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Meghan Ottolini | August 5, 2021

Quincy forced to fix sewage overflows in settlement with feds



QUINCY, MA – JUNE 26-SATURDAY: A sign reading “No Lifeguard On Duty” on a lifeguard chair advises beachgoers to be vigilant while swimming at Wollaston Beach June 26, 2021, in Quincy, Massachusetts. (Photo by Paul Connors/Media News Group/Boston Herald)

A settlement in federal court this week between Quincy and the Environmental Protection Agency has the city under the gun to stop discharging raw sewage into the bays and harbors on the South Shore.

“It’s really good news,” said Bruce Berman, spokesperson for local environment advocacy group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay. “It’s absolutely critically important to the residents of Quincy and Boston.”

Under the judge-approved agreement, Quincy will need to spend more than \$100 million to update its sanitary sewer systems. The outdated infrastructure has leaked raw sewage and discharged stormwater contaminated with sewage onto local beaches, and into the Boston Harbor.

The EPA is also fining the city \$115,000 in penalties for noncompliance around EPA guidelines that have been in place since 2003.

“This settlement is a reminder that municipalities must comply with the law and environmental standards to prevent and address pollution caused by defects in their stormwater and sewage systems,” Acting U.S. Attorney Nathaniel R. Mendell said in a statement.

Quincy has already developed a plan to upgrade its stormwater management, but the agreement with the feds holds the city to a strict schedule, with the first deadline on Halloween 2021.

“We are actually very proud of the work we’ve done in

planning to keep our waterways clean,” said Quincy Public Works Commissioner Al Grazioso.

The settlement forces the city to focus on “areas posing the greatest risk to the public and the environment,” including Wollaston Beach.

The 2.3-mile beach is the largest public beach in the Boston Harbor, but was recently named by one environmental group as the state’s third most dangerous beach for swimming, due to high amounts of fecal bacteria in the water. The water at Wollaston was tested for bacteria 85 days in 2020, and found to have dangerously high levels on 27% of those days. That beach is under control of the state, but Grazioso said the

city intends to help clean it up any way it can.

The \$100 million price tag should not hit Quincy ratepayers’ wallets too hard, city officials said. Quincy has already budgeted \$8 million annually for the next 15 years of upgrades, and will apply for state loans and funding from the American Rescue Plan Act.