

Lynn and Nahant officials talk climate change at public hearing

The Metropolitan Beaches Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay held a public hearing about efforts to improve coastal resilience with community leaders and members of Lynn, Nahant, and other waterfront towns and cities on Tuesday.

According to Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Executive Director Chris Mancini, the region's waterfront and beachfront areas are extremely threatened by rising sea levels and coastal storms that are increasingly frequent and severe. Those storms are caused by global warming and climate change, he said.

"Unless we take steps today to preserve these beaches and protect our communities, in the near future we really could be looking at a Bay State without beaches," Mancini said.

The goal of the hearing was to receive input from the communities.

In Lynn and Nahant, the beaches are economic drivers and "critical recreational resources" to residents, state Sen. Brendan Crighton said.

"We need to work together to secure the resources our coastal communities need to preserve our beaches and protect our communities from the increasing threat posed by global warming and sea-level rise," Crighton, who is also a Metropolitan Beaches Commission co-chair, said.

Each community had a chance to share what it is doing to fight against climate change and protect its waterfront.

Lynn's principal planner, Aaron Clausen, said the city has been focused on preliminary planning efforts in order to understand the vulnerabilities caused by climate change.

"A key aspect of that is how do we become more resilient to climate change? How do we deal with the prospect of higher sea levels and more frequent storm surge and coastal storms?" Clausen said.

The 2020 Lynn Municipal Harbor Plan Amendment and DPA Master Plan has the framework for the redevelopment of the city's waterfront area, he said.

"It takes into consideration rising sea levels and coastal erosion, and takes into consideration flood mitigation that we need to carry out to make that work and be resilient," Clausen said.

Lynn also has the Lynn Hazard Mitigation Plan, which intends to reduce the city's vulnerabilities to natural hazards. The plan was adopted by the City Council in June 2022 and has been approved by the Federal Emergency Management Administration.

"That looks at a broad range of vulnerabilities across the city, but many of which are focused on the waterfront and prioritize that work," Clausen said.

The city has also implemented the Municipal Vulnerability Planning program, which has been a critical resource, he said. Through this program, Clausen added, Lynn has been focusing on inland flooding.

"We've just begun ... developing some preliminary design and engineering ... along the Saugus River and the shoreline there to help mitigate flooding and coastal flooding along some pretty significant recreational amenities, infrastructure, and some low-lying neighborhoods," Clausen said.

Nahant, which is only connected to the mainland by a causeway, has had damage from previous storms, according to Nahant Town Administrator Tony Barletta.

“We are constantly at risk of being cut off from the mainland,” Barletta said. “If we have an emergency and our only road heading out of town... gets flooded, we can’t get people off the island.”

That is why fighting against climate change and being prepared for storms is very important to the town, he said, and why Nahant has adopted and expanded the Wetlands Protection Act and a stormwater bylaw act.

“Because our coastal infrastructure is so susceptible to climate change, and it’s impossible for us to improve those quick enough so that they’re going to be able to protect us when the next big storm comes, we’re forced to invest in infrastructure that’s going to basically help us recover from the flood,” Barletta said.

There aren’t enough funds to properly prevent storm damage, he said.

“I think we really need to come together and think about how we take the funding that is already available and the programs and the technical assistance, and how do we create a program that really meets with the communities and really starts to understand what their vulnerabilities are and what their limitations are,” Barletta said.

This was the first of a few hearings that are being held in the coming months, according to a press release from the commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay. There will then be a report of the findings from the hearings and recommendations released.

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay also recently released a report titled “Imagine a Bay State Without Beaches: Strategies for balancing coastal defense and public access.” This report details the coastal infrastructure and storm-surge flooding of Metropolitan beaches from Nahant to Nantasket.

Link to article: <https://itemlive.com/2023/07/11/lynn-and-nahant-officials-talk-climate-change-at-public-hearing/>