

Jared Nicholson | August 22, 2021

Opinion: Clean King's Beach

One of the biggest environmental success stories of the last half century has been the clean-up of Boston Harbor and the Massachusetts Bay.

We spent billions of dollars and the results have been fantastic. In one of the densest regions in the country, almost all our beaches are clean and swimmable more than 90 percent of the time.

Except for King's Beach in Lynn and Swampscott. Last year, King's Beach was swimmable 70 percent of the time.

This undermines the success of the whole coastline cleanup. It's also an equity issue. King's Beach is a recreational opportunity for one of the few remaining working-class communities on the water.

It's an environmental justice issue. Lynn is a diverse community. It's only beach is polluted. Other beaches up and down the coastline are not.

It is an ongoing public health issue. Despite warning flags and some signage, people continue to use the beach. Drive by even on a day when the red flags that are meant to warn people to stay away are flying and families will be in the water.

For the City of Lynn, it's also an economic development issue. One of the city's major selling points for development is proximity to the ocean. Pollution undermines what should be an obvious draw.

This is a fixable issue. The fact that it hasn't been fixed is an understandable source of frustration in the community.

When I drive by and see people in the water on a day they're not supposed to be, I see a public communications failure.

Every summer when Save the Harbor/Save the Bay releases its beaches report card and King's Beach lags far behind, I see Lynn's public perception undermined by a challenging yet solvable issue. I see a community, whose beach has not been saved, surrounded by communities whose beaches have been saved, that is tired of being overlooked.

Problems like the pollution at King's Beach that cut across bureaucratic lines create headaches for everyone involved. Agency leaders feel unfairly accused of failing to address a problem that isn't necessarily their fault. Community members hear leadership refusing to accept responsibility and solve the problem.

It's exactly these scenarios when local leaders need to step up and persistently push the action forward. The City of Lynn, the Town of Swampscott, the Lynn Water and Sewer Commission, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the United States Environmental Protection Authority, and other stakeholders need to do what it takes to put King's Beach on par with the rest of our urban beaches.

Fortunately, we should have an opportunity to do so in the near future. State leaders are seeking to invest almost \$1 billion in federal relief money into upgrades of water

and sewer infrastructure. This is the perfect opportunity for the different agencies involved to work together to find a solution while the resources are available.

We will need the state and federal government to provide much of the funding for these efforts. Local leadership will need to provide the will, the urgency, and the focused and sustained attention.