

COMMISSION WORKS TO PUT THE PUBLIC BACK IN LYNN AND NAHANT BEACHES

By Emily Pauls | May 15, 2023

A recently-released report found that the experiences of marginalized groups at area beaches, including those in Lynn and Nahant, have often made them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.

The Metropolitan Beaches Commission released its “Breaking Barriers: Improving Public Access to the Metropolitan Beaches” report, which also studied beaches in Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy, and Hull. According to [the report](#), the commission spent the past two years hearing from the public in those areas; beachgoers throughout the region; and environmental justice, disability resource infrastructure, public education, and communication experts.

From those conversations, the commission was able to confirm the public’s views of beaches and how they are “shaped” by personal experiences.

“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 report said.

The commission is making an effort to “alleviate these concerns.” It will be working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for these efforts.

One of the ways they are looking to make changes is by enhancing leadership opportunities, according to the report.

“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,” the report said. “We look forward to working with the new DCR commissioner to address systemic problems and implement long-term solutions.”

Gov. Maura Healey and her administration could help with setting policy for DCR, the report said. The policies should hold the DCR commissioner and the agency accountable for “implementation over time.”

The commission wants to improve beach access for people of color. According to the report, a majority of residents in Lynn identify as Black, Hispanic, or Asian.

“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 disabilities, and people who do not speak English as their primary language,” the report said.

The commission has recommended to DCR that it should make sure its representation in leadership matches the diversity of Massachusetts.

The continuation and investment into Save the Harbor/Save the Bay’s “Better Beaches Program” is also recommended by the commission.

“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 in hundreds of free beach events and programs since its inception,” the report said.

In order to make beaches more comfortable for people of color, there should be culturally relevant activities, according to the report.

“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,’” the report said.

The commission also recommends that there should be an improvement of beach public safety, increase commitment to water and safety programs, add resources and expand partnerships that facilitate beach access for people with disabilities, expand multilingual signs, and more.

“Investing in improved public access for people of color, with disabilities, or who do not speak English as their primary language will make our region’s beaches better for everyone,” state Sen. Brendan Crighton (D-Lynn), co-chair of the commission, wrote in a statement to the Item. “With strong partnerships from the Healey-Driscoll Administration and DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo, I look forward to making our public beaches more welcoming for all.”