

Dukes County Commission (DCC)
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 15, 2023
4:00 PM
Hybrid meeting

Dukes County Commissioners Present in person: Christine Todd, Peter Wharton, Doug Ruskin, Tristan Israel, Don Leopold, Juli Vanderhoop*

Other County Officials (in person): Martina Thornton – County Manager

Other County Officials (remote): Paulo DeOliveira – Register of Deeds, Judy Soules – County Treasurer

Others Present: Jim Malkin – SSA Board, SSA Port Council members: Joseph Sollitto, John Cahill; Lynn Christoffers – MVT, David Dandridge

Others on zoom: Bob Johnston – Future Works, Nathaniel Trumbull – MV Times, Bob Jones, Steamship Authority; Sean Driscoll; MV Commission: Ben Robinson, Kate Warner; MV Airport: Bob Rosenbaum, Richard Knabel; Kara Shemeth, Kimberly Angel (CCMVHB), John Christiansen, John Abrams, Nathaniel Trumbull, iPhone, iPad, Samsung SM-S918U

Christine called the meeting to order at 4:02PM

Approval of minutes

Tristan/Don moved to approve minutes for November 1, 2023. So voted. Doug – abstained, Peter – yes, Tristan – yes, Christine – yes, Don – yes, Juli – yes. Motion carried.

Steamship Authority (SSA) Updates – Jim Malkin

Several commissioners raised concerns over the reported incident with SSA vessel Sankaty, which leads them to question the effectiveness of the SSA leadership and management. Jim Malkin shared the timetable of the event and September 2023 SSA report (both documents are on file). There were 1600 budgeted trips in September (average 53 trips per day). Jim addressed the general concerns and his experience of how this specific incident was handled. The SSA governors also spoke about their concerns and experiences. Jim spoke in detail about his involvement with the evaluation of the general manager this summer and that he raised some deficiencies. He stated that this incident is a good example of all that is wrong with SSA – lack of communication to the board members and the public, being reactive, instead of proactive and the general manager not delegating responsibility. He shared that each board member represents different constituencies and different set of expectations from the SSA, which makes it hard to come to mutual conclusions sometimes. Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket representatives hold each 35% of the vote, and Falmouth, Hyannis and New Bedford each have 10% vote. There has not been a meeting about this particular incident yet. Multiple commissioners very strongly expressed their concern that this is a systemic issue, not an individual issue and they hope that the rest of the board members and Port Council members will take this incident and how it was mis-handled seriously as it could have happened in any port, have much more severe consequences and that it is representing a serious safety concern.

Tristan/Peter moved to ask the Steamship Authority Board to hold a special meeting regarding this incident. The motion was amended by both to also send this to all port council members, chairs of all boards that appoint board members and the local papers. So voted. Doug – yes, Peter – yes, Tristan – yes, Christine – yes, Don – yes, Juli – yes. All in favor.

Kate Warner raised an issue of need for discussions how will the SSA address the mandate to reach the energy goals by 2050. Jim responded that Mark Higgins is working on a project plan.

ARPA Septic Project

Martina asked the DCC to vote on the two agreements that would allow for direct pay to vendor.

Juli/Don moved to approve the agreements as prepared by the county counsel. Discussion followed. Motion was tabled until the next meeting. DCC also requested to talk about process of how to allocate ARPA funds that will be unspent prior to the deadline.

*Juli left the meeting at 5:25pm

Committee Updates

Finance Committee – Treasurer is still working out issues with the payroll conversion. She is working with Kim Angel to clean up FY2023. The auditors are scheduled to come to the island the 3rd week in January.

Land Use Committee – They are waiting for the appraisal of the New York Ave property and preparing an RFQ for the consultant on long-term assessment of space needs for the County. The Courthouse needs assessment is scheduled for this spring. The letter will go out in support of rezoning New York Ave as soon as we find at least one co-signer for the letter.

Legislative Committee – Christine reported that letter is ready to go out to the Board of Selectmen of all towns in support of the county treasurer to be appointed and not need to reside in Dukes County.

Tristan/Peter moved to authorize the communications committee to send the letter regarding SSA as discussed earlier. So voted. Doug – yes, Peter – yes, Tristan – yes, Christine – yes, Don – yes. All in favor.

Communication Committee – Doug is working with Martina and Suzanne on some changes to the website and will be meeting to implement some changes after Thanksgiving.

Improvements Committee – Don and Doug are working on simplifying the organizational chart and having the presentation ready for the Oak Bluffs Finance Committee on Tuesday November 21st which will be a pre-meeting on the regional forms. They are also working on an elevator speech.

Manager's Report – document of file

Martina noted that DCC needs to make two appointments before the end of the year – to the MV Commission – currently Peter Wharton and to the Retirement Board – currently James Hegarty. Both are interested in continuing to serve in these roles. Discussion followed. DCC decided to advertise for the Retirement Board appointment to follow to standard process for appointment, although they are aware that there is a strong candidate.

The next meeting of the County Commissioners association is on December 8th in New Bedford and Tristan agreed to go and represent Dukes County.

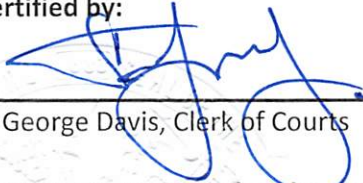
Christine is meeting with Tristan and Oak Bluffs Conservation Commission staff to look at the jetty at Eastville beach that is washing away.

New business – discussion was held on some presentation at the recent Health Aging Summit. Cindy Trish and Adam Turner were invited to the next DCC meeting to talk about their presentation and ideas.

Public Comment – none

Don/Doug moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:00pm. So voted. Tristan – yes, Doug – yes, Peter – yes, Christine – yes. Motion carries. The meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm.

Certified by:



T. George Davis, Clerk of Courts

Documents presented at the meeting and part of the official record:

- Presentation and Timetable re SSA provided by Mr. Malkin
- Letter regarding county treasurer proposed legislative changes
- Manager's Report