

## Government Agencies and AFSCME – October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2006

Commission Co-Chairman Representative Anthony Petruccelli opened the meeting, saying that the Commission was formed because there were problems with operations, maintenance, and capital projects on many beaches in the Metropolitan area, and that the Commission was committed to making positive change. He said the Commission wanted to “get it right”, so that in twenty years there wouldn’t be a need for another Commission. He also expressed the Commission’s disappointment that DCR Commissioner Stephen Burrington did not attend the meeting, and he asked EOEA Secretary Robert Golledge to convey that disappointment to the administration. He closed by saying that the Commission was especially interested in how maintenance was scheduled and carried out at each of the DCR beaches, and he cited some examples of complaints about maintenance at the previous hearings.

Co-Chairman Senator Jack Hart spoke next, and echoed Petruccelli’s feelings of disappointment that Commissioner Burrington was not in attendance, saying he was frustrated that the administration told the Commissioner not to come. He went on to say that the Commission would try to get all of the information they needed from Secretary Golledge, and that the inquiry would be successful despite the Commissioner’s absence. Senator McGee spoke next, saying he was frustrated by Burrington’s editorial in the *Globe* that attributed some of DCR’s problems to the earmarks that the legislature put in DCR’s budget. McGee said that the legislature felt that nothing got done in anyone’s district *without* specific earmarks. Representative Kathi-Anne Reinstein expressed her frustration about Commissioner Burrington not being there, and added that the Commission was prepared to help DCR, to ask what they needed and to try and get it for them.

Secretary Golledge began by saying he had been on the job just four weeks, and was looking forward to hearing the Commission’s concerns, but also wanted to recognize the good work that was happening. He described some recent capital improvement projects. He noted that while DCR was making strides there was still much more work to be done, and that he was not satisfied with the pace of the projects. He said that for years the agency simply responded to complaints rather than act proactively. He described a new system where all work orders are being entered into a centralized database to more effectively organize work in the future.

Senator Hart asked what DCR’s budget has been in the past, what it was now, what the Secretary thought it should be going forward, and also about past and current staffing levels. The Secretary responded by saying there were many different pots of money, and that the bigger question was how to grow in a way that the organization could maintain its systems and not overstretch its capacity. He also said that DCR had about 200 less employees than they did when there were two separate agencies and that clearly there was a need for more people out in the field. Regarding beach employees specifically, he said there had been an overall reduction from 375 in 2004 to 285 in 2006. Senator Hart asked whether that decrease had led to a decrease in quality of services, and the Secretary answered that that issue needed to be examined beach by beach. Representative Petruccelli asked whether each beach had maintenance schedules and performance reviews. Secretary Golledge replied that until the past 12-18 months there were no such systems in place, and that the new system they were working on would help with this. He also noted that operating and capital expenditures had risen significantly over the past three years.

Senator McGee requested information on staffing levels over the past 20 years to see the trends in staff levels and quality of service. He also asked about the timing of seasonal staffers, saying that the beaches are used almost year round, not just in July and August. Dan O’Connell asked how many of the work orders in the system had been addressed, and what the schedule was for routine tasks such as cleaning the bathrooms. The Secretary replied that he didn’t have the answers, but that he would find out. Senator Hart then voiced his frustration that Secretary Golledge was unprepared to answer any of the questions posed by the Commission, despite having had a conversation about it with him prior to the hearing. The Secretary

## METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION

### Executive Summaries of Hearings

responded that he didn't have all of the specific information that the Commission was interested in, but that if he was given a list of needed information that he would find out.

The Commissioners then posed questions to be answered by the Secretary at a later date. Dan O'Connell asked what the trash collection schedule is, why there aren't barrel covers, and what the schedule is for sand sifting on the beaches. He also noted the trend of DCR building beautiful facilities and then not maintaining them at all. Kip Becker said that the Commission wants to know where DCR needs more money to do things. He asked how global concerns get voiced within the organization, how small and large projects compete for priority, and what might a differently organized DCR look like – was there room for decentralization of some tasks? The Secretary answered that for some smaller projects, decentralization was a possibility, but that on larger capital projects a centralized approach was more appropriate.

Mark Cullinan asked the Secretary for his commitment that DCR and EOEA would cooperate and assist the rest of the Commission's work as the project moves forward, including letting the Commission's consultants spend time with Administrators and facility managers, the Secretary said they would. Paul Grogan asked what the level of ambition was at the agency, whether there were any performance standards for beach maintenance, and whether the agency would consider outsourcing some of the maintenance. The Secretary replied that while there is institutional resistance to change, that the majority of people are there for the right reasons. He also said that while they haven't yet outsourced maintenance, they would be open to trying it.

Joan Meschino asked about budget projections, and whether there were any statistics available on beach visitorship. She also highlighted the successes of Hull working together with DCR to develop a plan, instead of just throwing money at a problem to solve it. Roseanne Foley commented that seasoned DCR employees should be consulted when trying to find solutions to the problems at hand. Secretary Golledge closed by saying that the beaches were an incredible resource, and that they were too important for the Commission and DCR to not do a good job.

Representative Petruccelli then called up Mike McKinney from the Division of Capital Asset Management. Mark Cullinan asked whether DCAM has anything to do with the Lynn/Nahant causeway, McKinney said no. Cullinan then asked how projects get in DCAM's queue, how they are prioritized, and whether other agencies could take over smaller jobs normally done by DCAM. McKinney explained that any project over \$1 million is done by DCAM. Anything DCR project under \$1 million is done by DCR. Kip Becker asked whether there was a maintenance plan in place at the time projects were constructed, McKinney replied that it was a requirement that there be an operations and maintenance plan in order for construction to take place.

Representative Petruccelli then introduced the speakers from AFSCME ([American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees](#)), all DCR employees: Jim Kelly, AFSCME Local 3485; Jim Lindsey Vice President, AFSCME Local 3485; John Dwinell, President, AFSCME Local 2948; and Kevin Drake, President, AFSCME Local 3485. The full text of their testimony is attached to this summary. Highlights from their testimony are as follows. The four men spoke about the challenges they see the agency facing, and the changes they've seen over their decades with the agency (both as DCR and MDC). Jim Kelly spoke about the decline in summer maintenance staff, and lifeguards taking over maintenance duties, which has led to a decrease in quality of maintenance and also in public safety. He also noted the decline in year round staff, he said those were the people who cared about their work and about their beaches, and that because people who care have been replaced by seasonal workers or inmate crews the beaches have suffered. Jim Lindsey added that summer staffing arrives too late in the season, and that since DCR is not a

## METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION

### Executive Summaries of Hearings

seasonal agency they shouldn't have so many seasonal employees. He also described a trend in DCR of ignoring needs and facilities, and then outsourcing those tasks to private companies to avoid having the agency do it at all. In answer to Senator Hart, Lindsay said that contrary to what the editorial in the Globe stated, DCR could not do more with less. John Dwinell spoke about the recent trend to shift workers around, out of their usual posts, to make up for a worker shortage. Kevin Drake added that not only is much of the equipment antiquated and even unusable, but there was also a shortage of qualified staff people to operate much of the equipment.

Representative Petrucci closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming.

### **AFSCME COUNCIL 93 TESTIMONY**

#### TESTIMONY FROM JIM KELLY

Good evening. My name is Jim Kelly, and I am a member of AFSCME Local 3485. I was born in South Boston, and raised in Weymouth where I reside with my wife and son. I have worked at the MDC – what is now the DCR – since 1978, and have worked at Nantasket Beach since 1984. I began working at the beach as a lifeguard and for the past five years have been a Recreation Supervisor at the beach. Essentially, I oversee the lifeguards and public safety. I would like to talk briefly about 2 issues at the beach -- staffing and management.

In talking about staffing at the beach, I would like to compare the situation now to when I started at Nantasket in the mid 80s. In 1985 the beach was staffed with 32 lifeguards, and in my opinion that was a sufficient number for the mile and a half we patrol. In addition to the lifeguards there were 5 skilled craftsmen, 6 year-round labor staff, and 12-18 summer workers whose responsibilities were cleaning the beach daily, emptying the trash barrels, cleaning parking lots and bathrooms, etc.

Today, we have 36 lifeguards, which sounds great, but the summer work force has been reduced to 3 summer workers who cut grass and empty trash barrels. The cleaning of the beach has been transferred to the lifeguards, who are also responsible for public safety. In my opinion, the end result is inadequate performance in both areas. For example, 2 summers ago a young family of three – a father and 2 children, were caught in a rip current, and because the guards were picking up trash on the beach at the time, only one lifeguard with a rescue tube was available to respond to the emergency. Thankfully all ended well, but this was not an adequate public safety response.

I believe what has harmed the beach the most in the long run is the elimination of year round employees. These are the jobs filled 40-52 weeks per year by employees who return year after year. These employees are not high school or college students who work for a few summers in a transitional job; they are the career DCR employees. These are the people who notice signs of deterioration, and have an emotional investment in the beach. In the mid-1980s there were 12 of these workers on site most of the year. Last year there were only 3. That is a 75% reduction in staffing. These positions have either been eliminated or the duties have been transferred to short-term seasonal workers, usually students, or inmate labor. Neither of these groups has the perspective, maturity or emotional investment in the beach that the long term employees have. I believe this has really compromised our ability to be proactive about the care and protection of this well-used beach.

To manage the beach proactively is really what has failed over the past 15 years or so. The classic example of this is the sea wall. The sea wall was undermined and began to crumble after the NO NAME storm in

## METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION

### Executive Summaries of Hearings

1993. However, it was not until 2004, when the wall actually started to collapse, that DCR management was forced to take emergency action and piled boulders to shore up the wall. No engineering study was ordered before that, no sand re-nourishment was done to shore up the base of the wall, and management ignored deterioration reported to them by the work force. Everything in the department is reactive – we are always putting out forest fires. There's no plan to do anything proactive -- we just respond to one crisis after another.

I'm going to stop there, but I will be happy to answer questions you all might have about Nantasket. I do really care for this beach, and it's been agonizing to watch it decline these past 15 years. I hope this Commission can spur some changes before this jewel is forever lost. Thank you for taking the time to hear from us.

#### TESTIMONY FROM JIM LINDSEY

Good evening. My name is Jim Lindsey and I am the Vice President of AFSCME Local 3485, which represents the workers in the Division of Urban Parks. I started working at the MDC in 1990, and today I am a Recreational Facilities Supervisor. I work in Hyde Park on the various playing fields, and I live in Jamaica Plain.

Jim Kelly has talked pretty specifically about the staffing problems at Nantasket Beach, and those problems plague the entire agency. There just isn't enough manpower. But a different staffing problem has to do with the summer help. It always arrives late. The summer staffers generally don't start until July 1, but as those of you who have lawns know, grass starts to grow well before July 1. This is why there are so many complaints about unmowed grass near the beach, because until July 1st, there's just nobody to mow it. This is one of the problems with relying on so much on this short-term seasonal help. DCR is not a seasonal agency. We provide services 52 weeks a year, but we've become so reliant on short-term employees, that it has really affected the quality of the services. I know why DCR does this -- they do it to save money -- but I guess what I would say is that you get what you pay for.

I'll go ahead and stop there. Thank you for giving us an opportunity to talk.

#### TESTIMONY FROM JOHN DWINNEL

Good evening. My name is John Dwinell, and I am the President of AFSCME Local 2948. We represent about 320 people in the Division of State Parks. I live in Oxford with my wife and one year old twins, and I started working for what was then the DEM in 1982. Today, I am the Forest and Parks Supervisor of Cochituate State Park.

I know that your concern today is not the State Parks, or the beaches operated by our division, so I'll be very brief. You've already heard about understaffing, but I want to make sure you understand that the understaffing of the beaches affects the state parks as well. For example, this summer on 2 separate occasions the DCR took employees from the Bureau of Forest Fire Control in the State Parks Division, and sent them down to the beaches and parkways to mow grass. The first time, this involved moving 12 employees, the second time 8 employees.

Normally, the job of these Forest Fire workers is the detection, suppression and prevention of wild land fires, in other words, forest fires. On each of these occasions, three fire districts were stripped of their fire detection personnel. I don't have to explain to you how dangerous this practice is.

## METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION

### Executive Summaries of Hearings

To us, these kinds of management practices are like a game of staffing musical chairs. The agency is understaffed all over, and they are frantically moving people around, usually in response to the crisis of the moment, to try to get the work done. The bottom line is that there just aren't enough people in the field doing the front line maintenance work. If these practices continue, we're going to end up with more than dirty beaches, we've going to have a disaster.

Thank you for your time this evening.

#### TESTIMONY FROM KEVIN DRAKE

Good evening. My name is Kevin Drake, and I am the President of AFSCME Local 3485. I represent about 350 workers in the Division of Urban Parks. About 80 of those workers are rangers, and the other 250 are people who work to maintain and care for all of the DCR assets, including the metropolitan beaches from Lynn to Nantasket. I live in Marshfield, and I started working at the MDC in 1985. Today I am a Recreational Supervisor, and I work primarily in the Blue Hills.

First, I want to say something about equipment. By and large, DCR has a problem with equipment that is simply too old to be useful. For example, on Nantasket Beach, where Jim Kelly works, they use front-end loaders, dump trucks and garbage trucks for cleaning. All of these vehicles are from the 1970s, and they break down all the time. In fact, there are 4 such trucks sitting in the parking lot at Nantasket that are completely inoperable. Generally over the last 15 years, the agency hasn't been very proactive about replacing equipment before it becomes useless.

Even when the equipment is in good shape, there often isn't enough staff to operate it. One of the better pieces of equipment we have for beaches is a beach sanitizer. A beach sanitizer is a big piece of equipment that turns the sand over and pulls out trash, seaweed, and other debris. Over the last 10 years, between Castle Island and Wollaston Beach, the amount of time the sanitizer is used has decreased 50%. In that case, the equipment is in good shape, but the agency lacks enough staff to actually operate it as often as it needs to be used.

And I think that's one of the main themes you've heard today -- staffing. There has just been a huge decrease in staffing over the past 15 years, and that has made a big difference in the cleanliness and maintenance of all the DCR facilities, including the beaches. In addition, more and more of DCR's staffing money is used for seasonal workers, and less and less for permanent, full time employees. The trick, obviously, is to find the right balance between short-term and long-term workers, and our opinion is that the agency is way out of balance right now.

Our observation is that this has become a vicious circle. As the agency's funding has been cut, the assets have deteriorated. The more the assets deteriorate, the more complaints legislators hear from their constituents, and the more frustrated you all have become with the agency. What we've observed time and again is that the asset is underfunded and mismanaged to the point where everyone throws up their hands in disgust. At that point, the administration claims that the only solution is to privatize. We don't see privatization as a solution. Obviously it affects our jobs, but we also don't think the public gets a good deal. For example, at Nantasket beach, they privatized the operation of the parking lots 14 years ago. Well, they also put that vendor in charge of cleaning the bathrooms, and one of the biggest complaints you hear is that the bathrooms aren't clean.

METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSION  
Executive Summaries of Hearings

One of our biggest concerns is that this vicious cycle of underfunding and mismanagement followed by privatization stop. We think the key to keeping the beaches maintained is adequate funding for staffing and equipment and good management practices, not privatization. We -- the workers at the agency -- want world-class beaches and a world-class park system just as much as residents do. But we have to get out of this "just do the best you can" mindset that dominates at the DCR to achieve that.

I'll go ahead and stop there. We'll be happy to answer any questions you might have. We really appreciate your giving us an opportunity to speak to you. Thank you.