

Youth Focus Group
November 28, 2006

Senator Jack Hart opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for coming. Both Senator Hart and Commissioner Kip Becker spoke about the positive qualities of the beaches, their own experiences on the beaches, and how important it is to bring people back to the beach and create new memories. Senator Hart explained that Kip Becker would speak, and then the room would break into two groups for small group discussion. Bruce Berman then suggested that people introduce themselves and explain how they use the beaches and the harbor.

Youth Use of the Beach and Harbor

Frank Tenzer from the Quincy Recreation Department said that they use the beaches and harbor for sailing in the summer program. Barry Welch, Director of recreation at the City of Quincy, said 400 youngsters each summer, participate in kayaking, canoeing, rowboats sailboats, and said, they felt proud to be the community to have brought the suit against the MDC. Maryann Zizzo from Revere Cares pointed out that they were the first group that came to use the beach in the sea kayaking program, and in the past few years have done exploratory walks on the beaches. Kelly O'Connor, Director of the Gregg Neighborhood House, claimed they use the beaches for field trips, and Adrienne Maguire, the Recreation Director in Revere, told the group that they have had movies on the beach in evenings, concerts, fireworks twice this summer, and sandcastles. Ed McCabe, who runs the maritime program for Hull Lifesaving Museum, put kids out in traditional rowing boats in Boston Harbor. The Paris Street Community Center in East Boston shared that they use the beach for field trips, and just got funded for fishing programs. Ted Coates from the Piers Park Sailing Center stated that we are reclaiming the harbor, and Piers Park 15 years ago was blighted, but now it is one of the jewels of Boston Harbor with free programs for kids.

Samuel from Outward Bound Thompson Island said they use the islands for sailing, sea kayaking and canoeing, and in summer have CWC courses for girls, and do courses for at risk youth. Kristen Wyman from Island Alliance focused on their community based education program, taking school students to parks to learn about environment. Kelly Ann Thompson, a youth instructor at the Piers Park Sailing Center, takes kids to the islands each Friday, and shared that kids love going to beaches there. Others from the East Boston YMCA, BOLD, City of Mattapan, East Boston YMCA, summer camps, Courageous Sailing, and individual communities articulated their use of the beaches and the positive impact that has had on the youth and the communities.

Bruce Berman then introduced David Spillane, and David explained that the room would break into two discussion groups, the kids meeting with Bruce and the adults meeting with himself. He then explained that they would be asking two questions about the beaches: What's not working well today/what would you like to change, and, what is working well now. Then the two groups would write their opinions on sticky notes. He also suggested writing about what people would like to do, or what they'd like to add, or things that you'd like to have on the beach. The room would then talk about them and figure out if there was a pattern.

Senator Hart then stated that there is no better time to do what they were doing, and that we need to think about how to light a fire and bring kids back to the beach.

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After the individual groups reconvened, each group discussed what their sticky notes said and what they talked about, making notes on a chart for each one.

The adult group talked about things they could change to make the beaches better, including a water transport partnership, working with other programs, better public transportation like ferries, trolleys, and shuttles, and more creative programming. One person pointed out that the youth are scared of the water and don't know that some water is now clean. One person complained that there is an odor from algae in Lynn at certain tides. Others mentioned a complete clean up of the inner harbor and designated swimming areas in Chelsea, designated dock area for boats, bocce courts, outdoor performances, parks and educational programs, and programming for people of all ages, with curfews for kids and teens. On the subject of facilities and maintenance, people requested more beach rangers, guards on a regular basis, more bathrooms and cleaner bathrooms, drinking fountains, and cleanup of pet waste. Education was central to the discussion, with suggestions that included teaching kids about stewardship and environmentally responsible behavior, and teachers to teach kids about the history of the beaches and islands.

They also commented that Lynn has a great park, there is free parking in some areas, and that beaches with long walkways are accessible for walkers. People like the nice white sidewalks, some noticed excellent showers and restrooms, and someone commented that the clean water is bringing back small fish. Others said they appreciated the community partnerships, and beach cleaning when it takes place, and the formation of the Beaches Commission.

For the kids group, some of the most prominent negative things to change were encompassed in the maintenance section of the discussion, especially relating to trash and dirty water. Bathrooms, recycle bins, and not enough transportation—especially from places like Mattapan--were also brought up. Some also brought up safety on the beach as well.

For positive comments and ideas for how to make things better, comments included activities and entertainment, such as street performers, magic shows, and comedians, as well sand castle festivals, races, Bahama style regattas, friendly competitive community gatherings, sunset gatherings of kids on the beach, as well as parties. The kids spoke enthusiastically about what they like to do at the beach, commenting that swimming, playing Frisbee and other sports, and hanging out with friends is among their top priorities, and most importantly, they want to be able to do so without having to worry about dirty water or being kicked off the beach for no reason. The kids cited a lack of places to hang out, and that it would be great to have the beach as a place to go to feel safe and have fun.

Commissioner Joan Meschino then thanked everyone for coming, reminding everyone that this kind of participation is important, and this is how we accomplish our goals. She then commented that she hoped participants would continue to support their communities and be involved.

Commissioner McGee, Commissioner Becker, and Commissioner Reinstein also spoke about how productive the meeting had been, and thanked everyone for contributing. Commissioner Becker suggested possibly forming other groups, including having competitions against other beaches for the most improvement or new ideas. He offered help particularly for ideas that don't require a lot of funding, but time and planning.

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Senator Hart closed by discussing the history of the room and the waterfront, and explaining what would happen with the beaches commission information, which he said would be available for perusal and review in January. He again thanked everyone for coming.