

MASSACHUSETTS RESTAURANT PROMOTION COMMISSION

Minutes from the Eleventh Meeting of the Commission

Zoom Conference Video Call

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

1:00 p.m.

Remote Zoom Conference Participation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84725843889?pwd=UGZveUo5bjBjd251UjZVd1padUdSQ09>

Meeting ID: 847 2584 3889

Passcode: 8pKuVT

Commissioners in

Attendance:

Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall, Executive Director, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

Senator Julian Cyr, Cape and Islands District

Senator Edward J. Kennedy, First Middlesex District

Representative Paul McMurtry, Eleventh Norfolk District

Pat Lee, Owner and Operator, Horseshoe Grille

Christopher P. Jamison, Co-Founder, COJE

Rebecca Roth Gullo, President, Gallows Group

Kathi Maino Turner, Turner's Seafood Companies

Tiffani Faison, Chef and Owner of Sweet Cheeks Q, Tiger Mama,

Fool's Errand and Orfano

Commissioners not in

Attendance:

Bob Luz, President and CEO, Massachusetts Restaurant Association

Ted Twinney, Co-Founder and Manager, Start Line Brewing Company

Other Attendees:

Mark Fuller, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Daniela De Caro-Heavey, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

Tonia Tassinari, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Rory O'Hanlon, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Michael Quinlin, Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism

Pat Johnson, Senator Cyr's Office

Garrett Burns, Representative Paul McMurtry's Office

James Ostis, Senator Kennedy's Office

Tyler Cotta, Representative Carol Fiola's Office

Steve Clark, Massachusetts Restaurant Association

The eleventh meeting of the Massachusetts Restaurant Promotion Commission ("the Commission") occurred via Zoom Conference Video Call, pursuant to the suspension of certain provisions to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, in response to the State of Emergency declaration by Governor Baker due to the Coronavirus. Notice regarding remote participation was duly given to all meeting participants, including the Commission Board Members and the public.

Chairperson Keiko Matsudo Orrall called the meeting to order at 1:02 P.M, and announced the names of members participating remotely.

Commissioners Orrall, Senator Cyr, Senator Kennedy, Representative McMurtry, Faison, Lee, Jamison, Gullo, and Turner were present.

Commissioners Luz and Twinney were not present.

Chairperson Orrall motioned that all of the Commissioners present remotely, to vote to approve the meeting minutes from March 16, 2021. All Commissioners present remotely approved the minutes via roll call vote.

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Chairperson Orrall then reviewed the final recommendations and findings of the Restaurant Promotion Commission via three PowerPoint slides, which included short and longer term recommendations.

Short-Term recommendations of the Commission in its final Report (“Report”) to the Legislature included the following:

- A continued, safe reopening is critical for recovery. Vaccine access for food service workers is essential to that process.
- Public promotion and support for the industry is needed. These efforts should include educational components that inform customers on what to expect in the new normal.
- The industry is still incredibly vulnerable. Aid from federal, state, and local government must continue to be made available, including technical assistance to help restaurateurs access available resources. At the same time, measures must be taken to curb added costs during this vulnerable period, such as freezing the Unemployment Insurance (UI) rate schedule and relief from taxation on the Paycheck Protection Program.
- The state must evaluate credit card fees on restaurants. During the Pandemic, members of the commission experienced increases on transaction fees that further squeezed lean bottom lines as they fought to survive.
- The restaurant sector must continue to find ways to be an attractive employer and entice workers to return to the labor force.
- The state must monitor trends in the economy, including consumer behavior, as we continue to reopen and shift into the new normal. This should include consumer sentiment about visitation and educating consumers on how to support local restaurants. It is important to remember many restaurants rely on businesses and workers that are located in downtowns and town centers for a customer base.

Longer-Term recommendations of the Commission in its final Report to the Legislature included the following:

- The COVID-19 Pandemic brought about certain adjustments and changes to help the industry survive. Outdoor dining proved to be popular with consumers and impactful for restaurants. State and local government must continue to accommodate and facilitate outdoor dining.
- Similarly, other support programs, such as the enabling of beer, wine, and cocktail orders to-go, as well as caps on third-party delivery services, should be considered beyond the state of emergency.
- State and local government should streamline licensing and permitting processes. This includes shifting to a digital model that reduces paperwork and increases efficiency.
- Consider mechanisms to support workers, such as a “kitchen appreciation fee” and more flexible tip pooling between the ‘front of the house’ and ‘back of the house’.
- Housing costs, especially in seasonal communities, remain a significant challenge for workforce. Massachusetts must stabilize housing costs. Seasonal businesses will suffer if they cannot get the workforce needed to support operations.
- The federal government should also consider reforms to the H2B and J1 visa programs so that the process is more predictable.
- Liquor licenses remain costly, which serves as a significant barrier to entry. The state should explore reforms to the allocation process to create a more equitable system for restaurants.
- Explore and educate on innovative business models, such as employee ownership and co-ops that allow employees to gain ownership and take a formal stake in business management and development.

Chairperson Orrall next opened up the meeting discussion for further recommendations from Commissioners. Commissioner Jamison asked Chairperson Orrall what happens to these recommendations. Chairperson Orrall detailed the Report’s filing process to the House and Senate Clerk, noted that Legislators then view the Commission’s Final Report, and then determine what to do with the recommendations in terms of filing legislation. She then asked the Commission’s Legislator members to elaborate on this process.

Representative McMurtry noted his intention of extracting legislative priorities and fixes from the Report to support priority legislation for the restaurant industry.

Senator Kennedy noted that he will advocate for the continuation of items permitted during the pandemic, such as cocktails-to-go. He stated that these items will be addressed through legislation as a group or taken up individually as they are key topics for Legislators.

Chairperson Orrall then provided an update directly from Commissioner Luz. Commissioner Luz apologized that a scheduling conflict prevented his attendance at the meeting, but noted his full support of filing the Report.

Senator Cyr stated that he will work to advance these recommendations swiftly. He went on to note the great value in the restaurant industry’s workforce.

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Commissioner Turner asked that Legislators be conscientious moving forward that new legislation doesn't add more dollars to employers, but rather captures dining dollars and spreads them more equitably amongst the restaurant workers.

Mr. Steve Clark, Massachusetts Restaurant Association (MRA), noted that the MRA has entered into an agreement with corporate partners, with promotions in support of the restaurant industry.

Senator Cyr requested that should there be changes to legislation after the Report is filed, that an addendum(s) to the Report be filed to ensure consistency.

Chairperson Orrall entertained a motioned that all of the Commissioners present remotely take a vote on the Final Report to the State Legislature. Commissioners approved the report, by a nine to zero vote, with two members not present, via roll call vote at 1:24 PM.

Chairperson Orrall made a motion to adjourn. All Commissioners voted to adjourn the meeting via roll call vote; meeting adjourned at 1:25 PM.

Handouts for this meeting:

1. Commission Meeting Agenda
2. Minutes from the tenth meeting of the Restaurant Promotion Commission– 3.16.21
3. Restaurant Promotion Commission short and longer term recommendations - PowerPoint
4. Original Restaurant Promotion Commission Report to Legislature 2020; Restaurant Promotion Commission COVID-19 Report 2021

Recorded by Daniela De Caro-Heavey, Special Projects Manager, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, March 30, 2021.