

# Breaking Barriers

Improving Public Access to the Metropolitan Beaches



Produced for the Metropolitan Beaches Commission of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay

May 12, 2023

## About the Metropolitan Beaches Commission

The Massachusetts Legislature created the Metropolitan Beaches Commission (MBC) in 2006 to take an in-depth look at the Boston metropolitan region's 15 public beaches in Nahant, Lynn, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull. These beaches are owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Today the Commission is a permanent legislative Commission charged with making specific findings and recommendations to the Legislature, DCR and the public on ways to improve the region's public beaches.

The Commission is Co-Chaired by Senator Brendan Crighton of Lynn and Representative Adrian Madaro of East Boston and managed by Save the Harbor / Save the Bay.

The Commission is made up of elected officials and community leaders from Boston and the Metropolitan Region's waterfront neighborhoods and beachfront communities including Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.

You can find more information about the Commission, and download copies of our previous reports at <https://www.savetheharbor.org/mbc-archives>.

If you would like to share your thoughts or concerns about your beach or join our mailing list and be notified of upcoming Metropolitan Beaches Commission hearings in your community, take a brief survey at <https://tinyurl.com/MBCSURVEY2023> or send an email to [info@savetheharbor.org](mailto:info@savetheharbor.org).

### 2023 METROPOLITAN BEACHES COMMISSIONERS

Co-Chair Senator Brendan Crighton,  
*Third Essex*

Co-Chair Representative Adrian Madaro,  
*First Suffolk*

Vice Chair Christopher Byner,  
*Boston Police Activities League*

Vice Chair Senator Lydia Edwards,  
*First Suffolk and Middlesex*

Vice Chair Representative Joan Meschino,  
*Third Plymouth*

Antonio Barletta, *Nahant Town Administrator*

Ghizlane Benzerdjeb, *Revere resident*

Representative David Biele,  
*Fourth Suffolk*

Barbara Bishop, *Winthrop resident*

Professor Bob Chen, PhD, *UMass Boston, School for the Environment*

Representative Tackey Chan,  
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Daniel Kenary, *Harpoon Brewery*

Senator John Keenan, *Norfolk and Plymouth*

Keith Mahoney, *The Boston Foundation*

Chris Marchi, *East Boston resident*

Jason McCann, *Hull resident*

Nicole McClain, *the Northshore Juneteenth Association*

Senator Patrick O'Connor, *Plymouth and Norfolk*

Mercy Robinson, *South Boston En Acción*

Robert Tucker, *Friends of Lynn and Nahant Beach*

Representative Donald Wong,  
*Ninth Essex*

## About This Report



*The Metropolitan Beaches Commission Leadership (L to R) includes House Vice-Chair, Rep. Joan Meschino; Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Executive Director, Chris Mancini; Senate Vice-Chair, Sen. Lydia Edwards; Community Vice-Chair, Christopher Byner; House Chair, Rep. Adrian Madaro; Senate Chair, Sen. Brendan Crighton.*

In the spring of 2021, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission focused its attention on ways to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion on the Metropolitan Region's public beaches from Nahant to Nantasket.

The Commission conducted this inquiry in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and a national conversation on race, as protests against police brutality and systemic racism were breaking out across the country in the wake of George Floyd's murder. *These two factors shaped the conversation and our perspective on the importance of our beaches to all the residents of the region, of every race, age, nationality, and ability.*

The Commission's initial goal was to find ways improve access to our public beaches for people of color. However, at the suggestion of several Commissioners, the inquiry broadened to include people with disabilities and people who do not speak English as their first language, many of whom also do not enjoy equal access to the benefits of our more than \$5 billion investment in clean water and better beaches.

Over a period of 18 months, the Commission held four public hearings focused on overcoming obstacles to beach access for people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their first language. This report contains our findings and recommendations, which we hope will serve as a blueprint for improving beach access going forward.

The Commission would like to thank the Legislative leadership and all the members of the public who contributed their time and insights to support our work.

The Commission would also like to thank Save the Harbor's staff, their Better Beaches Program Partners and Funders, Maria Rodriguez Ortega, Caroline Adamson, David Spillane, Paul Santos and the Commission Lead Consultant Bruce Berman for their important contributions.



*“With more than 1,500 miles of coastline, Massachusetts families deserve access to beaches we can be proud of. We must continue to make investments that will enable our residents to swim in clean water and enjoy our outdoor recreational spaces. Better beaches are particularly important to environmental justice communities that face public health disparities and various socio-economic challenges.”*

State Senator Brendan Crighton of Lynn  
Senate Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

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*“Equity, inclusion and diversity are critically important to me and my constituents in East Boston. Save the Harbor’s free programs have improved beach access for everyone, bringing our beaches to life, connecting kids and families from across our diverse community to each other and Boston Harbor.”*

State Representative Adrian Madaro of East Boston  
House Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

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*“Our public beaches are gateways to healthy blue and green spaces that belong to us all, no matter what language we speak. Simply seeing signs in your primary language makes a public place instantly more welcoming and provides people with the information they need to safely enjoy their beach.”*

State Senator Lydia Edwards of East Boston  
Senate Vice-Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

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*“The Commonwealth’s metropolitan beaches are treasured open spaces where the built environment meets the natural environment, that everyone should be able to enjoy. We need to take every opportunity to remove barriers and create better beach access for people with disabilities so that everyone can actively enjoy our beaches.”*

State Representative Joan Meschino of Hull  
House Vice-Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

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*“Save the Harbor’s free youth and beach programs have introduced more than 250,000 young people to our beaches and the sea, creating a generation of young stewards, encouraging them to care about Boston Harbor, the marine environment and our community.”*

Christopher Byner, Program Administrator, Boston Police Activities League  
Vice-Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

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*“As an environmentalist, I understand that biodiversity is an important measure of the health of an ecosystem. As an advocate, I see the diversity of people using the metropolitan region’s public beaches as an indicator of the health of our city and our region.”*

Chris Mancini  
Executive Director, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay



**Metropolitan Beaches Commission**  
**The State House**  
**Boston, Massachusetts 02133**



Dear Friends:

Over the past two years, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission has had the opportunity to hear from people from the City of Boston, our region’s waterfront neighborhoods and beachfront communities and beach goers from across the region, as well as experts on environmental justice, disability resource infrastructure, and public education and communication.

These hearings and listening sessions confirmed and deepened our understanding of what we have seen and experienced in each of our communities: people’s perceptions of their beaches are shaped by their personal experiences and those of their friends and families. For people of color, people with disabilities and non-native English speakers, this has often meant feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable on their beaches, which are spectacular public resources that belong to them and their communities. The Commission has focused its efforts on identifying practical steps that would begin to alleviate these concerns.

Though many of the Commission’s previous recommendations regarding maintenance and infrastructure on our region’s public beaches have been enacted, others have not. Despite its best intentions, DCR has been burdened by a lack of leadership continuity, clear direction and accountability at the top.

We are looking forward to working with the new DCR Commissioner to address systemic problems and implement long-term solutions that they may not be around to solve, and we are counting on the Governor and her administration to set policy and hold the agency, and not just the Commissioner, accountable over time.

We believe the metropolitan region’s public beaches are extraordinary assets for our communities, and that equitable access to healthy blue and green spaces improves the quality of life of all the region’s residents and visitors, regardless of race, ability, language, or income.

We also believe that working together we can strengthen our communities and improve people’s lives.

Sincerely,

Senator Brendan Crighton  
 Senate Chair

Representative Adrian Madaro  
 House Chair

Chris Mancini,  
 Executive Director  
 Save the Harbor/Save the Bay

Senator Lydia Edwards  
 Senate Vice-Chair

Representative Joan Meschino  
 House Vice-Chair

Christopher Byner  
 Vice-Chair  
 Program Administrator,  
 Boston Police Activities League



King's Beach

Nahant Beach

Revere Beach

Constitution Beach

Winthrop Beach

Pleasure Bay

M Street Beach

Carson Beach

Savin Hill and  
Malibu Beach

Tenean Beach

Wollaston Beach

Nantasket Beach

# Overview: Key Findings & Recommendations

After releasing reports in 2007 and 2014 on maintenance, infrastructure, and programming improvements to our region's public beaches, in 2021 the Metropolitan Beaches Commission began to examine all aspects of its work through a lens of racial justice and equity.

**After talking to hundreds of people of various ages, abilities, races, ethnicities, and genders, we found that the region's residents who live within a short ride or drive to the coast love their beaches and rely on them for recreation, respite, mental and physical health.**

**We found that our beaches have increasingly drawn residents who represent the rich diversity of our region. However, more progress is needed before we can say they are truly inclusive. For many people of color, there is much work to be done before they will feel embraced, valued, and safe when they spend time at these important public amenities.**

**Some of these same concerns are also experienced by people with disabilities and people for whom English is not their first language.**

No single action will fully address these challenges or reshape the experience of our fellow community members and their families. New partnerships will be required with increased participation by people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their first language. More diverse involvement in our planning processes, beach management, and beach programs can also contribute. Success will benefit all of us by creating healthy public spaces that reflect the diversity which is a source of our community's strength.

The following represents a high-level overview of the Commission's Findings and Recommendations, which are supplemented in the sections that follow by an overview of the Commission's inquiry process and specific findings drawn from each of its public hearings.



*While improved conditions on the beaches increasingly draw residents from across the region, much work is needed before all residents will feel equally welcomed and embraced.*

## Elevate our Public Commitment to Strengthening the State’s Public Beaches and Parks

In December 2021, a DCR Special Commission Report authored by the UMass Donahue Institute reported that Massachusetts state and local government per capita spending on parks and recreation was the lowest in the country and only 58 percent of the national average.

While DCR’s seasonal and fulltime staff who care for our parks and beaches work hard to do their jobs right, the DCR does not have sufficient staff or resources to do the job we expect them to do.

## Enhance Leadership Accountability

With six DCR Commissioners in the past eight years, DCR **has lacked** leadership continuity, clear direction, and accountability at the top, with DCR Commissioners too often making commitments that they may not be around to keep.

We look forward to working with the new DCR Commissioner to address systemic problems and implement long-term solutions. However, we believe that the Governor and her administration need to help set policy for DCR and hold the agency, and not just the Commissioner, accountable for implementation over time.

## Reinvest in the Beaches

As a result of consistent underinvestment in beaches, there is also an enormous backlog of deferred maintenance and postponed capital investment. This shortfall in investment has compromised equitable access to these extraordinary assets. The appendix<sup>1</sup> to this report contains a list of the Commission’s capital priorities for these beaches that have been identified based on input from Commissioners, local elected officials, and the wider public.

The Commission recommends that **at its next public hearing after the release of this report**, DCR share a list of its planned capital investments on the region’s public beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.

Renewed capital investment in the beaches will benefit all the region’s residents, including people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their first language. These investments are critical to improving access



*More robust capital investment is essential to maintain and enhance public access to the beaches. Increasing winter storms create major obstacles to accessing the beach, especially for people with physical disabilities.*

for the nearly one million people who live within a short ride or drive to these beaches, and will make it possible to create great public spaces that are welcoming to all people—and are more reflective of the diversity that is a core value of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which benefits all of us.

## Advance Creative Solutions to Filling Critical Funding Gaps

The Commission’s 2007 and 2014 reports contain a number of specific recommendations about ways to address critical funding gaps, which have yet to be fully implemented:

1. Establish a “Baseline Budget” for the Metropolitan Beaches and for DCR as a whole.
2. Supplement it with funds from parking fees and other directed revenue streams.
3. Schedule critical capital investments including funds from the Environmental Bond Bill which have been authorized but not appropriated.

## Deploy the Successful Model of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission in Other Contexts

As a result of consistent advocacy by the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, the metropolitan region’s public beaches from Nahant to Nantasket have seen improvement since the Commission was established in 2006.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.savetheharbor.org/breaking-barriers-report>



**This is a strong argument for considering the establishment of similar commissions elsewhere, beginning with one focused on urban parks.**

The Commission's record of accomplishment is also a strong argument for investing in "Friends Groups" that support educational, recreational and conservation focused activities and can play an important role in helping DCR overcome staffing and budget challenges, as recommended in the 2021 UMass Donahue Institute report to DCR.

## Sustain and Reinforce Signature Successful Beach Programs

The Commission heard testimony throughout its public hearing process from participants who repeatedly referenced the success of Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's "Better Beaches Program" partnership with DCR, which has invested more than 2 million dollars in hundreds of free beach events and programs since its inception.

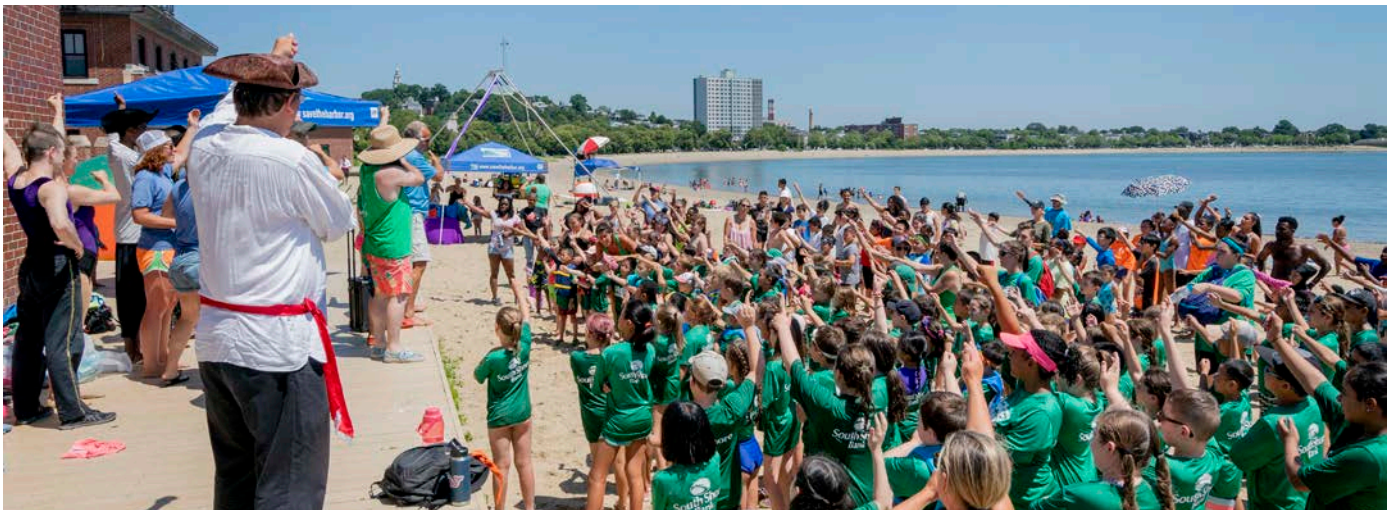
In 2022, the Commonwealth invested \$290,000 to support the Better Beaches Program which funded scores of free events and programs that brought a diverse group of people to our region's public beaches.

The Commission strongly recommends that in 2023 the Commonwealth continue that investment, and urges Save the Harbor/Save the Bay to continue to leverage those funds with additional funds from its corporate, community and philanthropic partners.

## Near-term Actions

Though there is no one-size-fits-all solution for overcoming the many barriers to beach access, as we work together to create more diverse, inclusive and equitable access to our region's public beaches, **the Commission recommends:**

1. That within 90 days of the release of this report, DCR shall report to the Commission on its efforts, metrics, and plans to increase diversity within the agency at every level.
2. That the Commission continue to create opportunities (like its public hearings process) for community members to provide input and feedback on beach policies and procedures, and to participate in beach planning and management.
3. That outreach materials, meetings and other public events be translated into languages spoken by non-English speakers in the community.
4. That hearings, meetings and public events and programs are accessible for people with disabilities.
5. That the Commission, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and DCR continue to look for ways to develop inclusive and transparent processes for grant making and permitting for beach events, programs and vendors to ensure more equitable access and increased diversity.
6. That the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts to ensure that our public beaches are safe and inclusive spaces for all by regularly collecting and analyzing data and using this information to inform future efforts.



*Successful beach programs advocated by the Commission have been a highlight of recent summer seasons. Sustaining and reinforcing these signature successful programs will continue to give thousands of kids and families the experience of a lifetime and leverage millions of dollars more in community investment.*

# Improving Beach Access for People of Color

The following represent key findings and recommendations shaped by testimony at the Commission's Hearing #1:

## Affirm a Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to Change Perceptions of the Beaches

### ▣ FINDING

Though more than 70% of the residents of Massachusetts are White, the majority of the residents of Boston, Lynn, and Revere (and 40% of Quincy residents) identify as Black, Hispanic or Asian.

For many people of color, perceptions of our public beaches have been shaped both by their personal experiences and

those of their friends and families, who reported feeling unwelcome and being uncomfortable at the beach.

The Commission also found that these perceptions were influenced by historic and current images of violence and conflict on our beaches, with which we are all familiar.

### ▣ RECOMMENDATION

Both the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay need to find ways to regularly and publicly reaffirm our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusive access to our region's public beaches.

Following our first public hearing, the Commission took immediate steps to increase diversity of representation within the Commission itself. The Commission also expanded its outreach efforts to people of color, people with



*Tens of thousands of kids and families from over 100 Massachusetts communities rely on free access to “the People’s Harbor” for health, relaxation and recreation every year.*



*Free and frequent public programming reinforces connections to the beach for people of color and others who have been historically excluded from fair access to these shared spaces.*

disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their primary language.

**We recommend that DCR ensure representation of its leadership comparable to that of the Commonwealth.**

**We also recommend that the Commission, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and DCR** continue to work with local elected officials, state and local law enforcement, community leaders, and the media to get the message out: The Metropolitan Beaches belong to everyone, regardless of their race, their ability, or the language they speak. We need to continue to work together to change perceptions by supporting and highlighting efforts that bring people together on our public beaches.

## **Continue to Use Free Beach Programs and Events to Broaden and Strengthen the Appeal of the Beaches to Diverse Audiences**

### **▣ FINDING**

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and DCR's Better Beaches Program Partnership has been very successful in improving connections to the beach for kids, families and communities. The free beach events and programs that this partnership supports have improved beach access for all the region's residents, including people of color, people with disabilities and those who do not speak English as their primary language.

At all of the hearings we heard testimony on the value of Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's free "Better Beaches"

events and programs to the region's youth development and community organizations, and the kids, families and communities they serve.

**State Representative Adrian Madaro** of East Boston, who Co-Chairs the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, put it like this: *"Equity, inclusion and diversity are critically important to me and my constituents in East Boston. Save the Harbor's free programs have improved beach access for everyone, bringing our beaches to life, connecting kids and families from across our diverse community to each other and the harbor."*

**Christopher Byner**, Program Administrator of the Boston Police Activities League agreed, testifying that *"Save the Harbor's free youth and beach programs have introduced more than 250,000 young people to our beaches and the sea, creating a generation of young stewards, encouraging them to care about Boston Harbor, the marine environment and our community."*

### **▣ RECOMMENDATION**

That the Commission should continue to advocate for increased investment in the Better Beaches Program to bring more of the region's kids, families, and community groups to our beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.

That Save the Harbor/Save the Bay should continue to award Better Beaches Program grants to local organizations and community groups that promote and celebrate diversity on the beach, and report to the Commission each year on the success of its efforts.

## Overcome Transportation Barriers to Accessing All Beaches

### □ FINDING

Though many of our public beaches (in Quincy, South Boston, East Boston, and Revere) are accessible by the MBTA, many of the region's residents from inland and upland communities of color and need simply don't know how to (or in some cases have the resources to) get to the beach.

It can also be difficult to get from the T to the beach or from one end of the beach to the other on our larger beaches, particularly for families and older adults.

Though parking is free on some beaches and metered or fairly inexpensive on others, (ranging from \$10 per day at Nahant to \$20 per day at Nantasket) parking is limited, and often unavailable especially on sunny summer weekends.

### □ RECOMMENDATION

That DCR and the MBTA produce and distribute a guide to getting to the beaches by public transportation, and that the Commission work with the legislature and the administration to find funds for free shuttles from public transit to and along the larger beaches, like the Hull-O Trolley.

## Support Culturally Relevant Activities That Are Relatable to Diverse Audiences

### □ FINDING

There is an appetite for more diverse events, activities, music and food to appeal to people of all ages and our region's increasingly diverse population.

Abdi Ali of the East Boston Racism Community Coalition put it like this: *“Free cultural activities are really important. When I hear music that is relevant and inviting to me, I feel welcome and comfortable in that public space.”*

### □ RECOMMENDATION

That the Commission and DCR continue to invest in Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Better Beaches Program, that supports a diverse suite of multicultural events, programs, food and music that make our beaches more welcoming and inclusive and help create a sense of community.

## Strengthen Our Commitment to Water Safety Programs

### □ FINDING

Kids of color are six times as likely to die from drowning as white kids, underscoring the importance of free life jackets, water safety and swimming instruction, and well-trained lifeguards.

### □ RECOMMENDATION

That DCR offer beach safety instruction on the region's public beaches, and work with organizations including the YMCA and Boston Women of Color Coalition's Swim Safety Partnership which gets “people of color comfortable with swimming, as part of an effort to reduce swimming accidents and lower racial and economic barriers to lessons.”

## Improve Beach Public Safety by Involving the Community

### □ FINDING

In recent years large groups of teenagers have gathered on the region's public beaches in South Boston and Revere, prompting public safety concerns among some beach goers and residents, and highly visible responses from state and local law enforcement officials, who want to send a strong message that they intend to enforce beach rules and regulations.

Participants all agreed that drinking, fighting and disruptive behavior like we saw early in the 2022 beach season simply do not belong on our beaches. However, it is hard to “follow the rules” if you don't know what they are.

Participants also expressed concerns about policing that appears to unfairly target groups of young people who are simply trying to beat the heat and have some fun.

Rather than focusing on images of conflict, we highlight a recent image of community leaders and law enforcement officials joining hands in a prayer for peace on our beaches. This image can serve as the basis for a strong partnership that can foster a greater sense of inclusion and belonging on the region's public beaches.

### □ RECOMMENDATIONS

That the leadership of DCR, rangers and state and local law enforcement participate in a discussion with Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, local officials and community leaders led by the Commission about how to avoid the conflicts



*The beaches have too often been a source of images of conflict. This recent image of community leaders and law enforcement joining hands in prayer reflects a hope for a better future. A strong partnership fostering inclusion and belonging on our beaches can help reduce disruptive behavior and improve communication around expectations on the beach.*

we had on the beach early in the 2022 beach season during “school skip days” and warm weekends.

In 2023, DCR will install at least one multi-lingual sign on each of the metropolitan beaches, with a QR code linking to beach rules and regulations to let people know that they are welcome on the beach.

## Review DCR’s Current Event Permitting Process to Make it More Equitable and Transparent

### ▣ FINDING

We heard from several Better Beaches Program Partners who felt that DCR’s permitting process was overly complicated, unwieldy, and in some cases seemed unfair or discriminatory.

### ▣ RECOMMENDATION

That within 90 days of the release of this report, DCR will report to the Commission on ways to make the permitting process for beach events, programs and vendors more equitable and transparent, to make it easier for new people and organizations to participate.

Continue to expand Save the Harbor’s Better Beaches Program Partnership with DCR, funding new program partners and new free beach events to improve beach access for people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their first language.

## Prioritize Clean Water Investments that Support Environmental Justice

### ▣ FINDING

Nearly every participant in the hearings reiterated the importance of access to clean water to them and their community. Though our region’s \$5 billion investment in the Boston Harbor cleanup has dramatically improved the health of the harbor and the bay, some area beaches continue to lag behind in water quality.

*“With more than 1,500 miles of coastline, Massachusetts families deserve access to beaches we can be proud of. We must continue to make investments that will enable our residents to swim in clean water and enjoy our outdoor recreational spaces,”* said Senator Brendan Crighton. *“Better beaches are particularly important to environmental justice communities that face public health disparities and various socio-economic challenges.”*

### ▣ RECOMMENDATION

That the Commonwealth of Massachusetts prioritize capital investments in clean water in Environmental Justice communities of color and need, including funds from the Environmental Bond Bill, which have been authorized but not appropriated.

# Improving Beach Access for People with Disabilities

The following represent key findings and recommendations shaped by testimony at the Commission's Hearing #2:

## Add Resources and Expand Partnerships that Facilitate Beach Access for People with Disabilities

### ▣ FINDING

In 2019 there were 787,330 people with disabilities living in Massachusetts, more than 75,000 of whom live in the City of Boston, making up nearly 12% of the population. **They each deserve full access to our public beaches and the sea.**

What the Commission heard in this hearing on improving access for people with disabilities reinforced what we have learned at the annual BeachAbility Festival at Constitution Beach in East Boston, which is organized by Triangle, Inc. and funded by a grant from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Better Beaches Program.

Colonel (Retired) Andrea Gayle-Bennett of the Disabled American Veterans of Massachusetts put it best when she testified that without sufficient handicap and van parking, accessible and well-maintained ramps, accessible walkways and bathrooms, *“Access to the beach is limited for those with physical disabilities, which turns them into spectators instead of participants.”*

In the summer of 2022, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the Commission conducted a survey of the Metropolitan Region's public beaches and found that in many instances, paths, walkways and ramps were poorly maintained (and in some cases blocked with cobble and boulders), preventing people in wheelchairs, older adults and people with strollers and walkers from getting to the beach safely—or at all.

Though DCR's Universal Access Program (UAP) is terrific, the agency does not have sufficient staff or resources to place (or store) mobility mats and wheelchairs on any of the region's metropolitan beaches owned by the Commonwealth and managed by DCR, which creates logistical challenges.



*The annual BeachAbility Festival at Constitution Beach is a model for what could be offered on many beaches throughout the summer.*

Though the UAP has some mobility mats and beach and floating wheelchairs, they are not readily available at any of the Metropolitan Beaches except by prior arrangement, which prevents people with disabilities from fully enjoying the metropolitan region's public beaches.

*“The Commonwealth's metropolitan beaches are treasured open spaces where the built environment meets the natural environment, that everyone should be able to enjoy. We need to take every opportunity to remove barriers and create better beach access for people with disabilities so that everyone can actively enjoy our beaches.”* – State Representative Joan Meschino of Hull, House Vice-Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

### ▣ RECOMMENDATION

**At the Commission's next public hearing following the release of this report,** DCR shall report on an “accessibility audit” of parking, ramps, walkways, and bathrooms on each of the Metropolitan Beaches, as well as its plans to make these beaches fully accessible to people with disabilities. DCR's report should include its assessment of additional staffing needs associated with addressing the needs of people with disabilities as well as related capital and equipment costs.

**By the start of the 2023 Beach Season on May 29, 2023,** DCR shall complete the following actions:

- Work with the Commission, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and local beach friends and community groups to organize early season beach cleanups to remove sand and debris from ramps, walkways and paths that prevent access to the beach for people with disabilities.
- Install (and maintain) at least one mobility mat **with the new material DCR ordered for the 2023 season**, and place and store a minimum of two beach and/or floating wheelchairs at Revere Beach, Constitution Beach, Carson Beach, and Wollaston Beach, where they will be readily available for use by people with disabilities during the 2023 beach season.
- Work with the Commission and with Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and their Better Beaches Program and Community partners to get the word out to the disability community and the public that these resources are available.



*Clearing ramps regularly is an essential step to improve beach and water access for people with disabilities. Today, this practice is the exception, not the rule.*



*Providing mobility mats and wheelchairs at every beach is key to allowing people to become full participants rather than spectators on the region's public beaches.*

# Improving Beach Access for People Who Don't Speak English as their First Language

The following represent key findings and recommendations shaped by testimony at the Commission's Hearing #3:

## Provide Timely and Critical Public Health and Safety Information to People in a Language they Understand

### ▣ FINDING

In 2019, just under 10% (approximately 528,324) of all Massachusetts residents ages 18 and over spoke limited English, self-reporting that they spoke English less than “very well,” nearly half of whom lived within a short ride or drive to the Metropolitan Region's public beaches.

According to the **Demographic Profile of Adult Limited English Speakers in Massachusetts** produced by the Boston Planning and Development Agency, in 2019, 100,000 limited-English speaking (LES) adults lived in the City of Boston, 17,987 LES adults lived in the City of Lynn, while 16,962 LES adults lived in the City of Quincy.



Scan this QR code for beaches water quality information that can be translated into over 100 languages. Tools like this on all our beaches can easily increase awareness, information and even health outcomes.

Beach signs contain critical information about beach rules and regulations, water quality and public safety. In the winter of 2022, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay conducted a comprehensive survey of signage on the region's public beaches in Nahant, Lynn, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull. **Of the 250 signs Save the Harbor/Save the Bay examined, just four were in languages other than English.**

*“Our public beaches are gateways to healthy blue and green spaces that belong to us all, no matter what language we speak. Simply seeing signs in your primary language makes a public place instantly more welcoming and provides people with the information they need to safely enjoy their beach.”* – State Senator Lydia Edwards of East Boston, Senate Vice-Chair, Metropolitan Beaches Commission

**Limited English speakers who live in these communities rely on the Metropolitan Beaches for recreation, respite and healthy outdoor activities. They deserve full access to the information they need to safely use and enjoy these beaches in a language they can understand.**

Boston City Councilor-at-Large Julia Mejia put it well at the hearing on linguistic obstacles when she testified *“When I look at the signs on our public beaches, everything is still very much in English. If we are serious about creating spaces where all people are seen and reflected, then translation and information justice has to be a part of that conversation.”*

The Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay announced at the hearing that all future notices, advisories, press releases, posts and communications from the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay be available in 133 languages on the web using Google Translate, and that translation will be available at all Commission hearings.





*In 2022, Save the Harbor conducted a survey of signage on the metropolitan region’s public beaches. Just four of the signs they found on the beach were in languages other than English.*

As an important first step, in May 2022, DCR designed and posted several new beach safety signs with QR codes for multiple language translation on the region’s public beaches. The Commission looks forward to working with the new DCR Commissioner to develop additional multi-lingual signs as appropriate in 2023.

In addition to the signs posted by DCR, critical information from other agencies including the Department of Public Health (on water quality) and the Division of Marine Fisheries (on fish and shellfish advisories, closings and regulations) also needs to be available in languages other than English.

In response to a request from the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, Division of Marine Fisheries has produced its first multilingual sign with a QR code on shellfish regulations and plans to install them by the start of the 2023 beach season.

Unfortunately, the Department of Public Health has not yet addressed the problem associated with English-only signs. Despite numerous requests, critical information on the Department of Public Health’s beach water quality website and its physical beach posting notices are at least one day old, and are still available in English only, putting the public’s health at risk.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**Within 90 days of the release of this report,** DCR shall report to the Commission on any plans to improve the accuracy of the flagging protocols for the Metropolitan Region’s public beaches and the status of its promised implementation of multi-lingual signage with appropriate QR codes and the number of multi-lingual signs they posted on the Metropolitan Beaches in 2022.

**Within 90 days of the release of this report,** the Department of Public Health shall update the FAQs on their Beach Water Quality website to accurately reflect the delay between testing and posting as outlined in Save the Harbor/Save the Bay’s October 27, 2022 memo on **Improving Beach Flagging Accuracy and Beach Posting Transparency.**

**In 2023,** DCR will post appropriate multilingual signage with QR codes linking to multilingual webpages with information on beach regulations, hours of operations, parking restrictions, public safety and water quality on each of the Metropolitan Beaches from Nahant to Nantasket, including Nahant, Lynn, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.



Save the Harbor's Youth Environmental Education Program staff and other Boston area youth took part in a listening session. These younger beach users both shared their unique generational perspective and echoed many of the concerns of other community members.

## Listening Sessions

In addition to the three hearings and summit, at the suggestion of the Commission, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay hosted two additional "listening sessions."

### Boston Area Youth

On August 1st, 2022, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay held a listening session with Boston area youth on improving access for youth on the Commonwealth's public beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull. The young people who participated shared their thoughts on beach access, affordable access to Spectacle Island, water safety, and free youth programs. The young people echoed the concerns heard in the previous hearings, including the visible presence of staff and lifeguards for safety both on the sand and in the water; ease of transportation from the T to the sea; and more free beach events and programs for kids and families with diverse food and music options. They also brought their own unique generational perspective, suggesting amenities such as phone charging stations, water filling stations, gender-neutral bathrooms and free open water swimming lessons.

### Better Beaches Program Partners

On September 8th, 2022, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay held a listening session with its Better Beaches Program partners to discuss improvements to the Better Beaches Program based on the summer of 2022 events. Better Beaches Program partners shared their thoughts on ways to improve DCR's permitting process, strengthen communications

between DCR and the groups, and improve signage. While there was definite overlap with the previous hearings and listening session, the primary consensus among beach event organizers was the hope for greater ease of applying for and acquiring event permits on the DCR beaches early enough to plan and advertise to their communities. Most praised the support they received from the beach staff though it was sometimes difficult to communicate with them via email and phone. Partners would appreciate more in-person interaction with DCR.

The Commission recommends that Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and DCR hold annual "listening sessions" for youth and beach program partners and share what they hear and learn with the Commission in a brief report.

#### Some challenges faced by Better Beaches Program Partners

*"After doing our event for a few years, we did have additional familiarity with the process. It is harrowing the first time through when you don't know how to efficiently follow-up!"* – John Kaiser, Triangle Inc.

*"It was difficult to plan and advertise without knowing if we had been approved. We in fact were denied 4 days before our program due to another program's boat difficulties. We had to postpone the program after advertising."* – Mary Mitchell

*"We submitted our application about 4-5 months before our event, and it was approved only about a week or two before our event. It's super stressful not knowing if you will get it approved or not when you are putting so much effort (and money!) into planning."* – Lauren Sullivan

# Next Steps

The Commission hopes that this report will serve as a roadmap to help The Commonwealth, DCR and local communities improve management, maintenance and public access to our region's public beaches from Nahant to Nantasket for everyone, including people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their primary language.

However, as with our previous reports in 2007 and 2014, the Commission recognizes that accomplishing our shared goals will require continued commitment, resources and focused attention.

Going forward, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and DCR will hold annual "listening sessions" for youth and beach program partners, and share what they hear and learn with the Commission in a brief report.

The Commission will also hold a hearing each year to give DCR, the Department of Public Health, the Department

of Environmental Protection and other state agencies an opportunity to report on their progress and continue to solicit feedback from the public on what is working well and what needs to be improved with an ongoing online survey.

## Imagine a Bay State Without Beaches

Over the course of the inquiry, we also heard from Commissioners and local elected officials who were concerned that efforts to protect their communities from sea level rise and "global storming" also preserve recreational access to their public beaches.

Sea level rise and climate impacts associated with global warming threaten both public safety and beach access in Lynn and Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.



*Sea level rise and more intense storms threaten both public safety and beach access in all our beachfront communities.*



*Working together, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission believes we can shape a future where our public beaches are shared and enjoyed by everyone.*

The Commission recommends that Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the Commission jointly host workshops in Boston, Quincy and Lynn to help the Metropolitan Region's beachfront communities plan for sea-level rise and increasingly severe coastal storms.

At these workshops we will share **a suite of tools** developed in a partnership with the City of Boston and the region's experts and advocates **to increase resiliency and improve coastal defense, while preserving recreational access to our public beaches.**

Following these workshops, the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay will work with the Administration, the Legislature and each community to help identify funds to address these critical concerns.



**Scan this QR code for the online home of the Breaking Barriers report and the appendices referenced throughout this report.**

## Conclusion

The Metropolitan Region's public beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull are extraordinary assets that belong to all of the residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

However, people of color, people with disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their primary language continue to face obstacles to equitable access to these spectacular, shared natural resources, which we have an obligation to address.

The Commission hopes that the findings and recommendations included in this report will be embraced by the Healey-Driscoll Administration and serve as a blueprint for improved and equitable access to the Metropolitan Region's public beaches.

For more information on how you can help, visit [www.savetheharbor.org/mbc](http://www.savetheharbor.org/mbc) or send an email to [mbc@savetheharbor.org](mailto:mbc@savetheharbor.org).



# The Commission Would Like to Thank All Those Who Helped Shape the Findings and Recommendations Contained in this Report

Thank you to the more than 300 individuals who contributed the findings and recommendations included in this report!

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		Maya Smith	

The Metropolitan Beaches Commission wishes to thank Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and its Better Beaches Program Partners for their important contributions to making our beaches accessible and welcoming to everyone.

A Trike Called Funk	Coast Cannabis	Hull Lifesaving Museum	Piers Park Sailing Center
Aashka Company	Comcast	Hull-Nantasket Chamber of Commerce	Plein Air Painting
Abilities Dance	Daddy & Me Literacy Program	Income Research + Management	Quincy Dept. of Natural Resources
BCYF Curley Community Center	Department of Conservation and Recreation	JetBlue	Quincycles
Bike to the Sea	East Boston YMCA	Masskiting	Revere Beach Partnership
The Black Literacy & Arts Collaborative Project	Fields Corner Crossroads Collaborative	Mattapan Food and Fitness	Revere Parks and Recreation
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts	The Flavor Continues	Mix 104.1	The Richard Saltonstall Charitable Foundation
Boston Circus Guild	FMC Ice Sports	The MOMS Club of South Boston	Soca Fusion
Boston Consulting Group	Friends of Belle Isle Marsh	NamaStay Sober	Soca Hikes
Boston Fun Cruises "The Belle"	Friends of Lynn & Nahant Beach	National Grid	South Boston en Acción
Boston Police B3	Friends of Nantasket Beach	Next Stop Revere	South Boston Neighborhood House
Boys & Girls Clubs of Dorchester	Friends of the Paragon Carousel, Inc.	NOAH	The Theater Offensive
Caribbean American Carnival Association of Boston	Friends of Winthrop Beach	North Shore Juneteenth Association	Triangle, Inc.
Charlestown YMCA	Friends of Wollaston Beach	North Shore Women of Color Association	The TrikeHub
Circus Up	GreenCrab.org	NSO Cares	Veronica Robles Cultural Center
City of Boston Department of Youth Engagement & Employment	The Harborkeepers	Ohana New England Dragon Beat Team	Vertex Pharmaceuticals
	Harpoon Brewery	P&G Gillette	Youth Enrichment Services (YES)
	Haus of Threes		The YMCA of Greater Boston



You can find hearing summaries, transcripts and other materials on which this report is based, as well as copies of our previous reports at [www.savetheharbor.org/mbc](http://www.savetheharbor.org/mbc)

If you would like to share your thoughts or concerns about your beach or join the MBC mailing list and be notified of upcoming Metropolitan Beaches Commission hearings, send an email to [info@savetheharbor.org](mailto:info@savetheharbor.org)