

The Boston Globe

YEAR OF THE BEACH | GLOBE EDITORIAL
MAY 26, 2007

Not enough fun at Pleasure Bay

THE TIDE is always high at Pleasure Bay in South Boston, and the likelihood of beach closings due to poor water quality is extremely low. But even though it is the cleanest of the six Boston Harbor beaches that lie within the city limits, Pleasure Bay still has a long way to go to live up to its evocative name.

Pleasure Bay was the 1950s brainchild of the late Senate President John E. Powers of South Boston, who envisioned his constituents splashing in the roughly 170-acre lagoon enclosed by jetties. Spillways in the upper part of a dike allow water to enter on the inward tide and drain slowly on the outgoing tide. As a result, the water doesn't stagnate, even though the depth of the lagoon seldom varies by more than a foot in an area where 9-foot tides are the norm. A long causeway rims what the locals call the Sugar Bowl and reaches all the way to Castle Island, where visitors can fish or explore the mid-19th-century Fort Independence. Mothers pushing strollers and the elderly pushing walkers can be seen along the causeway. But bathers are a less common sight.

Powers had hoped that Pleasure Bay would offer a recreational experience, albeit on a much smaller scale, like that of Jones Beach State Park on Long Island, which draws 6 million visitors a year to its concerts, theater, dancing, pitch and putt, volleyball, fireworks, and even air shows. But programming of any kind is rare at any of the 14 Boston Harbor beaches under the control of the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. Expectations of the underfunded state agency are so low that DCR officials recently created a buzz among beach advocates simply

by posting an online maintenance schedule for the Boston Harbor beaches. While Jones Beach aficionados are looking forward to summer concerts by Bob Dylan and the Goo Goo Dolls, boosters of the Boston beaches are hoping for a sufficient fleet of sand sifters and trash haulers.

It falls to newly appointed DCR Commissioner Richard Sullivan to ensure that beach use grows enough to justify the \$4.5 billion harbor cleanup. And the stakes are especially high along the South Boston shoreline, where the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority is undertaking the construction of a 2.1-mile tunnel that will virtually eliminate sewage and storm water discharges on the beaches.

A matter of money

Sullivan won't succeed if limited to the paltry \$1.7 million budgeted last year for beach operations that extend from Nantasket to Nahant. A commission chaired by state Senator Jack Hart of South Boston and state Representative Anthony Petrucci of East Boston is pushing for an additional \$2.7 million to address maintenance deficiencies across the state recreational system. Optimistically, they are also urging that at least 5 percent of operating funds be used to introduce or improve programming. But it is a good bet that friends of the beaches and parks will also need to raise money if they hope to kick up the fun quotient.

One sensible way to advance that goal at Pleasure Bay would be to charge a modest fee for parking. Roughly 300 spots are available in the usually crowded parking lot at Castle Island. A small fee of \$1 or \$2 per car

could raise tens of thousands of dollars each summer and could be used on site to create programs, such as swimming lessons or canoeing, for children and young adults. North of Boston, supporters of Revere Beach are seeking to impose parking fees as a means to stimulate programming. Supporters of Pleasure Bay should do the same.

Castle Island users appeared split on the idea this week. Mary Mueller of the South End, a regular visitor for six years, said a parking fee wouldn't keep her from the "wonderful spot," especially if Sullivan's snack bar, an island staple, keeps turning out tasty grilled hot dogs for \$1.45. But Jodi Schaaf of Quincy, a mother of four sons, put the highest value on a family outing "when the whole day is free."

Urban beaches like Pleasure Bay should be transformative for city kids. The area needs more programs like the oversubscribed sailing club for kids at Castle Island, where two staffers from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, an environmental advocacy group, also use lobster pots and dip nets to introduce youngsters to local marine life.

"These are the kinds of skills that the Bushes and Kennedys learned in Kennebunkport and Hyannisport," says Bruce Berman, the group's spokesman.

The million or so residents living within a half hour of the Boston Harbor beaches should be able to take similar comfort and pride in their shoreline. ■