

William J. Dowd | Sept. 20, 2021

Swampscott lawmakers eye federal money to address King's Beach wastewater



A woman and her dog play at King's Beach on Tuesday, May 5, 2020. [Wicked Local Staff Photo / David Sokol]

In early July, a Massachusetts-based environmental nonprofit published annual report cards that individually graded how safe the water quality is at metropolitan beaches along the Bay State coastline.

In Swampscott, Save The Harbor/Save The Bay gave the water quality at King's Beach a grade well below average in 2020. Water samples tested for fecal-bacteria concentrations greater than the federal Environmental Protection Agency's highest warning levels.

On Thursday night, Swampscott resident John Allen brought state Rep. Lori Ehrlich, state Sen. Brendan Crighton and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Executive Director Mancini for "A Discussion on the Future of the Bay" in a virtual Zoom room with community members.

"[Save The Harbor/ Save The Bay] studies most recently found that King's Beach received the 70% rating, meaning it was unsafe for swimming one out of every five days in 2020," Crighton said. "Obviously this is unacceptable."

Ehrlich sourced the issue to two side-by-side outflow pipes -- one from Swampscott and one from Lynn -- that run right down the middle of King's Beach. Raw sewage infiltrates stormwater pipes that flow to King's Beach.

"What we are seeing is bacteria-laden and sometimes and often raw sewage coming out through both those pipes," Mancini said.

Lynn has combined sewer systems, in which surface runoff enters the sewer. Heavy rain reduces capacity as stormwater and groundwater overwhelm the systems, often leading to discharges of sewage and runoff into public waterways. The discharges can carry bacteria and cause algae bloom.

"Both communities know what the problem is, and that is the good news, folks, this is solvable," Ehrlich said. "It's just a very expensive solution."

Two of the night's noteworthy items: A group of stakeholder appears to be coalescing around seriously addressing

the longstanding public-health issue. Crighton and Ehrlich believe the Lynn and Swampscott sewer and water infrastructure is a viable candidate for American Rescue Plan Act money - of which the federal government awarded Massachusetts \$5.3 billion.

"With the American Rescue Plan Act funding, infrastructure funding opportunities right before us," Crighton said. "This really could be a once in a generation opportunity to get this issues addressed."

King's Beach sports a very large cove on which people enjoy low-tide strolls, and it's a popular spot for surfers year round. The public beach starts at the Lynn-Swampscott line and, heading into Swampscott along Lynn Shore Drive, terminates at Black Will's Cliff.

In September 2015, Swampscott entered into a consent decree after the federal agency discovered the town discharged untreated polluted water into the ocean at King's Beach. The EPA fined the town \$65,000 and mandated the town take corrective action.

Under an Environmental Protection Agency consent decree, Swampscott Town Meeting has put millions of dollars toward relining very old pipes to fix the Stacey Brook problem.