

Hanscom Area Towns Committee
DRAFT Meeting Minutes
October 22, 2019

Attending: HATS Selectmen Jonathan Dwyer, Lincoln, chair; Linda Escobedo, Concord; Mike Rosenberg, Bedford. Other HATS members: Margaret Coppe, Lexington. Also attending: Jessica Casserly, Hanscom Air Force Base public information officer; BJ Dunn, superintendent, Minute Man National Historical Park; Anthony Gallagher, Massachusetts Port Authority community relations.

Superintendent Dunn reported that, to date, there have been 871,942 visitors this year to Minute Man National Historical Park. The 2018 total was 1,014,800. The projected increase is 9.3 percent. Totals are logged at the visitor centers in Concord and Lexington. This year the park passed the cumulative 50 million visitor mark. Although the park opened in 1959, record-keeping began in 1964, the superintendent said. He also noted 2018 economic impact data: \$59.9 million and 790 jobs in the regional economy. He explained that the numbers are derived using a formula common to the entire system of national parks.

Superintendent Dunn noted that he is nearing the end of his third year in the position. In May the park's chief ranger retired and there has been a four-month rotation of substitutes. He expects to hire a full-time replacement soon. Also, the chief of interpretation and education has been promoted to a park out of state and the public relations director, who is actually on the staff of Lowell National Historical Park, will retire in December. A law enforcement ranger is also retiring and there are two additional vacancies. The budget is flat, part of a continuing resolution from the prior year, the superintendent said, so if he fills all the positions he will have difficulty financing all operations. The coming year will be a challenging one, he said, though it's not essential to fill all the openings.

The superintendent said the official visitation season has been shortened to April 1 to November 1. Superintendent Dunn said the Friends of Minute Man Park have been extremely helpful raising funds for certain projects. They include the Parker's Revenge site in Lexington, also supported by grants. Patriots Day events usually run \$60,000, the superintendent said, and the Friends will try to raise \$20,000. The group's new executive director is Kathleen Fahey, former director of the Bedford Historical Society. She already has launched a website and e-newsletter.

The 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution will be marked in 2025. Superintendent Dunn said he attended a three-day planning session in Washington, DC in September, involving representatives of 23 national parks connected to the theme. He noted that there is a national Semiquincentennial Commission, chartered in July 2016, composed of four U.S. senators, four U.S. representatives, four Cabinet members, the director of the National Parks Service, and 13 presidential appointees.

With a tagline of America 250, the philosophy is to celebrate the country's 250 years, not limited to founding events, the superintendent said. The commission meets quarterly; the March meeting will be in Boston. At the state level, there is legislation to establish a commission. Superintendent Dunn said the park is also working with the group Rev 250, under the auspices of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

In 1975, the Bicentennial year, park visitation increased by more than 400,000, the superintendent said. There was a similar rise at the 225th anniversary, which is when the Battle Road trails opened, he added. As annual visitation continues to grow, the park continues to evaluate parking lots and consider alternate or shared transportation. Park leaders are also thinking about shared marketing, and are looking at key events leading up to the 250th milestone. Maybe there should be a working group with him and representatives from affected towns, Superintendent Dunn said.

Minute Man has been very successful competing for federal project funds, the superintendent said. Money has been allocated for preserving historic structures, including six roof replacements and exterior painting. A \$1.2 million preservation project at the North Bridge Visitors Center is underway. The Lexington center desperately needs work, including access improvements, but it is not a building that qualifies for preservation funds. He noted the most recent acquisition, Barrett Farmhouse in Concord, is where munitions were stored in April 1775. Planning is ongoing to try to have the house open to the public by 2025.

Superintendent Dunn summarized successful events over the past year, including honoring Edmund Wilson on his 90th birthday in July and marking the park's 60th anniversary in September. Lou Sideris, the former Minute Man planner, spoke on park history. The Concord Band played a recent birthday concert. An artist-in-residence is sharing time with the Emerson Umbrella for the Arts.

Improved signage is needed throughout the park, Superintendent Dunn said. He said staff has been directed to allow certain vehicles on the trails. He also said Congress has reactivated the national program supporting the Battle Road Scenic Byway. Asked by Selectman Dwyer if new trails could connect with crosswalks on Route 2A, Superintendent Dunn noted that maybe there could be joint local and federal funding. The superintendent also noted that he is trying to persuade the state Department of Transportation to accelerate planned resurfacing of Route 2A so the project won't overlap with the milestone.

In answer to Selectman Rosenberg's question, the superintendent said the park is working on an agricultural management plan, identifying best practices for farmers working in the park. There are plans to cultivate additional fields on both sides of Route 2A near Meriam House. There is also an official partnership with Codman Farms of Lincoln for the Highlander cattle. The park would like to add sheep or goats, as they consume invasive plants, Superintendent Dunn said. He added that every field being used for agriculture is one less field the park has to mow; that budget is \$20,000. Ms. Coppe noted that Lexington will be opening an expanded visitors center on Meriam Street in a few months. There are also new interpretive signs on the Battle Green and near the Old Belfry. She said a visitors center makes a difference in generating interest in a site.

Municipal highlights: Selectman Rosenberg said his board adopted a 5G communications policy identical to Burlington's, as a stopgap. A special town meeting is scheduled for Nov. 4. Selectman Escobedo said Concord has hired a project manager for a new middle school feasibility study. It is assumed that the project won't qualify for state assistance. Concord also has retained water rights to Nagog Pond, following a legal challenge. Selectman Dwyer said a Lincoln special town meeting will address costly maintenance issues. The Nov. 2 annual State of the Town meeting will include discussion of proposed zoning bylaws in the area of the railroad station. The town also will be looking at avenues of property tax relief. As part of the upcoming Route 2A resurfacing project, Lincoln would like to see signalized crosswalks and traffic-calming stripes, with retention of rural character and historical elements. Ms. Coppe noted that a Lexington special town meeting Nov. 12 will consider a proposal for funding, at the 25 percent design level, improvements to the intersection of Bedford Street and Hartwell Avenue.

Ms. Casserly reported that Air Force base officials conduct continuing conversations with contiguous towns about traffic management, including for future projects and major events. Mr. Gallagher said the Massport Community Advisory Council has held its annual meeting.

Col. Chad Ellsworth will present to HATS at the Nov. 21 meeting, scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. Other possible guests at future meetings will include Lisa Wieland, executive director of Massport, and Paul Regan, executive director of the MBTA Advisory Board. A future meeting may be scheduled for the four town managers together.

Minutes of the meeting of Sept. 24, 2019 were approved as amended. The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.