

MASSACHUSETTS RESTAURANT PROMOTION COMMISSION

Minutes from the First Meeting of the Commission
October 15, 2019

Commissioners in Attendance:

Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall, Executive Director, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism
(By phone) **Senator Julian Cyr**, Cape and Islands District in the Massachusetts Senate
Tiffani Faison, Chef and Owner, *Sweet Cheeks Q, Tiger Mama, Fool's Errand, and Orfano*
Rebecca Roth Gullo, President, Gallows Group
Christopher P. Jamison, Co-Founder, COJE
Senator Edward J. Kennedy, First Middlesex District in the Massachusetts Senate
Pat Lee, Owner and Operator, *Horseshoe Grille*
Bob Luz, President and CEO, Massachusetts Restaurant Association
Representative Paul McMurtry, Eleventh Norfolk district in the Massachusetts House of Representatives
Kathi Maino Turner, Turners Seafood Companies
Ted Twinney, Co-Founder and Manager, Start Line Brewing Company

Other Attendees:

Rory O'Hanlon, Legislative Director, Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development
Annie M. Thompson, Chief of Staff, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

The first meeting of the commissioners of the Massachusetts Restaurant Promotion Commission ("the Commission") was held at the Massachusetts State House, Room 437, pursuant to notice being duly given under the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall called the meeting to order at 2:02 P.M.

Commissioners Faison, Gullo, Jamison, Lee, Luz, and Turner, Senator Kennedy, and Representative McMurtry were present. Senator Julian Cyr called in by phone located in Room 437. Commissioner Ted Twinney was not present.

Chairperson Orrall asked the commissioners to introduce themselves, starting with Commissioner Christopher P. Jamison.

The Commissioners present and on the phone provided their name and occupation.

Chairperson Orrall asked Commissioners to review legislation creating the Commission, referring to line item 7008-1024, which dedicates \$2 million for the promotion of the restaurant industry in the Commonwealth.

Chairperson Orrall read aloud an excerpt of the legislation describing the scope of the Commission, and opened the floor to the Commissioners to give comment to the Commission's scope and charge.

Commissioner Bob Luz remarked that he has been having conversations with "industry folks." Commissioner Luz stated that there are two sides the Commission is equally charged with looking at: 1) there is a vibrant and growing culinary experience in Massachusetts and it's one that's taken off in recent years. The Commission has to explore how to drive tourism and best market this sector; and 2) In light of recent high-profile closing, the Commission should address the concern that restaurants can stay open. How do we support and protect the restaurant industry?

Commissioner Jamison remarked on the great expansion of restaurants in Boston over the past 5-10 years. However, the barriers to entry are tremendously high, compared with other cities, and new openings are leaving out smaller restaurants.

Commissioner Tiffani Faison commented that there is a need to look at sustainable restaurants. She remarked that seeing tourists patronize the aggressive pop-up of chain restaurants over local businesses "breaks my heart." Commissioner Faison continued that there is a need to look at opportunities for people of color, women, and other people who are often overlooked and do not have access to capital.

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Commissioner Rebecca Roth Gullo commented that the housing crisis is the single biggest problem, with restaurants opening without requisite staff. She noted that she has employees making “six-figures” who are not able to afford to live in alone in Boston.

- Commissioner Gullo also commented that for “big-boxes” that buy a liquor license, but are not based in MA, that we should consider concepts requiring mentorship and collaboration with someone on how to be a restaurateur in MA, especially for new and emerging businesses.

Commissioner Kathi Maino Turner provided a regional perspective on restaurants:

- Recent changes to minimum wage and paid leave is a perfect storm for restaurateurs.
- Restaurants in the suburbs outside of Boston will turn business away with increased menu prices.
- Commission should uncover how to create a vibrancy of restaurants through MA.
- Charged the Commission with looking at how the restaurant model has changed and how to sustain a customer base.

Chairperson Orrall remarked that future meetings of the Commission will be held around the state to ensure it is not solely focused on Boston.

Representative Paul McMurtry commented that he hopes the Commission creates a blueprint that helps bring change to the industry.

Senator Edward J. Kennedy remarked that Boston is the capital but the focus of the Commission is the entire state. He stated that the Commission should determine how it can enhance the current industry, and what should be fixed.

Commissioner Jamison commented that he will meet with his staff in advance of Commission meetings to bring their feedback to the commission. He noted the “incredible” pool of people to talk to within the restaurant industry and that the commission should hear from them.

- Also remarked on issues relating to overtime limits for employees who work at multiple restaurants.

Representative McMurtry remarked that a line of communication should be set up for the industry to provide feedback.

Commissioner Pat Lee remarked that the Commission should be asking how we create a sustainable workforce. He noted that the restaurant industry is one where an employee can go “from the dish room to the boardroom.”

Senator Julian Cyr stated that the workforce issue is appreciated from the Cape & Islands perspective.

- Nearly every eatery has to rely on foreign worker visas, which has become less reliable than it used to be.

Senator Cyr also commented that anything that can be done to extend the tourism season makes a difference.

- Towns are taking on their own promotions to extend the season.
- Not enough is spent on tourism promotion: \$10 million in a \$43 billion budget

Chairperson Orrall stated that the Commission is tasked with filing a report at the end of January 2020. She mentioned that Senator Kennedy and Representative McMurtry have supplied the Commission with resources and staff, but for stakeholder surveys and other business, an independent consultant should be hired.

- A discussion among the commissioners ensued about ideal times for next commission meetings, as well as about the holiday season approaching and the hope of extending the deadline for the report.
- Locations for future meetings will be throughout the state.

Commissioner Ted Twinney arrived at 2:30 PM. Chairperson Orrall asked Commissioner Twinney to introduce himself.

- Commissioner Twinney remarked that his farm-brewery in Hopkinton is relatively new, which can add perspective to the “barrier-to-entry” discussion.

Commissioner Turner remarked that the commission has a bifurcated charge: how to promote restaurants and how to support them, and states that it would be good to have a clearer focus.

- A discussion ensued among the commissioners regarding the need for a specific structure for the Commission to stay focused.

Chairperson Orrall closed the meeting at 2:40 PM with a group photo.

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Handouts for this meeting included:

1. Commission Meeting Agenda
2. Text of "an Act establishing a restaurant promotion commission": Chapter 49 of the Acts of 2019; & text of fiscal year 2020 Massachusetts State Budget appropriation line item 7008-1024
3. List of Restaurant Promotion Commission membership
4. Biographies and contact information for Restaurant Promotion Commission

Recorded by Annie M. Thompson, Chief of Staff, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, October 15, 2019.