

MBC Hearing

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SPEAKERS

Coleman Nee, Ralph Decicco, Adrian Madaro, Joan Meschino, Susan Hamilton, Andrea Patton, Kristen McCosh, Kathy Lafferty, Angela Ponte, Chris DeFilippis, Ellice Patterson, Stephanie Cooper, Patti Capano, Alex DeFronzo, Maya Smith, Tackey Chan, Tom McCarthy, Bruce Berman, Patti, Chris Mancini, Barbara Bishop, Brendan Crighton, David Biele, Joanne McDevitt, Andrea Gayle-Bennett

Chris Mancini 00:04

I am Chris Mancini; I am the Executive Director of Save the Harbor / Save the Bay. We are here for the second of what is three planned hearings on improving access for people of color, people with disabilities, people who face language barriers on our public beaches. Over the past couple of years, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission has been trying to do for equity and public access what the Commission has always done for maintenance and infrastructure, trying to improve our beaches. When it comes to awareness and enjoyment, everyone could and should have access to these spectacular urban natural resources for recreation, and for free events and amazing programs put on by the DCR, put on by the Better Beaches partners, many of the folks in the room here today. Our goals really are to elevate these issues, and eliminate barriers based on race, ability, language, and improve access for everyone.

I'm so grateful that all of you are here today. I want to thank all of our Metropolitan Beaches Commissioners for joining us here as well as all of our guests on our panel, who we'll hear from in a few moments. I'm going to go over the agenda really briefly, and the hearing guidelines just to let you know what's going to be going on. We'll begin in a moment, I'll introduce our Co-Chairs, who will welcome everyone to the meeting, we'll then turn to our panelists. After that, there'll be a chance for some Q&A and testimony from the Metropolitan Beaches Commissioners from each of their communities. Then, we'll have time for public testimony. We have a few folks pre-registered for that. There's a chance for the public, anyone who's here who would like to speak on these issues, we'll ask you to use the raise hand function and Maya will call on folks. Just to go over our hearing guidelines since this is all about access, we are asking folks to stay muted. You will be muted upon entry, as you may have noticed. We'll ask folks to use the raise hand function, so we don't interrupt each other. This will also help with our live transcription, so it will be clear to folks using that who's speaking at any given point.

As we said already, the meeting will be recorded, transcribed, and we will send this out to all of our participants afterwards. Staff will be monitoring the chat, so feel free to ask questions there. Please introduce yourself in the chat as well if you get a chance. Maria will be posting the agenda there as people come in, so you have a chance to look at that. As I mentioned, the live transcription will be available on the zoom bar, so you can activate that for yourself. At any point throughout the meeting, if you need a moment, you know, feel free to take that moment as we go. We will be here. We'll keep this to our schedule. I know some folks have appointments as we go. Hopefully you'll have a chance to speak up while you're here. With that, I think I'm going to turn it over and introduce our Co-Chair from the Senate, Commissioner and Senator Brendan Crighton.

Brendan Crighton 03:49

Thank you, Chris. I really appreciate all your work to pull this together as well as Bruce, and all of the Save the Harbor / Save the Bay staff, certainly all the Commissioners that have joined here today. I'm going to be brief just because I know we have some really great panels as well as public testimony. I'd like to recognize my Co-Chair, Adrian Madaro, who's going to speak in a minute, but also, I believe we have Reps. Joan Meschino and Rep. Tackey Chan as well. If other folks jump on, I'm sure Adrian will cover them in his remarks.

From my time working as a staffer, and then Commissioner now Chair on this Commission, you know, beach access has always been a top priority in looking at ways to improve that. I'm so grateful for the folks that are working now to really highlight and prioritize this issue and come up with recommendations that hopefully can improve access for everyone, not just the physical access pieces Chris had mentioned.

It's so important that we're mindful of how we're getting the message out to residents across the Commonwealth, whether it's language barriers or other issues. They may just not be aware of the great activities going on at the beach, they may not be aware of water quality issues like we see at Kings Beach and when it's safe to swim. Making sure that the physical access is there but also that we're reaching every resident in the Commonwealth to highlight these important resources in areas for recreation. With that, I'm really excited to listen more than talk today and to really learn from our panelists as well as the public about what the challenges are and hear some ideas on how we can move this forward. With that, Chris, I'm going to turn it over to Chair Madaro.

Adrian Madaro 05:40

Thank you, Senator. Good morning, everyone. It's wonderful to be with you all. First of all, I want to echo Brendan's thanks to the staff and board members of Save the Harbor / Save the Bay, who really do an amazing job of making our beaches the best public resources they can be and uplifting issues that are really important to all of us.

Today, we'll be discussing improving access to our beaches for people with disabilities. 30 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, we still have a long way to go to make certain that our systems, infrastructure and public accommodations are welcoming and accessible for people with disabilities or different abilities. There's a lot of work to do to ensure that our public spaces including our public beaches, particularly within the greater Boston region, reflect that we all belong and deserve

access. Just last week, the disability community achieved a major victory. A federal court decided that the city of Boston must upgrade curb ramps across this city for wheelchair users. We have some significant momentum to build upon with this victory by continuing to uplift the leadership of people with disabilities.

I look forward to hearing from all of you today, including my good friend and neighbor in East Boston, Alex DeFronzo, the Executive Director of the Piers Park Sailing Center, who really has done an incredible job of making sure that sailing in the Boston Harbor is accessible and enjoyable for people of all abilities. Finally, I look forward to working with DCR, and all of our partners and stakeholders to make our beaches are more equitable and accessible for all. Thank you so much, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Chris Mancini 07:11

Thank you both so much. I'm going to introduce our panel. Just before that, I'd like to say if there are any members of the press here, welcome. We will have opportunity for Q&A at the end of the hearing. You can always reach out to our Director of Strategy Communication, Bruce Berman. I assume you already have his phone number, and if you don't, he'll send it to you in the chat. With that, I'd like to turn it over to our panel. I'll just introduce that panel in order. We're delighted to hear from Acting Commissioner Stephanie Cooper of the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Tom McCarthy, the Director of DCR's Universal Access Program, Commissioner Kristen McCosh, of the Boston Disabilities Commission, Coleman Nee, CEO of Triangle, Inc. and Kathy Lafferty, Executive Director of South Boston Neighborhood House. With that, I'm pleased to introduce and welcome Commissioner Stephanie Cooper, thank you for being here, Stephanie.

Stephanie Cooper 08:11

Well, thank you so much, Chris and good morning, everyone. Good morning Chairs Crighton and Madaro, all the Commissioners and all the attendees who are here today. Looking around the virtual room, I was happy to recognize a number of friendly faces of folks who I've worked with in one way or another in the past. I'm the Acting Commissioner of DCR, on my fifth week in this role, and I'm so humbled to be asked by Secretary Theoharides and the administration to serve in this role in this transition period for DCR. While I am obviously new to this position, DCR is familiar, DCR is really kind of home to me, it's where I started my career in public service in Massachusetts, back in 2005.

We all know, it's clearer than ever, COVID taught us what we knew in our hearts. The critical importance of getting outdoors for our collective physical, mental and spiritual health, it's never been more apparent. I know this Commission is well aware and supported DCR during the period where we never closed, we continued to welcome visitors from Massachusetts and elsewhere to all the half-million acres of what's entrusted in our care, but very importantly, the beaches that are the focus of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission. I do want to note that when I started at DCR, soon after that, I believe if I've gotten my timelines correctly, that this Commission was convened, and I remember vividly the importance of the work and the way that it really elevated and challenged DCR to do better at these beaches. We appreciate that long standing partnership.

It's so great to be with you today to hear about where the Commission is going. I commend you for your focus on equity and access, which could not be more critical. We know that these 15 public beaches in Greater Metropolitan Boston are really, you know, they're a crown jewel for all of us and they're so important. As you all well know, we can't do this work alone, we can't steward these properties by ourselves. We rely on this Commission, we rely on our friend groups, conservancies, or municipal partners are critical, the legislature. All together, we come together to help take care of these special places.

I want to highlight our long-standing partnership with Save the harbor / Save the Bay and to really commend Chris and his team. Bruce, I remember you very well from my first tour at DCR. We work closely together. Working together, we provide grant funding every year for the Better Beaches Program that provides community-level programming geared toward bringing more people to our beautiful metropolitan beaches. In the last two fiscal years, we provided \$190,000 to the program, working closely with Chris Mancini and the team at Save the Harbor / Save the Bay to try to, you know, on our end to streamline permitting and the operations management to clear any bureaucratic hurdles. It's really all about the programming and bringing people to the beaches. I think we did a pretty good job supporting the efforts through COVID and allowed the program to deliver virtual and socially distanced events. We're looking forward to collaborating on next summer's programs. You know, based on the chill today, it feels like it's a long ways away, but it'll be here before we know it.

I want to say a few words today about our Universal Access Program and you'll get to hear from our Director, Tom McCarthy in a few minutes, who is an incredibly talented professional and really an expert in this field who's been running this program for 25 years. The Universal Access Program at DCR provides guidance across the agency around accessibility requirements for our parks, you know, the physical aspects of it, the physical infrastructure, but also and just as importantly, Universal Access provides adaptive programming and equipment at our pools, skating rinks, beaches, of course, lakes and ponds. The idea is that everybody of all abilities can participate and enjoy themselves at our properties.

Just to highlight one example from the Metropolitan Beaches scope this last summer, Universal Access provided a significant number of beach wheelchairs and additional rollout beach matting, which I think folks are familiar, I see some nodding heads at Constitution Beach for a Better Beaches event called Beach:Ability. That was in partnership with Triangle Inc. I see more nodding heads, so I suspect some of the folks who ran that program were among us today, I thought you would be. That's important to provide a supportive beach experience for people of all abilities for their friends and their families to come out and enjoy a nice day along the water. Our Universal Access Program staff were on hand to assist and support the program, but also to share information about the Universal Access across our DCR system. Tom is an incredible resource. I'm sure you will tap into him as you delve into this work going forward. He's passionate, and he's talented, and he has a lot to offer.

Ensuring that everyone feels welcome and invited at our public beaches, particularly at our metropolitan beaches is a really important core value for us at DCR and I know it's a core value of this Commission. We want to work with you to make sure that we're fully meeting that mission and that we are doing better and better every year. We think about accessibility improvements when we make capital project

when we make capital upgrades and of course, that's what the ADA calls for, but we try to do it in a really creative and expansive way. I'll just highlight one example. We are currently working on a design to renovate the Michael Joyce Memorial playground at Marine Park in South Boston, near Pleasure Bay. The design we're working on that we look forward to sharing with the public in early 2022, would make the playground the most universally accessible of all of our playgrounds, which really is saying something with ground-level activities, ramps and equipment to welcome children of all physical abilities, and spaces and tactile activities that feel safe and inviting for everyone. I wanted to just give you a couple of those highlights, to sort of give you a sense of our commitment to this work.

I'm eager to hear from the rest of the Commissioners and the attendees today about your ideas. Before I close here, I want to recognize Susan Hamilton, our Assistant Deputy Commissioner of State Parks, who I know is familiar to you, serving on this Commission. I know it's something that she has enjoyed and has been doing for the last four years. Susan is also an incredible professional who's incredibly knowledgeable and committed to our mission, and I know will continue to support this work going forward.

One thing I did want to say in case you see my face disappear from the screen, it's not because I don't want to be here but as Chris and I were chatting about when we opened the program, we are cutting a ribbon on a beautiful accessible facility up at Halibut Point in Rockport a little later this morning. I will need to leave this proceeding before it closes to do that, but Susan, and Tom will be here, and I look forward to catching up with them on anything that I've missed. With that, Chris, am I turning it to Tom now. Okay, Tom McCarthy, if you'd like to introduce yourself. Thank you very much.

Tom McCarthy 16:26

Yeah, thank you, Stephanie. Thanks to the Commission for inviting me to be here today. Accessibility clearly is a priority of mine and has been for a long time. I've been very fortunate to work in the DCR in creating this across the state in a number of different ways. In the beginning, we looked at accessibility as what is the experience that people are trying to achieve or looking to experience when they get into our parks and onto our beaches? Where we can't always provide, you know, the physical access that most people experience, we've tried to find what is the experience and how can we do that in alternate ways.

When it comes to beaches, there's only one way to enjoy the beach, and that is being at the beach. That has been a challenge over the years. We've been trying to find ways to provide access to the beach. I don't mean to say that we've tried everything over the years, but we've tried a lot from modular boardwalks that were constructed out of port orford cedar, a rot resistant, winter resistant, natural material to movable shade structures. Elevated walkways constructed to protect the dunes to simple but expensive plastic rollout matting.

Now, in addition to providing beach wheelchairs, for the public use, you know, all of these things have worked to some degree and some have not worked out so well. It is, you know, time gives us that experience. The experience really works well for I think everyone in finding out the kinds of things that work but we've found that in most cases to meet the minimum requirements that you find in standards and regulations, we can figure out how to do that, but keeping that accessible is the challenge. We

found that without a significant focus on maintenance and management, these improvements to accessibility can disappear very quickly. It doesn't take much of a barrier to block access to the beach. Boardwalks buried by drifting sand, erosion at the end of a walkway, you know, that creates a six-inch drop. An unreported broken beach wheelchair means, you know, we can't claim to be providing accessibility at that particular beach, if these things are not all up and working. It's a constant maintenance and management item that has to be attended to. Our beaches are beautiful. They're constantly changing and at time, you know, dramatic weather and our dramatic environments that we have work against us in ways that we depend completely on our staff and management facilities.

Stephanie mentioned the capital improvements that we are planning to make and that we continue to make and we're really fortunate to have been given these resources to create these oftentimes expensive, accessible improvements at our beaches. But they can as I said before, disappear really quickly without the current constant maintenance and monitoring that's needed. That said, we do have wonderful staff at our beaches, working very hard all the time, to, you know, to keep these things in place.

We have many projects ongoing right now and things that we look forward to in terms of making these things accessible, you know, to try and meet that minimum requirement of providing access to your, you know, high water line, or to the edge of the beach, or to the edge of the water, you know, is something that's in the forefront of our mind whenever we look at these beaches, but slopes and grades and soft sand, you know, are the challenge. Coming down a beautifully constructed concrete ramp to find a sea of cobbles, you know, they're completely inaccessible. These are all very difficult design challenges. Over the years, we've come to be able to meet most of those challenges in many of our beaches to create that accessibility. We look forward to continuing this work and I really look forward to hearing what everyone has to say today, and thanks for this opportunity to share.

Chris Mancini 21:21

Thank you so much, Tom and Commissioner Cooper. We are delighted to have you and it's great to hear from you.

I'd like to move on and introduce Commissioner Kristen McCosh of the Boston Disabilities Commission and congratulations on the big win, which we all read about that Rep. Madaro already mentioned, which is a huge thing for the city of Boston, so welcome. We'd love to hear how we can extend that and keep, as Tom just put it, you know, keep working on that when it comes to our parks and beaches.

Kristen McCosh 21:52

Great. Thank you, Chris and thanks, Tom. You hit on a lot of the points that I'll be discussing. I've worked with Tom for many years. He's a great partner and I have a lot of respect for the work he does. Anyway, I want to say thank you for allowing me to give testimony today. My name is Kristen McCosh. I'm the Disability Commissioner in ADA Title II Coordinator for the City of Boston. In this role, I lead the city's overall effort to ensure accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities. That's in every aspect of life. Everything from streets and sidewalks to programs, policies, services, we ensure that people with disabilities have access to everything. But we don't all only strive for meeting bare minimum requirements, as Tom mentioned. We strive for ideal accessibility, which really goes from accessibility

to inclusion. We know that the ADA was signed into law over 30 years ago, so a lot of the bare minimum access is being met, but how can we go to the next step and really make sure that people with disabilities are included in every aspect of life?

For those of you who don't know me, I'd like to let you know that I use a power wheelchair due to a disability I acquired as a teenager, so accessibility has a direct impact on my life. The curb ramp settlement is great news. We all know that Boston has a lot of built in challenges. I always say that Boston's an old city, we're a winter city, a vertical city and a densely packed city. We already have a lot of baked in challenges that we need to overcome, but we do have the political will and great staff and our city agencies or our state partners, so we have a lot of work to do.

I really believe that we're having a direct impact, so I'm really grateful to be here today because beach accessibility is a very important issue to me. I love the beach. I'm a lifelong resident of South Boston, and I grew up going to the beach literally every day. Like my two fellow panelists, we all grew up in South Boston together and we know the beaches very well.

I'd like to give you some of my thoughts on accessibility to see how we can improve it and also give a shout out to all the work that you've already done to improve accessibility. Everything from water quality to the sand to parking. I mean, when I grew up in the 70s, going to the beaches, it was a whole different ballgame. We still loved it as kids, but now as an adult, I can really appreciate all the hard work that's gone into cleaning up the beaches and improving accessibility.

Tom really hit on one of the issues that's important to me, and that's most beaches, you can get down to the sand most of them have ramps or sloped walkways, but when you get to the sand, there's really no place to go a lot of the time. I've seen the raised platforms that Tom mentioned on the sand. Personally, I love those because they don't get as covered with sand as the matting does. I've noticed a lot of time that there's a gap between the end of the ramp and the beginning of the mat and sometimes it's the installation, like whoever installs it in the municipality doesn't abed it tightly to the ramp but I've seen it up a distance of up to four or five feet past the ramp in the sand. Other times it just gets covered with sand like Tom mentioned, so that is basically inaccessible to someone like me who uses a power wheelchair.

I'd love to see more thought or maybe I know Tom mentioned the expense, but the raised walkways of the composite material, they used to have that in some of the beaches I've visited. That was like super accessible, because it doesn't get as much sand on it, plus the hard surface is a lot better for a power wheelchair than the matting. The reason that I really like this too, is because I've used the beach wheelchairs and I love the fact that there are two different styles. I've used both, one to get over the sand and then the one to actually go in the water, and I've never had trouble securing them. I've always called ahead of day before and I've been able to access the chairs, but I'm not able to transfer independently. So that means I need to have somebody with me if I want to go into the sand and on one of these chairs. That's why the walkway is especially important. If I want to go to the beach with friends, we always end up sitting at the back of the beach, close to the ramp because I can't really go down to the sand. If we had a walkway that not only extended onto the sand, but also extended down to the water, that would be super helpful.

Then the other thing I want to mention specifically in South Boston is the parking. You may all know the area of Pleasure Bay, and Castle Island. Castle Island has a great deal of accessible parking, which is wonderful, but along the angle parking, it's a really long stretch from the skating rink to the beginning of the parking lot at Castle Island. I don't know how many spots there are, I never counted, but it's dozens, and there's no accessible parking in that whole stretch. If I wanted to go to the beach of Pleasure Bay, I couldn't park in any of the angle parking I have to park really far away either in the Castle Island parking lot, or on the street by the rink. I would even think it would probably be a requirement to put accessible parking there. I would strongly recommend just because I know that you're personally and others have reached out to me in my role as Commissioner to ask why there isn't any accessible parking in the stretch of spaces. I'd love to see accessible parking there along with an access aisle and signage so that the public could make more use of Pleasure Bay.

I think those are my main comments. I don't want to take up too much time. I know we have a lot of people to hear from but really want to give a shout out to the work that you've done. Like I said, and the 30-40 years I've been going to the beach, I see a lot of improvement. I love beach and hope to continue making use of all the accessibility improvements. Thank you very much.

Chris Mancini 27:29

Thank you so much, Commissioner and thank you again for being here.

We'll move on to our final two panelists, after which point, I'll open it up to our MBC Commissioners for any questions you may have, or comments. Then we will move on to our public testimony. Coleman Nee, CEO of Triangle Inc, with whom Save the Harbor has partnered to put on events like Beach:Ability, and helped us put this hearing together as well today. Coleman, thank you for being here.

Coleman Nee 28:02

Oh, thank you very much, Chris. Can you hear me? Okay. Excellent. Good morning. Well, Commissioner McCosh always a pleasure to be with you Kathy, Tom, good to see you again. Commissioners Crighton and Chairman Crighton and Madaro and all the Commissioners, I really want to thank you for hearing my testimony today, giving me an opportunity to speak to you on issues related to accessibility and our public beaches in Greater Boston. Again, my name is Coleman Nee, I'm the CEO of Triangle Inc. We were established 50 years ago by business leaders and families who believe that we are all people with ability.

In our early years, we provided on site employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Medford, Malden, and Everett because people with disabilities wanted to work and live in the community. We grew, we opened three community homes in our first decade and today we operate nine residential homes in the North Shore, and all of which are within a short drive in our public beaches.

Since 2001, we rapidly expanded to try to provide youth and adults with a myriad of services from innovative careers to leadership and safety skills to live more independent, dignified lives. Our mission is simple and very straightforward. We seek to ensure that all persons with disabilities in our area are

not only in our communities but are really fully part of our communities in a meaningful way that allows them to fully participate in and enjoy all their rights and freedoms as residents of our great Commonwealth.

Now for several years, we've been fortunate enough to partner with Save the Harbor / Save the Bay and to look at issues of accessibility and available resources at our Greater Boston beaches. Our goal was really to determine how welcoming and available these precious resources are to persons with disabilities.

This effort culminated three years ago, when we launched our first beach ability event at Constitution Beach in East Boston, where we organized a celebration and family friendly event for the disability community in the summer of 2019. It was an amazing day. Thanks to Save the Harbor / Save the Bay, the amazing staff at Constitution Beach, and the amazing staff at the Universal Access Program, we were able to bring together many persons with disabilities to an amazing place, and a lot of whom were visiting for the first time despite being born and raised in the area. They got to enjoy a fantastic day of fun games, swimming, and just sitting peacefully on the sand and beautiful weather and being at ease with nature in the ocean.

When COVID hit last year, our folks were not able to hold this event, so we organized crews from our residential programs to go out to the beach and the beach cleanings in the morning. Really, that allowed them to go outside after being locked down or sheltered in place for so long out in the environment out in the fresh air by the ocean, in a safe manner, reconnect with the sea reconnect with the environment and had a huge effect on their mental health and their positive outlook and hope during some really difficult and dark times over the past few years.

Now thankfully, we were able to hold another Beach:Ability at Constitution this year again, and again another great day of fun and celebration. So many of the people we serve, we have some semblance of what we would like pre pandemic, again, cannot stress enough the importance of the positive impact that this has had on mental health and spirits of those who attended the event and especially after everything they've been through over the past few years. Again, staff at Constitution Beach and Universal Access were amazing and great to work with. Our program participants and our residents love the beach. They love the ocean.

We've partnered with Piers Park Sailing for several years and run a six-week program there for persons with disabilities each summer that gets people out on Boston Harbor every Saturday, teaches them to sail, be safe on the water. The program is a huge hit with our residents and participants. The demand is high for slots every year. I would invite any commission member that is interested to come by next year. I know one of our sailors would love to take you for a short cruise on the harbor. I think you'd really appreciate it in an accessible and safe manner.

Now, these are all great events, a lot of work goes into organizing and making sure we have the right equipment and the resources available for everyone to feel included and safe at the beach is important and takes a lot. But as Tom said in truth, these beaches are public assets, and they shouldn't only be available to the disability community one day, but they should be available all the time.

DCR's Universal Access Program is a great initiative, it has amazing advocates, and we feel that with more targeted resources, we believe we could achieve so much more to make these beaches even more open and more accessible. We need additional investments. We need accessible walkways and ramps, we need proper equipment, we need floating chairs we need Mobi-Mats in every beach, and we need all the restrooms and the snack stands to be ADA compliant and also close and available to use so that people can avail themselves of those if they need to. If they want to spend a day at the beach. Many of our residents don't have a lot of money, so these free, beautiful public resources that are available to them in their community should be inclusive, and they should be allowed to enjoy them as much as anyone else.

We also really need to make sure that all of our beach personnel and our lifeguards have the training and knowledge of how to make sure that those using the beach who may have disabilities, especially now as we see an increase in the number of our neuro diverse communities and people on the spectrum, our personnel on the beach need to have training to ensure that they're working with those people properly, and that they're prepared to safeguard and interact with all persons that will create an environment of inclusion and enjoyment for all.

Again, as Commissioner McCosh said, I'm from South Boston, I grew up across the street from the beach. I went to Carson Beach every summer. I learned how to swim at the South Boston Neighborhood House where Kathy is now. They've come a long way since then and that's in no small part due to the efforts of this Commission and Save the Harbor / Save the Bay. Now really, we have to ensure that regardless of who you are, all of us in the community no matter a disability, can enjoy these places year-round, and allow us as a Commonwealth to truly state that these are public places which are serving all of the public in an inclusive and safe manner. With that, I'll turn it back to you Chris. Thank you.

Chris Mancini 34:59

Thank you so much, Coleman. You did a great segue to our final panelist, which is Kathy Lafferty, our Executive Director of South Boston Neighborhood House, one of Save the Harbor's terrific partners and a great organization. There's so much for the South Boston community. Kathy, thanks for being here.

Kathy Lafferty 35:16

Sure. Thanks, Chris. Thank you, everyone. There's a tough act to follow with Commissioner McCosh and Coleman Nee there and before I introduce myself, I just want to say that Coleman's sister took me to my first beach outside of South Boston on a yellow school bus, and Kristen and I spent many days on the beach growing up before she used a wheelchair and since she's been in a wheelchair. I've seen firsthand the struggles that she has, and I'm part of that group of friends that sits at the end of the beach with her many times.

In addition to being a lifelong resident of South Boston and raising my children here, I am the Executive Director of the South Boston Neighborhood House, we're a 120-year-old settlement house serving 2,000 individuals each year, we offer five programs. Working with our youngest infants and families in our family engagement program. We work with preschoolers and school-aged children in our licensed

childcare programs. We work with preteens and teens in education and career development. And finally, with our older residents within our senior programs, our mission is simple. It's just support family and neighborhood life in South Boston. That's been our mission since we opened our doors in 1901. Our priorities are to positively impact the lives of South Boston residents to meet the needs of families and individuals experiencing social and economic stress, and to be a resource and advocate for our most vulnerable and isolated residents, ultimately to promote and develop healthy families and a healthy community.

Although our programs don't specifically focus on individuals with disabilities, all of our programs are inclusive and open to all residents. In addition, we host the South Boston special kids and young adults in our building every week. 75+ individuals, many whom use wheelchairs, or need adaptive equipment. We speak with them and we talk firsthand with all of these families and individuals. We know the struggles and we know the issues with access.

We've been working with Save the Harbor / Save the Bay for over a decade, we offer free and fun programming on the beaches in South Boston, attendance is terrific. DCR is super helpful and accommodating in all of our planning efforts. These events have introduced the beaches to children and families who otherwise would not have been to the beach. It's crazy to say even though they live within walking distance to the beach, many have not been to the beaches in South Boston, and that doesn't have anything to do with physical access to the beach, but a lot of it is economic access their families who don't have bathing suits, they can't afford sunblock, they can't afford to feed their kids for a day at the beach. That's a conversation for another time, but we see that our beaches are not accessible to all individuals, especially those who use wheelchairs or need adaptive equipment. When we offer programming, we want everyone to be able to participate. That means getting on the sand near or in the water, and not just on the pavilion to watch. That's not how we operate. That's not how we like to do our business.

Everyone on the call has already talked about the issues. We need more equipment; we need staff who know how to access and use the equipment. There are issues with parking. Our beaches in South Boston are overcrowded. Tom McCarthy, Coleman Nee, Commissioner McCosh have already talked about all of these things, so I don't want to waste anybody's time to reiterate all of that. What I do want to say is that we're in this conversation because we want to be part of the solution.

Save the harbor / Save the Bay was able to get us an adaptive wheelchair donated to South Boston residents to use as needed. The South Boston Neighborhood House will store this wheelchair and have it available for families and individuals who need to access it whenever they need it, but that's not the answer. We need permanent solution so that families and all individuals can access the beach whenever they need to. I'm hopeful that there are so many good people on this call and when good people work together, great things happen. Thanks for inviting me and for making this conversation a priority.

Chris Mancini 39:04

Kelly, that was fantastic. Can you write my stuff going forward? That would be terrific.

Bruce Berman 39:09

I'd have some problems with that, Chris.

Chris Mancini 39:12

Thank you so much for being here. I think the way you summed that up, you know, our hope was to bring exactly all these great folks together, all working together here on this call, so that we could start to come up with solutions, strategies. What this will ultimately culminate in is a report and a plan that will act as a roadmap for all of us to be able to make progress over the next couple of months and years.

I do want to give our Metropolitan Beaches Commissioners an opportunity for questions to our panel and for any comments you all have. We always toss a coin, are we going to go north to south, are we going to go south to north. I will go south to north this time, which means, Representative Joan Meschino, if you'd like to take an opportunity, we'd love to hear from you.

Joan Meschino 40:29

Well, first of all, I'm State Representative Joan Meschino, Commissioner since 2006, representing Nantasket Beach and Hull. I did just want to say again, thank you for all the hard work and for elevating this issue in particular. I think there was a hallmark of the work, the Commissioner said it very nicely it was to elevate and to challenge and to support DCR. I wanted to just say welcome to the Commissioners, and to thank you for your remarks, particularly I wanted to just say, I really love that you focus on the partnership. I think that this is wonderful venue to bring people together in partnership with DCR to really make better beaches was the original goal, but now to make the beaches both accessible and inclusive, and equitable access. It is really wonderful to see the Commissioners tackling this. I just wanted to say thank you for that.

On this topic, in particular, I just wanted to make one remark that whenever the built environment intersects with the natural environment, it is just always a challenge, and so the theme that I just wanted to sort of inject to make sure that I said to the Commissioner and to DCR staff was that we must always strive for this, this isn't, so to Chris' point, a roadmap and a plan, I think are critical to success over time, because then no matter what people come and go, we have our plan, we have our roadmap we have how we're going to take action, or at least how we're going to convene and rethink our action. I think it's the commitment to always striving.

I just want to say thank you to the DCR Commissioner because that's what I was hearing you say and I think it's probably the single most important thing, that will always mean we'll make our investments.

The other piece that I just wanted to say was, we talk a lot about how we get onto the sand but there's also other parts of the reservations that we need to be mindful of and so things like the bath houses need to be accessible as well. The boardwalks need to be accessible as well. I did just want to interject those two thoughts while Commissioner Cooper was still with us, and just add my welcome and thank you. I really appreciate your attention and look forward to partnering with you both as a Commissioner through the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, but also as a State Representative in Hull and for the Nantasket Beach reservation. I saw there are other Hull people on here from our chamber, from our

friends' group and that was all inspired through this group. I did just want to say that again. Thank you and Chris, and Chair Crighton, thank you for letting me just interject a few remarks before I have to excuse myself for the next commitment of the day.

Chris Mancini 43:46

Thank you Rep. Meschino. It's a pleasure to have you. Representative Tackey Chan from Quincy, if you have any questions or remarks.

Tackey Chan 43:59

No problem. No worries.

Chris Mancini 44:01

Okay. Terrific. Thank you for being here. I saw Representative David Biele has joined us.

David Biele 44:10

Yes. Good morning, everyone. Very honored to be here with you on a very important topic. I think if there's anything that we've seen over the last year, year and a half is how important our open spaces are -- our beaches, our parks and our public amenities, places where people can gather and enjoy. One thing that I've heard from many residents is the need to make sure that they're welcoming and accessible for all.

I'm very happy to be here today with my colleagues on the Commission with community partners, Kathy Lafferty, Coleman Nee to make sure that we're continuing this important work of making sure that our beaches which are some of the best in the country, are accessible for everybody who wants to take advantage of them and use them. I appreciate the time and look forward to the work ahead. Thank you.

Chris Mancini 45:05

Terrific. Thank you so much. I see we also have Chris DeFilippis from Representative Giannino's office, one of our Commissioner. Chris, do you have any comments or questions from the representative's office?

Chris DeFilippis 45:19

Um, no, no comments or questions. I mean, I think it'll be a great thing if we can get, you know, anything that we can up to date for people with disabilities, to be more inclusive.

Chris Mancini 45:31

Terrific. Thanks so much. Continuing to move north or I think I skipped over Barbara Bishop from Winthrop. Barbara, anything for our panelists?

Barbara Bishop 45:44

Well, thank you. This has been very enlightening. I'm thinking, how much does a water accessible wheelchair cost? Can we share? Is there a place that has them that we can borrow from? I'm just wondering, you know, if we had for instance, if we had a fundraiser or something, how much money are we talking about for like a mat or for a wheelchair? Can anybody answer that?

Chris Mancini 46:18

Tom, would you like to take that? Oh, you raised your hand. Terrific.

Tom McCarthy 46:23

We at DCR do not loan our beach wheelchairs, but they're always available, you know, for the public. Often you can reserve them but there is an organization called Smile Mass. They have beach wheelchairs; they are located on the lower cape. They will provide loaner wheelchairs for people to take with them, or they also donate beach wheelchairs. I think if you have a municipal beach, and you are without beach wheelchairs, contact them and they will work with you to get these wheelchairs because they are expensive.

Barbara Bishop 47:14

I was thinking maybe we could do something in partnership with our senior center or something to make accessible wheelchairs that the public could use that would be easy to sign up for. I don't know if one would be enough, but we have a very large population of veterans, elderly veterans in Winthrop. They don't all use wheelchairs, but they all have mobility issues. Anyway, thank you.

Chris Mancini 47:56

Thank you so much, Barbara. I will go to East Boston to representative and Co-Chair, Adrian Madaro if you have any additional comments or questions for the panel. Oh, Adrian may have needed to take a moment. I will go to our next community to Lynn, Senator Crighton.

Brendan Crighton 48:23

Thank you, Chris. I'm excited to hear more from the panelists and the public, so I have no comments at this time.

Chris Mancini 48:30

Thanks so much, Senator.

Bob Tucker, from Friends of Lynn & Nahant Beach. If you're still here. I mean, I have my view all here. Then Susan Hamilton, Commissioner Hamilton, do you have any questions or comments?

Susan Hamilton 48:51

Um, no, not at this time.

Chris Mancini 48:52

Thank you. Okay, terrific. Have I missed any of our elected officials or Commissioners at this point? That's good, I've done a good job there.

I will just say, piggybacking on Barbara's question and Tom, your response, you know, thanks for the resource on Smile Mass. As part of the Better Beaches program this year and next year, Save the Harbor is also committed to finding a similar opportunity. As Kathy mentioned, we've bought wheelchairs for the South Boston Neighborhood House and we have the ability for non-state entities,

for friends groups, for senior centers to find ways that we can provide mats, chairs or other equipment that can be for groups that are able to share that with the community. Anyone who is interested in that and Barbara, we should talk more about finding that opportunity.

We are going to move on to our public comment period. We have a few folks who preregistered, so I'm delighted to —Oh, yes, thank you, Maya for this reminder. Before that, we are going to do a group photo. We're going to grab a screenshot. Just make sure you've got your photo face on, and it's going to start happening in about five seconds. Look into your cameras. I don't know, which or how many of our staff is taking the photo. Give me a thumbs up when you feel like you've got it. All right, that's great. I'm also really delighted that we are five minutes ahead of schedule. I love when our meetings go on time.

Maya Smith 50:52

I just wanted to point out the hands up. I don't know if you're seeing those.

Chris Mancini 50:59

Yes. Thank you for using the raise hand function. We do have three folks who have pre-registered and then we will go in order of hand raise from public testimony. Thank you so much for doing that. I'd like to begin and welcome Colonel Andrea Gayle-Bennett of the Disabled American Veterans. Thank you so much for joining us, Colonel.

Andrea Gayle-Bennett 51:22

Good morning. Chairman Crighton and Chairman Madaro, thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony this morning. I'll introduce myself. My name is Andrea Gayle-Bennett. I am the third Junior Vice Commander of the Disabled American Veterans Department of Massachusetts. I'm also the Adjutant and Treasurer of the Lynn-Swampscott Chapter #64 for the DAV. I'm a physician assistant who served 35 years in the Massachusetts Army National Guard. Most importantly, I am a 40-year resident of Lynn. I'm here representing the DAV, whose mission is dedicated to a single purpose, and that is empowering veterans to lead high quality lives with respect and dignity. For many of our veterans with disabilities, including myself, this requires that all of our public spaces and community assets are available and accessible to all and to underscore the work of this Commission in the Universal Access Program and the Save the Harbor / Save the Bay work.

Many veterans who DAV represents have mobility challenges as a result of their service to our nation. These disabilities can make it hard to access areas that do not have ramps, accessible walkways and bathrooms. For many North Shore veterans, they find it sometimes challenging to access and fully enjoy our public beaches, particularly in Lynn. Lynn is a city of over 100,000 residents. Yet accessibility to the beach is limited to those with physical disabilities. While there is a ramp at the Wallace Street entrance, it's not readily or easily identifiable as the handicap access, there's no signage. In addition, that ramp ends at the sand, and as previously mentioned, this makes access to the full beach limited and it turns them into spectators instead of participants.

The beaches of Greater Boston are jewels as someone mentioned earlier and are amazing community resources that should be available to all the residents regardless of their disability status. No one should ever be prevented from sitting on the public beach on a summer day, hearing the crash of the

waves or the call of hungry seagulls, especially not because of a disability, much less someone who incurred that disability in service to our country. Public beaches should be for everyone to enjoy. We need to assess and invest in the proper infrastructure and equipment to make sure our public beaches are available to everyone. Going to the beach isn't just a fun vacation destination, and as Coleman mentioned earlier, there are mental health benefits. Studies show that there are benefits to our mental health by getting out there into those blue spaces and enjoying the outdoors. It lowers stress, it lifts mood and improves overall well-being.

As the purpose of this hearing is to bring attention to the barriers that the disabled community faces on the beach, easily identifiable ramps, accessible walkways, bathrooms will certainly allow that accessibility and full participation. The DAV of Massachusetts supports the work of Save the Harbor / Save the Bay and the Beach Commission. Thanks to the Chairs for their efforts to ensure that our veterans and their families can enjoy these public and beautiful resources year-round. With that, thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chris Mancini 55:24

Thank you so much. It's a real pleasure to meet you. I'm so glad Coleman connected us. I'd be really interested in speaking with you a lot more about this, especially up in Lynn and Nahant and those beaches up there. Thank you so much for being here. Next is Alex DeFronzo, from the Piers Park Sailing Center.

Alex DeFronzo 55:44

Thank you, Chris. I want to say thank you to all the Commissioners, the chair, Senator Crighton, and especially our State Rep. in East Boston, Adrian Madaro, and everyone at Save the Harbor / Save the Bay. I feel like a lot of what needs to be discussed has been talked about today. The hard infrastructure for making the beaches accessible is extremely important, but perhaps even more so is the human infrastructure of actually programming the beaches and getting groups of people out there. I feel like when there's Better Beaches programming running or Universal Access programs running, that's when the beaches feel most welcoming, most successful and most inclusive. For a lot of people, that's how they get introduced to the beach and learn about the fact that they're accessible and easy to get down to.

The Beach:Ability event that's from the last few years, has made Constitution Beach feel especially welcoming, accessible and inclusive. As long as the Better Beaches Program and Universal Access with DCR continue to thrive, the beaches are going to continue to thrive.

Thank you for the Commission making investment in our metro beaches, and everybody that's been here today to speak. Also, I'm going to drop a video in the chat for anyone interested in what it's like to go sailing on the harbor. Please share that out if you know anyone that might be interested in coming down and joining us. Thanks.

Chris Mancini 57:13

Thanks so much, Alex. That's great, I can wait to see the video. Next Ellice Patterson, Executive Director of Abilities Dance Boston, one of our newest Better Beaches partners, who have been doing great work.

Ellice Patterson 57:27

Hi, I'm Ellice, Founder and Executive and Artistic director of Abilities Dance. We use dance and art overall as a tool to promote intersectional disability rights in the greater Boston area and beyond. We partnered with Save the Harbor this past summer to activate three of their beach sites with movement and music. At Revere, Nahant and Tenean, we collaborated with the New England Film Orchestra to activate with different beach pop up performances in August and to have this moment to share the radical act of rest and joy, especially for diverse bodies both within and outside of the disabled community.

I could share like others about how the spaces could be more user-friendly, things with sidewalks or spaces, maps with clear signage, all of that, but a big part of our work is also building cultural understanding. That is just as important as the physical access and the equipment but be able to enjoy these features so that folks diverse, disabled and beachgoers don't have to fight to explain or to have what everyone else needs and can just rest like everyone else.

We had great experiences at beaches that were more diverse. Unfortunately, at Nahant Beach, we ran into a number of different folks who did not want us there, who stated that they demanded to see our permit. One woman kept saying that it was our beach. She is kind of right there, it is all of our beaches and we should be able to participate in these spaces like everyone else. I think that in addition to all of the great access and equipment notes that my colleagues are saying, also having things like visual reminders on websites or actual signage to not heckle other beach-goers, to have a space where they can share serious concerns, but to also let folks rest and be and to also make sure staff are trained as well to equitably treat every beach-goer. Once we have that, then we can really have our beaches really be for everyone that are able to equitably enjoy that across the board and not just in certain beaches. Oh, yeah, and our YouTube link is still up if you want to check it out.

Chris Mancini 1:00:25

Ellice, thank you so much. I mean, you all did some terrific work. I was really delighted to be able to come see your performances at Revere Beach. I'm very, you know, for what it's worth very sorry for the experience that you shared with us on Nahant. I'm looking forward to really addressing those issues. You know, this is the purpose of the hearing, and this work that Saved the Harbor is recommitting ourselves to with all of you.

I just want to kind of amplify the things I heard a couple of folks say that were really on my mind, that this is not a simple solution of purchasing one piece of equipment, as Tom said. As Alex said, the human infrastructure that we need to invest the ongoing effort, and that's true for not just people with disabilities, but for everybody. We're all here, we're invested in these resources, we're invested in our communities and really, I'm looking forward to it. It seems we're all on the same page. I'm hoping this effort, this report, and this roadmap that we keep referring to, is an important step in taking those steps forward and creating that overarching strategy.

We have so many different beaches, and we have so many different communities, and each place has its own unique challenges. My beach is, Kings Beach up in Lynn, which, you know, this is not the conversation we're having today, but has water quality issues. Andrea, to your point, has the ramps that ended the sand. That beach at high tide has no sand. What is the infrastructure option for creating that pathway down to the water at low tide when the entire thing is underwater at high tide, and that problem will just get more aggravated by sea level rise and climate change. That is another issue that we're going to be starting to look at more earnestly in 2022. In the meantime, we're going to continue the Better Beaches partnership with DCR and the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, Alex, to your point, those times when we have human infrastructure when we have programming on the beach, I agree with you, that's when the beaches do most truly represent themselves as everybody's beach, as a public resource that is welcoming and belongs to everybody.

I want to do a call out to Maya, and just to our Save the Harbor staff for the huge new partnerships that we were able to establish coming out of COVID this year with folks like Dance Abilities and Ellice, and deepening our relationships with Piers Park and South Boston Neighborhood House, all these great folks who are in the communities and on the beaches doing this work. To that point of the ongoing work, we know firsthand from the annual cleanups and stewardship that we do in South Boston and Quincy. We bring groups down and shovel, literally hundreds of pounds of sand off of the accessibility ramps, and that happens every year because that's the nature of a vibrant and changing environment and ecosystem that you have on the beach. It's something that we do have to have that plan to deal with. That's my testimony from myself and from Save the Harbor. I know we have some hands raised. Maya, do you have those in front of you? Would you be able to call on folks?

Maya Smith 1:04:07

Yeah, of course. Ralph, if you'd like to give your comments. We're trying to keep comments to I think you send around three minutes, Chris initially.

Chris Mancini 1:04:14

Yeah, I think we have a little flexibility. We are running a little ahead of schedule, but yeah, we're just trying to be respectful of people's time.

Ralph Decicco 1:04:21

Thank you. Thank you for everything that you do. My name is Ralph Decicco. I actually run the Revere Commission on Disabilities. I put one of my comments in the chat and thank you for who responded to me. As the Chair of the Commission on Disabilities, my pet peeve is for people of all abilities to have access to not only public spaces, but most of the Revere Beach.

As everyone knows Revere Beach is the first public beach in the U.S. I really think, not to be biased that from Revere, but there should be extra attention to that it should be fully accessible to everyone. I've been dealing with several issues for the past several years with the former Commissioner, that if you go on the website, there's supposed to be the accessible beach buggys. They're nowhere to be found. Also, we don't have the mats to be able to get people from the beginning of the sand to the end

of the sand. The answers that we get is that they're hard to remove for them to rake the sand, that's not acceptable to us.

Other issues that we have is, we have a great new beach house there, but one thing that's needed in not only that area, but also, they should think about putting APS signalization there because we need automatic signalization for the public beach. We have a train station there that people access with disabilities to come to the beach, but it's a danger to get from one side of the road to the other without the signalization getting there. We need to look into that.

Also getting into the beach, some of the cutouts are up high from the ground level to it, so somebody with a wheelchair or walker can't access it. There are only certain ones that are open. That's a stigmatism and that's not allowing all the openings to be for people in wheelchairs or walkers to get into. That's something to look into. I had counted a few years ago, all the accessible openings that there were along with handicap signs down the beach, and sent that to the former DCR Commissioner, but it had fallen on deaf ears. I was working with a former representative from the area and she was helping me a great deal, but we weren't getting anything done.

Another thing that I'd like to see done with DCR is every year, there's money allocated to line items for our DCR and a certain percentage of that money for not only Revere but for any public beach or any public space that DCR controls should be allocated to a certain line item for accessibility projects -- issues to create ways for people with accessibility issues to be able to get to those areas. Just throwing out numbers, if there's \$30,000 allocated, 15% to 20% of that 30,000 should be set aside just for projects for accessibility issues, working on that for other issues with cities and towns with different commission and disabilities to do that. There should be yeah, there's line items as chapter 90 money but they should also be a separate allocation for money to go towards projects like that. Thank you.

Maya Smith 1:07:52

Thank you, Ralph. Angela. I see your hand next. Angela, are you with us? I will go on to Joanne and then if Angela is available after. Oh wait, Angela, are you there?

Barbara Bishop 1:08:16

You found her?

Maya Smith 1:08:18

Yeah, I think so. I can't quite hear you Angela. I don't know if that's just me.

Angela Ponte 1:08:24

Okay, they said the closed captioning was going over my mute button. Can you hear me?

Maya Smith 1:08:36

I can hear you a little bit, it's just quiet.

Angela Ponte 1:08:38

Okay, I'll try to talk as loud as I can then. My name is Angela Ponte. I live on Quincy Shore Drive in Quincy, Massachusetts, which is also known as Wollaston Beach. I would like to reiterate some of the same comments some of the other people made earlier. We do have a ramp and a sort of whole observation deck that was installed when the beach was renovated many years back and at no time has the ramp been usable because of the reason many people have said that they cannot. It just comes to sand at the end. The observation deck also has a bench on it. If someone was in a wheelchair, there's not really a spot for them on the observation deck. Probably more importantly, I just think that there are other areas as the person from Revere just stated. There are openings along the seawall that also could be made accessible.

At a minimum, there should be Mobi-Mats available from like Memorial Day to Columbus Day because that's the time most people use the beach. There should be some kind of education component where people know that they are able to use a beach wheelchair, you know how to get to the ramps. There's plenty of handicap parking on Wollaston Beach, that doesn't seem to be an issue, but then there's not really anywhere to go. The one ramp we do have now is down sort of the area near the clam box, which most people are familiar with. I've been to many beaches on Cape Cod and in Florida, where they have Mobi-Mats, they have beach wheelchairs, and they have them out outside of the area where there's usually a beach sort of shack area where the restrooms are and the staff are for the beach. They have those things out on the beach, so people know that it's available for them to use. I think you know, it's one of those things, once people see it the first couple of times, they know it's something they can use.

We also have a senior center, right off of East Squantum Street that's actually at the northern end of the beach, certainly could be some partnership with them. I think in terms of things that people could use accessibility-wise, but we have a large elderly population in Quincy. There's also a lot of veterans. I think a one-day event, which is usually more geared towards children, is not really the thing that I think the adult population is looking for in Quincy. Overall, I just think the first immediate step is that it's been at least seven or eight years or maybe even more since the beach was renovated. Like other people have said, we've got a ramp to nowhere. It would be really great if that could at least immediately be addressed in some minimum way. That's my comments as a living across the beach resident in Quincy. I hope that there'll be some kind of plan, but education to the public, probably equally as important. Thank you for your time today.

Maya Smith 1:11:53

Thank you, Angela. I'm in Quincy as well and I've seen what you're speaking of firsthand, the issue of people not being able to use those ramps down to Wollaston Beach. Thank you for mentioning that. That's a great idea to partner with the senior center for an event for this upcoming summer. Thank you.

Joanne. I see your hand.

Joanne McDevitt 1:12:15

Okay, can you hear me now?

Maya Smith 1:12:17

Yes, I can.

Joanne McDevitt 1:12:18

Okay, so first of all, I want to thank you very much for having this hearing this morning, a Zoom meeting. I am a member of the City Point Neighborhood Association in South Boston and also the Harborfront Alliance, which deals with the rising of the seas in all of the areas around Boston Harbor.

In South Boston, particularly on some of the issues that have been covered, the parking is a major, major problem. We have as you know, in the city, a tremendous boom in development, especially in the South Boston area where a lot of millennials have moved in and use in particular the M Street Beach. Our beach runs from Castle Island all the way over to Carson Beach, where Kathy is, Kathy Lafferty, and then continues. If you look at the DCR coverage of what they do, which falls under the Metropolitan Commission and all that, we have a lot of beach area with nowhere to park. That presents an issue for the residents of South Boston. When you talk about adding disability parking, which we have, I am absolutely in agreement that you need to have help with that. You then have to go to the legislature for that you have to go to the city of Boston, which Christa can help with, Christa McAuliffe. We've worked with her over the past.

As you all know, there were people with various forms of disabilities. In the summertime we have the big yellow buses that come in and go down by Castle Island and they have an area where they can park. Then they have help with the wheelchairs, getting them off, getting the people off of the buses. Depending on the disability, some people can walk, some people can't walk. Some of those disabilities are extremely severe. That's one issue that has to be dealt with.

When you're talking about the Joyce Park, The DCR project of funding, and that goes into how much DCR gets for funding. Then you have to go to the legislature to get more money to go into DCR for funding. This goes with all of the beaches, no matter where they are, whether it's Revere, East Boston, etc. I hope you'll continue this conversation.

I have a niece who has severe Cerebral palsy since she was a child and she never had that ramp. She never had the ability of these wheelchairs that you're talking to go in the water. When you talk about, which we've all seen during COVID, when you talk about how happy that would make a person if they can go in the water, or even get down to the water's edge. A regular wheelchair doesn't work.

I hope you continue the conversation. I'm happy to participate in future ones. I want to thank especially representative Biele, who represents South Boston, because he attends all of the meetings and he can help us. I hope you reach out to Senator Nick Collins the next time to have him on the Commission, and other members who can influence the budget to make more of these things happen, because as you all know, it takes money and hard work to make it happen. Thank you for giving me the time to speak.

Maya Smith 1:17:47

Thank you, Joanne for your comments. Patti, I see your hands next. Patti, you're still muted. I'm not sure if you're interested in speaking still.

Patti Capano 1:18:10

Hi. Can you hear me now?

Maya Smith 1:18:11

Yes.

Patti Capano 1:18:13

Honestly, I came this morning with a bag of emotions because I've spent, well my son who's in a wheelchair is 33 years old. I've spent 33 years wishing and wanting to go to the beach. I've spent 33 years with no access to many beaches. We've gone from the Cape, we've gone to Western Mass, we've gone up and down the shores of our great state. Having today and having this meeting and having so many people that are out there looking to help, I do come with thanks, but I still come with questions. I still come with, I'm very reserved because there's one thing that people in wheelchairs or people with that lack of access can't seem or I've never been able to experience the spontaneity. I went to the beach it was quarter to six. Sorry, no chair. Oh, can't go to the beach after Labor Day, sorry, no equipment. There are so many pieces that could be made easier.

Commissioner Kristen McCosh was spot on with eight-inch gaps. I put a nasty and I apologize but I even put my own son out there on Facebook with us attempting with a ramp that DCR says, oh, we've linked in that ramp by three pads. Great. Well, there are three lights going nowhere to get to there. I have a power wheelchair, a 33-year-old man that loves life at the beach, loves the socialization, but now has his front wheel stuck. It was the most humiliating experience of summer 2021. Though you have ideas of grandeur, if you started with the basic mechanics of putting those rolling mats securely, to the end of the access or the beginning of the access, that would be a game changer for the moment.

I was told that the access mats can't be rolled up and down every day. I think my biggest question is why? We put our sand chairs in our car every day, we take them out every day. If it's someone's job to roll out mats, because it's low tide. Why can't we just do that? I'm in speaking in regard to, we have a great walk from the Nahant to Swampscott. In any modality that you need, if you need a bike, if you need a wheelchair, if you have a carriage if you have a scooter, if you have rollerblades. it's beautiful, but at 33, I promise you, my son is done with the scenery. It's time to want to do more.

We go to the **Solo Park**, if anybody can recognize the tide and the beginning, Nahant. If he needs to access or perhaps hope that there's someone to access that chair, that's a half a mile walk, you know how hot it is. He can't walk the edge of the beach to go to the bathroom. Even if at its simplest, we started where the beach houses are, secure those access spots, and maybe think about spontaneity. Maybe we can come up with a plan that a chair is available September 22nd at 4:32 in the afternoon, because there's so many families that haven't been able to have the simple pleasures of walks beyond the end.

When my son was 15, and he had a 10-year-old brother, that 10-year-old brother was pretty cranky that he couldn't go jump the waves because I had to stay with the adult child. It's inclusive to a family, not to an individual. If we think the full picture, the full family can become accessible to other needs. It's just the whole family, but I don't want to lose sight as 33 years in the making of today's meeting is

headways. I truly, I thank you for that. I'm enlightened by the knowledge and the energy and I hope we have funding to support that.

Maya Smith 1:22:46

Thank you very much for your comments, Patti. You're at Nahant Beach, right?

Patti Capano 1:22:52

Yeah, yep. We're from the Nahant off Kings Beach as we had a couple of Lynn Representatives speak up.

Maya Smith 1:22:59

Thank you so much. Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

Chris Mancini 1:23:06

Thank you, Patti. We do have more time for more testimony, but I know Senator Crighton has to leave. If you wanted to make another closing remark?

Brendan Crighton 1:23:16

Yeah, no, thank you, Chris. I'll be brief. I have to head to a medical appointment, but we'll certainly have staff here to listen in. I want to say thank you to Patti Capano, who's been a leader of public service for many years and a strong advocate for her son, Nick, their entire family has and it's so great that she made time today. We've spoken about this many times over the years. You know, she lays out a very strong case for improvements not only in Nahant, but at all of our beaches.

I just want to say thank you to everyone that that participated. Save the Harbor's history as well as the Beaches Commission's history isn't leaving recommendations or ideas on the shelf to collect dust. We will put these into action and through the work of the Commission, hopefully make changes soon for the upcoming beach season. Thank you so much. This was incredibly informative, and also inspiring. Excited to get to work. I'm sorry, I have to leave early, but I'll turn it back to Chris.

Chris Mancini 1:24:17

Is there any other folks from any community or from the public or any other Commissioners who've had questions come up? Representative Madaro, do you have any closing remarks in that case?

Adrian Madaro 1:24:37

Thanks, Chris. I just want to thank you and Save the Harbor / Save the Bay staff for hosting this important hearing. I want to thank my colleagues on the Metropolitan Beaches Commission for your work on bettering our public beaches. Most importantly, I want to thank everyone who joined us today to testify for your enlightening remarks. These are really important perspectives to hear, and together I'm confident that we can continue to improve accessibility to our public beaches and really make them the best public resources possible for everyone in our community. Thank you all so very much.

Chris Mancini 1:25:09

Thank you so much.

Brendan Crighton 1:25:12

Real quick, one final comment. I know, it's a workday for many folks. Anyone here who knows someone who may have wanted to testify, that couldn't make it. I think this has already been said, but just to re-emphasize it, you know, please reach out. Email your suggestions, your comments, your criticisms. This was an opportunity to have a hearing remotely but, you know, written testimony or, you know, even phone calls to our office, we want to make sure that we get as much feedback as possible. Please encourage folks to reach out to us. Thanks. Sorry, Chris.

Chris Mancini 1:25:45

Thanks. I was gonna close with a similar comment, just to give folks an expectation of what our plan is and what to expect next. As I said, this is the second of three planned hearings on access. We held our first this past May on racial justice and equity. As you're well aware, this one is on access for people with disabilities and we'll be following up in February with a hearing on language barriers. As Senator Crighton said, this isn't just a one-time thing. We are accepting written testimony. The information is in the agenda and will be up on the website. You can submit by email to Maria at rodriguez@savetheharbor.org. That's in the comments there, Maria, dropped that in there. We'll be distributing a form that folks can fill out as well that we have from the previous hearings. We hope to find more ways to connect with people. We're going to keep reaching out. We would rely on any word of mouth, any social media that you can do to spread the word that this is happening. Ellice, I see your hand.

Following the three hearings, we will be putting together kind of a reaction draft and sharing that at a summit, where we're going to be asked, you know, coming back to everyone and saying, you know, what did we get right? Where do we need to edit and change and make sure to include that's not there? Again, ultimately resulting in what will be a living document, or report that's going to be our roadmap. Of course, this effort is not going to stop at that point. The summit you can expect sometime in the late spring, next year, it will follow our Annual Harpoon Shamrock Splash, which is one of the ways we raised a lot of money for the Better Beaches Program, which of course, is the partnership with the DCR that we run each year where we we grant over \$200,000. That number changes based on how much we can raise at the splash for this type of programmatic free events, things like like Abilities Dance performances, like Piers Parks programs, South Boston Neighborhood House's beach bashes and more. We're doing a whole component on participatory budgeting on that this year, so we're looking for new ideas. I'm sure you'll be receiving communication on that in the next couple of weeks.

Ellice, you had your hand up. I did want to make sure to come back to you.

Ellice Patterson 1:28:24

Thank you, I just wanted to just frankly, raise a point that I raised in the chat just to make sure that it was on record. We had a really great experience at Tenean Beach, where when we didn't have our own speaker, a beachgoer hooked up their stereo so we can perform and also a couple of other beachgoers tried to encourage others to watch the show too. Just to say that, these really great points where everyone can enjoy the beach is possible. With continued access and with continued cultural understanding of each other we can make that happen. Thank you all for having me.

Chris Mancini 1:29:03

Thanks so much, Ellice. Thanks, actually, for making that point that, you know, we're having three hearings on three specific issues, but these are all intersectional issues. We're not hosting a hearing on ability to ignore, you know, language or race or culture or anything like that, so thank you making that point for us today.

Patti, I just want to say, your comment on spontaneity is exactly, that kind of is how it all culminates for me. That's always the thing that's in my head. It's like that's where we truly have to get to, that anyone can just show up and we want to think over the the barriers that are stopping us from getting to that point. Thanks for summing that up.

I know everyone loves it when the meeting ends early, me no more than anyone else, but I don't want anyone who is maybe thinking of making a comment or asking a question to feel like you are gonna get cut off. I'll just leave a quick, short moment here for anyone to raise your hand or speak up. Before we adjourn for the day.

Andrea Patton 1:30:13

I just want to be sure folks saw Commissioner McCosh's message in the chat. If there are any access related issues in the city of Boston, beach, or otherwise, you can reach our office at disability@boston.gov. We'd love to hear from you.

Chris Mancini 1:30:26

Thank you, Andrea. So, with that, I will once again thank all of our panelists for coming out today and making time. Thank you to everyone who made time out of your day and spoke up from your communities and your organizations. Of course, thanks to our Co-Chairs of the MBC and to all of our Metropolitan Beaches Commissioners for making the time and being here. We'll send the transcript and we'll talk to you all soon.

Bruce Berman 1:30:56

Thank you, Chris.

Chris Mancini 1:30:57

Bye. Thanks, everyone. Take care.

1:31:05