

# The Boston Globe

YEAR OF THE BEACH | GLOBE EDITORIAL

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## Dorchester's underused beaches

IF UNTOUCHED by human hands, Tenean, Savin Hill, and Malibu beaches in Dorchester would be nothing more than mud flats. The city created the first two a century ago to encourage saltwater swimming in the neighborhood, and the state built Malibu in the 1930s on land filled for Old Colony Boulevard (later Morrissey Boulevard).

Human intervention is required again and again to burnish their appeal. The beaches were getting that attention Sunday, when 60 volunteers combed them for litter. With just a couple of major improvements by the state, and continued good maintenance, they can become a reliable recreational resource for the 21st-century city dweller.

The three parks were renovated under the state Back to the Beaches program five or six years ago, but on Sunday, the beaches were hardly being used. A few children climbed the play equipment, but only two people ventured onto the sand at Tenean, and only three at Malibu. There was a solitary sunbather at Savin Hill.

A Dorchester resident on the Tenean sand said she had never been there before. The sunbather at Savin Hill, Gordana Stanojevic, was visiting a cousin nearby. "It's clean and very beautiful," she said.

Just arrived from Serbia, Stanojevic had no knowledge of the history of the area -- how the construction of the Southeast Expressway in the 1950s had eaten into the parks at Tenean and Savin Hill, and cut off all three beaches from the rest of Dorchester; how water pollution in the 1960s and 1970s had discouraged swimming; and how neglect over the decades had damaged the reputation of all three beaches.

These modest open spaces cannot take the heavy use that Nantasket or Revere beaches endure. But there is room for 144 cars at Tenean and 113 at Malibu-Savin Hill. A Red Line stop is only a few blocks from the Savin Hill beach. As part of the park system managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, they are intended to be enjoyed by more than a handful of people.

Tenean Beach, tucked into the Port Norfolk section of Dorchester, is a particularly hard sell. Mud flats make it unswimmable at low tide. But the sand is inviting, and it's a good place for children to alternate between building castles and maneuvering around the play equipment. Older youths can enjoy the basketball or tennis courts.

One drawback can only be resolved by a major improvement. "I have a 3-year-old, and if I see there are no bathrooms I won't come back," said Senator Jack Hart

of South Boston, an advocate for the beaches, who was checking on the clean up. The original renovation plans called for a bathhouse but the roughly \$900,000 project was put off by the state budget squeeze. A bathhouse with a similar cost was in the plan for Savin Hill, too, but has yet to be built. Both beaches ought to get these essential facilities.

Three decades ago, the state built a bathhouse at Malibu, near Morrissey Boulevard. The bathhouse is not connected to the city sewer line and is expensive to maintain. The department is right to want it closed. Malibu has a more immediate problem: Marsh grass creates a barrier to the water and makes this beach uninviting. The grass, protected by environmental laws, was removed from a section of Savin Hill Beach under a special arrangement in 2001 to allow swimming there. Savin Hill is also the location of a playground and Little League ball field.

One sunbather at Malibu said he had tried the water once, but it looked murky and he hadn't gone in again. According to a report by the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, the beaches failed water quality tests a little more than 10 percent of the time in 2005. That's too often, but it does not indicate gross pollution. However, the 24-hour turnaround

time in testing makes any finding uncertain. A quicker test, which US environmental regulators are trying to develop, would provide better assurances to get people back in the water.

The DCR maintenance schedule calls for daily trash pickups at all three beaches. Yet volunteers Julia and Tim Paradiso were finding all sorts of junk -- a baseball bat, empty Windex bottle, a chunk of Styrofoam -- on Tenean Beach close to the Expressway. The cleanup was sponsored by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the Harpoon Brewery. The volunteers were energized by the prospect of a pizza-and-beer party afterward. The items they were finding, however, point up the need for more rigorous work by DCR.

Harpoon and Save the Harbor did a great service to the beaches Sunday. To help DCR further, they ought to consider organizing a second clean up in August when the beaches have endured a summer's worth of wear. Sand without litter and new bathhouses would encourage city people to keep coming back to Dorchester's own beaches.

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