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Urban beaches make some feel ‘unwelcome and uncomfortable.’ A new report says we should fix that.

The Metropolitan Beaches Commission wants to make beaches more inviting for people of color, people with disabilities, and non-native English speakers.

By Globe Staff | May 12, 2023



Katrina (left) and Melissa enjoyed the quietness of Carson Beach in South Boston while the Metropolitan Beaches Commission held a press conference there Friday to release its report on increasing access to the urban beaches



Workers for Save the Harbor Save the Bay placed their flag on the beach.

With summer just around the corner, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission on Friday announced an initiative to make beaches more welcoming for underrepresented communities.

The plan, titled “Breaking Barriers,” was prepared by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and aims not only to make the beaches more inviting but also to drive increased investment in them. A recent report by the UMass Donahue Institute found Massachusetts to have the lowest per capita spending on parks and recreation in the country.

“We found that our beaches have increasingly drawn residents who represent the rich diversity of our region,” the report says. “However, more progress is needed before we can say they are truly inclusive.”

The commission represents Boston and the neighboring oceanfront communities of Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, Quincy, and Hull.

“People’s perceptions of their beaches are shaped by their personal experiences and those of their friends and families,” according to the report. “For people of color, people with disabilities and non-native English speakers, this has often meant feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable on their beaches, which are spectacular public resources that belong to them and their communities.”

The broad objectives of the initiative, which is being announced Friday at a news conference at Carson Beach in South Boston, call for increased funding for infrastructure repair and improvements, and better leadership from the state’s Department of Conservation and Recreation, which has had six different commissioners in the past eight years.

But the main focus is on making the beaches feel more inviting and safe for people of color, which includes everything from increasing transportation options with shuttles from public transportation, improving event programming with culturally relevant activities, and strengthening the commitment to water safety programs. Children of color are six times more likely to die from drowning.

“We believe the metropolitan region’s public beaches are extraordinary assets for our communities, and that equitable access to healthy blue and green spaces improves the quality of life of all the region’s residents and visitors, regardless of race, ability, language, or income,” according to the commission, which was co-chaired by Senator Brendan Crighton of Lynn and Representative Adrian Madaro of East Boston.

For people with disabilities, a public hearing revealed that the lack of accessible parking and maintained ramps and walkways leaves many feeling “like spectators instead of participants,” according to Andrea Gayle-Bennett of the Disabled American Veterans of Massachusetts.

“The commission hopes that the findings and recommendations included in this report will be embraced by the Healey-Driscoll administration,” the report reads, “and serve as a blueprint for improved and equitable access to the Metropolitan Region’s public beaches and the benefits of our more than \$5 billion investment in clean water in Boston Harbor and Massachusetts Bay.”