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Kathi-Anne Reinstein, commission chairwoman, speaks at Revere Beach last week.

Residents, officials report improvements at local beaches

REVERE — A state commission that pushed for increased funding six years ago to clean up state-run beaches in Revere, Winthrop, Nahant, and Lynn is reconvening this summer to meet with local officials and residents to get feedback on how to further improve the beaches.

“Part of the whole process was more accountability,” said Revere state Representative Kathi-Anne Reinstein, who serves as co-commissioner of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission with Lynn state Senator Thomas McGee.

Last week, Reinstein, McGee, and more than 100 others met in Revere at the first of nine planned commission hearings. The group, working with the nonprofit Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, will cull ideas, complaints, and recommendations from the hearings, and release a report later this year on the state of the beaches in Revere, Winthrop, Nahant, Lynn, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy, and Hull.

In 2006, the state Legislature created the commission after residents, along with city and state officials, became frustrated with the way many state-run beaches were being maintained. The commission’s 2007 report created a checklist of existing beach problems and also capital work projects that needed to be done.

Since then, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, which maintains the state beaches, has added dozens of new employees, designated beach managers and crews to work on specific beaches, and allocated over \$30 million for capital projects.

At last week’s meeting, most felt that the commission’s major recommendations from the 2007 report had been addressed. Six years ago, residents in Winthrop asked the state to rebuild Winthrop Beach, which had lost most of its sand to erosion; last year, work on the \$20 million beach restoration project began. In 2007, Revere residents and elected officials complained about dirty sand, poor trash maintenance, and dirty water at Revere Beach; these days, DCR crews take away the trash every morning and have purchased equipment to rake and clean the sand regularly.

“The difference in what people see on the beach right now as compared to prior to 2006 when the Metropolitan Beaches Commission was formed is just incredible,” said Revere Mayor Dan Rizzo at last week’s meeting. “I just pray that it continues to go the way it does. The DCR has been phenomenal.”

Samantha Overton, DCR deputy parks director, said state funding for the beach maintenance and the new coastal projects has changed the look of the beaches. “Stable funding is the key,” said Overton, who said the DCR reorganized its maintenance staff after the report, hired beach managers, and designated crews to clean the beaches with new equipment.

Six years ago, Nahant and Lynn residents had numerous complaints about those beaches, testifying to the commission about the poor condition of the Nahant Causeway, the Lynn Beach bathhouse, infrequent trash pickup, and also poor sand quality. In addition, people asked the commission to find a way to eliminate the odor from algae that washed up on the beaches.

Since then, the DCR has addressed all of those issues, said McGee. “We made great progress in 2007, really highlighting the need for resources, both in employees and equipment, and I think we want to continue that momentum,” he said.

After almost three years of roadwork, the DCR is finishing up a \$22 million project to reconstruct the Nahant Causeway, the only road that links the town to the mainland. Also, since 2008, the DCR has spent about \$150,000 a year to send a team of workers in front-end loaders to scoop up the algae every morning on the two beaches from April to November, eliminating the smell along Lynn Shore Drive. DCR has also stepped up its beach maintenance, removing trash daily.

“The process worked, and I would say it’s like night and day. It’s a major, major improvement,” said Robert Tucker, a commission member and president of the Friends of Lynn & Nahant Beach.

Part of the meeting in Revere included a period where people met in small groups to write down things that were working well along Revere Beach, as well as things they hoped to change or add.

Most people praised the water and sand quality, and the beach maintenance. One of the biggest complaints focused on the increase of piping plovers, an endangered bird species, that nest in protected areas along Revere Beach.

“The big issue is the plovers,” said Toni Esposito, a resident who attended the meeting. “They’re taking up too much of the beach and people are annoyed.”

Bruce Berman, a spokesman for Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, said the public might have to accept that the beach has become a haven for the birds.

“I think it’s coming to terms on how you manage a resurgent species that’s also threatened. It’s going to be challenging,” he said.

The next commission meeting will be held at 6 p.m. July 16 at North Shore Community College in Lynn. Steven A. Rosenberg can be reached at srosenberg@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @WriteRosenberg.



Swimmers headed into the waters of Tenean Beach during the annual Brian Leahy Memorial Polar Bear Plunge.

At Metropolitan Beaches Commission meeting locals praise Dorchester's beaches

Dorchester residents praised their neighborhood's waterfront, from Tenean Beach to Savin Hill Cove, at a Wednesday meeting of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, but they also saw room for improvement.

Formed in 2006 by the Massachusetts Legislature and made up of non-profit leaders, residents, and elected officials, the commission evaluates and critiques Department of Conservation and Recreation managed beaches from Nahant to Nantasket. It released its first report in 2007 and is now working on a follow-up, which will provide recommendations for ways to improve the recreation areas.

The 2007 report analyzed conditions at the Malibu/Savin Hill and Tenean Beaches, and concluded that the beaches are important community gathering places, that they are getting cleaner, and that they are easily accessible from public transportation.

The 2007 report, however, found that there were issues with contamination after storms, maintenance of existing facilities was lacking, and there was a need for better police enforcement.

Many at Wednesday's meeting said the beaches have been improving, but that there are still concerns about water quality, safety, and facilities.

The Save the Harbor Save the Bay 2013 Beaches Report Card found Malibu Beach in the middle of the pack when it came to overall water safety in 2012.

"[In Savin Hill] we have two beaches that have fairly good water quality and have made a remarkable improvement," Bruce Berman, a spokesperson for Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, told the audience at Wednesday's meeting.

Tenean Beach in Port Norfolk, however, has continued to struggle with poor water quality and had the lowest score of the 13 beaches on the report card.

"Tenean is not quite as optimistic of a story," said Berman. "It was rainy this year and as a consequence most of the beaches didn't do well."

Aside from water quality and maintenance, increasing the use of the beaches was at the top of the list for many.

"With our festivals we increased awareness of the beaches and saw a direct increase in use," said Maureen McQuillen, a Dorchester resident. "We need additional funding in the DCR budget to increase participation at beaches; it keeps out bad elements."

McQuillen also highlighted Morrissey Boulevard, which runs next to Malibu Beach and has been a headache for bicyclists, cars, and pedestrians.

"The sidewalks are all broken up and it is not safe," McQuillen added.

Over the years there have been several discussions about the state of the roadway, which often floods, but funding has kept projects from moving forward.

Over at Tenean Beach, Mary McCarthy, the president of the Port Norfolk Neighborhood Association, said the beach is a community gem, but needs public bathrooms.

"The new courts are looking beautiful and the overall beach area seems to get maintenance, but I know for us the main issue in getting a bathroom facility," she said.

Although there is not an immediate plan in place for restroom facilities at the beach, the commission reported that DCR has developed a design for bathrooms at the beach, but hasn't move forward with the project.

Others in attendance also highlighted a number of issues at the neighborhood's beaches including the need for more trash receptacles and signage, more marketing of the beaches, and dredging off of Malibu Beach.

A draft report will be created by the commission and it is expected to be presented to the community in the winter. A final report, which will take into account comments received at the winter meeting, is expected to be release by the spring of 2014.