the decrease in ridership was related to poor weather on weekends. Visitation was very strong on weekends with good weather. The most heavily visited island was Georges with 62% of the visitation, Spectacle next with 31% and Peddocks with 4% and Lovells with 2%. Michael Creasey asked if there was any ridership analysis done related to programming. Phil responded that it would be great data to have, and hopes to have it available in the future.

Alison said that it was a good year from an operational standpoint. There were many improvements in place from the prior season and they continued to learn more about visitor needs. She said that having direct service to each hub island was very beneficial, though it did result in fewer seats available to Spectacle Island. Alison said that BHC is working with park managers on how to increase capacity to Spectacle during peak demand (10-11:30AM), as there was more demand than capacity this year.

Alison reported that the fare increase this season did help offset the costs of the inter-island service, but it did not cover them; the current model is not sustainable. She said revenues were up, but costs were also rising. The Partners discussed the challenges of funding the inter-island service and the ridership numbers to Peddocks and other camping islands. Susan Kane mentioned that having staff on the island and the regular ferry service is beneficial to resource protection. Partners noted the many benefits of having a comprehensive system that includes both the ferries and inter-island service. Samantha Overton gave a suggestion to offer new ticket incentives such as buy ten rides and get one free, or perhaps a season pass. She said it could possibly increase ridership and help with the revenue stream early in the season. Alison responded that BHC is happy to look at the feasibility of offering season passes, but said that experience has shown that it typically serves a small market.

Alison mentioned that BHC is making progress updating their website and is working to optimize their website for mobile use.

Youth Engagement

Phil Griffiths announced that Elisabeth Colby, who is currently working for NPS as an Education Specialist, will soon be working for BHIA with a focus of increasing youth engagement.

Liza Stearns, NPS Youth and Visitor Engagement Director, said that the Partnership had an extraordinary education team this year and she thanked staff for their exemplary service. She also recognized the amazing youth programs ran by other harbor partners including the New England Aquarium, The Boston Harbor Association and Save the Harbor / Save the Bay.

Liza gave a presentation about the Harbor Islands Discovery Camp program that was piloted this year. The camp program was supported by BHIA, DCR, NPS, and Student Conservation Association (SCA), and held in partnership with YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston. The goal was to connect youth with their harbor islands. The program used a multi-day immersion model that began and ended in community clubs and involved theme/skill-based experiences at each of the hub islands. The week-long experiences included a history exploration of Georges Island, outdoor recreation on Peddocks Islands and a service project on Spectacle Island. The hope is that this first recreational visit will lead to a progression of involvement that could include participation in curriculum-based programs, becoming youth mentors for new island explorers, than obtaining summer employment/development positions.

Elisabeth Colby said she is looking forward to working with all the partners to engage more youth and work towards the development of a park-wide youth engagement strategy. She mentioned the NPS “Every Kid in a Park” initiative, which invites 4th graders to explore their national parks. NPS is working with DCR and BHIA to expand Discovery Camps to a 5-week program for this age group and provide the opportunity for meaningful experiences while visiting the Harbor Islands and sites along the Freedom Trail.

Long Island Update

John Thompson, Boston Public Health Department, gave an update on Long Island operations. The Long Island Bridge was closed on October 4, 2014. Utility service to Long and Spectacle islands was disrupted by the closure. Social services were relocated; security staff remain on Long Island. Temporary measures were put into place so that both Spectacle and the Harborview camp could operate in the 2015 season. John said thanked DCR for their assistance with shutdown operations and the barging and moving of equipment. The city is currently assessing the feasibility of replacing the bridge and upgrading the docking facilities. Phil Griffiths said that this is an opportunity to explore public access possibilities.

Urban Agenda

Michael Creasey said as NPS is approaching its centennial year, the agency is looking at its future. Particular notice was given to the role of NPS in urban areas and to the important role that urban parks play in the community. He described the “Urban Agenda” as a strategy to organize toward building relevancy for all Americans and making deeper connections with people’s everyday lives – to reach them where they live – not just where some may vacation. Michael said that parks are critical to healthy, vibrant and livable cities and that NPS. There are currently 407 national park units, support of several regional offices, and a large network of 43 programs (such as Historic Preservation, Land & Water Conservation, and Rivers & Trails). He said the NPS needs to mobilize, coordinate and share the resources they have, and also desires to work more collaboratively and stretch beyond traditional park boundaries. Michael said that no one division, park or program or even the agency itself has the resources and knowledge to address the needs of the communities we

serve. Working together and collaborating through partnerships will increase the social, economic, cultural and environmental impact of our collective work. It is an exciting time for Boston, as it is one of the ten areas chosen to begin this transformation and is a tremendous opportunity for innovative thinking and creative problem solving that can lead to great benefits to our community.

Michael said that as General Superintendent of National Parks of Boston, he will work to support this initiative. He illustrated the collaborative power of these 3 park units by sharing that that Boston Harbor Islands has 6 full time personnel and just over \$1M budget, and combined Boston National Historical Park and Boston African American Historical Site bring with it about \$10.5M and 110 full time employees and over 5 million visitors. Michael said that he sees tremendous potential for the islands and the City of Boston and that he appreciates the warm welcome and looks forward to getting to know everyone.

Agency Updates

CDR David O'Connell said the Coast Guard continues working on plans for the celebration of 300th anniversary of Boston Light in collaboration with NPS and BHIA. A press event is being planned for September and they are working towards opening the boat house to visitors and developing new exhibits. David said that harbor security is a priority and increased harbor patrols and armed boarding of passenger vessels are expected to continue indefinitely.

Fred Laskey said that MWRA is celebrating their 30th Anniversary this year. He offered to make a presentation at the next meeting.

Phil Griffiths announced that the Boston Harbor Island Alliance Gala will be held on Georges Island on June 23rd.

Samantha Overton said that camping reservations opened for the season and that yurts were sold out the very first day it went live. She said they are excited to add 6 more this upcoming season. She also reported that work continues on the resource management plan, a visioning session with BHIA and NPS was held and talks with the City of Boston are upcoming. Samantha also said that Dan Siegar, Energy and Environmental Affairs, is the Acting Commissioner and is a big supporter of the islands.

Susan Kane said that DCR contributed \$450k and NPS contributed \$275k to a large-scale safety fence and walkway improvement project on Georges Island. The project is nearing completion, and will provide a much safer environment for visitors.

Richard McGuinness said that the Boston Redevelopment Authority is 3 years into development of a Downtown Waterfront Municipal Harbor Plan. This plan will support public access to water transportation and better access from Downtown Boston to the water's edge.

Advisory Council

Elizabeth Solomon said the Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council has created two committees, one to focus on membership issues and one focused on the resource management plan. Elizabeth asked how the council can be part of the development process. Samantha said that Andy Bachman is the project manager and DCR values public participation.

Elizabeth invited all to the next council meeting which will be held on December 9, 2015.

Public Comment

Suzanne Gall Marsh, Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands, invited all to the annual "Seafarer's Island Holiday" on Thompson Island held on January 1, 2016. She reminded all that before the

national recreation area was designated, a planning charette was held on Long Island. She said that the park's Advisory Council sponsors public meetings to capture public comment on a variety of planning issues.

Amy Gaylord said that Save the Harbor / Save the Bay (SHSB) had a very successful year and that their "All Access" served 9250 youth in 2015. She also said that through a partnership with Bay State Cruise Lines, SHSB brought 6500 youth to the islands.

Samantha Overton invited all to participate in DCR's First Day Hikes.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45PM