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Metropolitan Beaches Comm. Holds First Meeting In-Person Since Shutdown

For the first time since the COVID-19 shutdown, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission gathered on Beacon Hill on October 31 for an in-person hearing on the state of the region's beaches. This was also the first opportunity for the Commission to hear from recently appointed DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo on his priorities and vision for the agency. The Metropolitan Beaches Commission is managed by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and is responsible for making recommendations on the maintenance, improvement and accessibility of the region's public beaches from Nahant to Nantasket.

Over 100 people attended the hearing in person or over Teams as DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo testified to the agency's efforts to address recommendations from the MBC's Breaking Barriers report, including steps towards equity and diversity-focused hiring practices and improvements to ADA-accessibility. Commissioner Arrigo also committed to adding more multilingual signage to the region's beaches before the 2024 beach season.

"We are really proud of all the work that has brought us to this point today," said Commission Co-Chair Senator Brendan Crighton. "Our collective work to break down with a particular focus on racial equity and language equity has identified concrete action steps to help address very complex long-standing issues that impact our beaches and communities."

"DCR's public beaches belong to everyone, and all of our residents should be able to safely access and enjoy them," said DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo. "We are committed to working with the Commission and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay to ensure our metropolitan region's public beaches are welcoming places for everyone regardless of race, ability, language or income."

The MBC and Commissioner Arrigo also discussed potential for improving the flagging protocols on our region's beaches to communicate to the public more clearly on the infrequent days when water quality may be potentially unsafe for swimming, usually following a heavy rainfall. While Massachusetts continues to boast some of the country's cleanest urban beaches, stormwater runoff can impact that quality. Director of Green Infrastructure for the City of Boston Kate England addressed the increased impacts of stormwater due to climate change and the potential to mitigate those impacts through strategic green infrastructure improvements, teeing up the Commission's next efforts to address climate resiliency and sea level rise along our coast.

"The beaches are absolutely a critical open space and natural resource for the Commonwealth and need ongoing improvements," said Co-Chair Rep. Adrian Madaro. "We have had great success working in partnership with DCR to upgrade our public beaches and are looking forward to continuing our collaboration so all families can enjoy them no matter what part of the world they come from."

The Commission also heard testimony from members of the public who spoke to the success of the Better Beaches Program, which brought over 200 free public and diverse cultural events to the beaches this past summer, and also addressed community specific concerns about water quality in Lynn and Dorchester that the Commission will continue to try and address.

“It’s terrific to have a Commissioner that shares our goals and values when it comes to making our spectacular urban beaches accessible to everyone,” said Save the Harbor Executive Director Chris Mancini. “We’re looking forward to supporting and collaborating with our partners at DCR to continue breaking barriers for people of color, people with disabilities and those who don’t speak English as a first language. And to see if we can’t do something about rising seas while we’re at it.”

Next steps for the MBC are to keep partnering with DCR to address the infrastructure and equity priorities discussed at the hearing, and to host a series of community charrettes in beachfront neighborhoods on strategies for dealing with rising seas and other effects of climate change.

For more information and to connect with the MBC, visit www.savetheharbor.org/mbc

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