MBC Regional Meeting

February 1, 2014

Minutes and Sticky Summary

**Present:**

**Minutes**

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay President Patty Foley began the Regional Meeting by welcoming everyone and delivering opening remarks.

“Thanks everyone for making the effort to joining us this morning. We chose UMass for the meeting today not simply because of the halfway point between Nantasket and Nahant, but because the location offers us a spectacular view of our harbor, our islands, and some of our beaches. And it also gives us the opportunity to show off one of the Commonwealth’s most spectacular University campuses. Save the Harbor/Save the Bay is more than proud to partner with the Massachusetts Legislature in support of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission. Under the leadership of Senator Tom McGee, the Commission members have invested an enormous amount of time and energy listening and learning from all of you. We have lots of good news to report today. We also have some challenges to overcome, but we’re confident we’re going to be able to take care of those as well.

But thanks to the commissioners we have a roadmap, and thanks to you we have a roadmap.

Today’s meeting provides all of us with an opportunity to make sure that we got it right. That everything we heard at the community meetings that we hosted over the course of the summer is reflected in the PowerPoint presentation and ultimately in the report.

I want to take a minute to say thanks to Chancellor Ed Lambert from the University of Massachusetts at Boston—Ed is the former Mayor of Fall River, and the former Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. He is a great friend to the beaches commission and a fine public servant, and we appreciate and are glad that he was willing to host us today.”

Chancellor Ed Lambert then took the podium, thanked Patty, and delivered his remarks.

“Patty, thanks. Good morning everyone. It’s a great pleasure to be here with all of you and on behalf of our Chancellor, Dr. Keith Motley, I want to say welcome. We think that UMass Boston is the place where these important conversations should take place—we’re very pleased about that. The University celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, and in addition to being directed by our founders at the time to provide an education that was equal to the best, we were also directed to not forget the city. And that means it’s in our DNA to work on urban policy issues, to help deal with some of the urban challenges and to look at the quality of life in urban areas, and as such, over the course of these 50 years the University has involved itself in not only helping to improve municipal services and working on issues such as health disparities, and closing the education gap, we’ve been very involved in the issues that bring all of you here today.

Jack Wiggin from our Urban Harbors Institute has worked very hard, I think Jack is here with us today, and involved in these conversations, and that institute celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. We were working on environmental issues long before it was popular to do so, and so this year we have formed our new school for the environment. We are here to try and support the kinds of things that we think are important to quality of life. And as you all understand, and certainly as the folks from Save the Harbor have made very clear, the issues that we address in terms of quality of life issues do not end at the landside border of our community. We have this incredible resource that brings us opportunities for commerce and recreation, and so we think that those conversations are very important. I know also, on behalf of the Chancellor, I want to thank the folks who over the course of a long time, have helped improve the quality of these urban beaches. Patty mentioned my involvement with DCR, and I couldn’t be prouder to have served with some of the folks who are here today from that agency, who have worked very hard on these issues and they have done an incredible job. But also to the leadership of this iteration of the Commission, and past iterations —Senator McGee, who co-chairs the commission, and folks like Jack Hart, Kathi Reinstein, and other legislators who have been very supportive of these efforts have done an incredible job, along with Patty and Bruce and last but not least all of you—thank you for your involvement in these issues; we welcome you here today. It’s a great pleasure for the university to host this event. Thank you.”

Patty Foley then took the podium again to read a list of the commission members, asking attendees at the meeting to join her in thanking them as they have worked incredibly hard on behalf of this project.

Patty went on to thank other local officials in attendance, and to introduce Senator Tom McGee.

“There are a number of local elected officials who are here with us this morning- thank you all for joining us. Nick Collins wanted me to make sure that we acknowledged State Trooper Jim Gordon from the South Boston barracks, thank you for being with us, and Eric Prentice from the South Boston office of Neighborhood Services, representing Mayor Walsh as well as Nancy Girard.

It give me enormous pleasure to call up Senator Tom McGee who’s cochairman of the Metropolitan Beaches Commission-- his leadership, his commitment to this project, his commitment not only to his district but to all of the beachfront communities and waterfront communities from Nahant to Nantasket is serving each of us and all of us incredibly well—please join me in welcoming Senator Tom McGee.”

Co-Chairman Senator Tom McGee took the podium to speak about the work that has been done thus far for the beaches, highlighting the strides made for water quality since the 70s, and how the improved water quality has changed the way people interact with the harbor and the beaches.

“Thank you for the kind words, but it really was the commission—I want to thank all my colleagues from the Commission—some from original commission in 2007. I just want to recognize Kathi Reinstein who has recently left the legislature, but her commitment on this has been there since 2007 as well.

When we first started in 2007 we recognized we really had some substantial issues in terms of bringing the beaches back to life, and that really involved getting DCR the resources they needed, both in capital equipment and staffing to do the job that we know they could do if they had the resources to make it happen, and because of the 2007 commission and because of all of you, and many like you around the beaches areas around Greater Boston who care about the beaches and care about our future—we were able to make a strong case to continue that investment. And that case continues, and I think the challenge we face is to work on the progress that we’ve made—I think the quality of the beaches has improved so we can say many of the beaches are good—but really the ultimate goal is to make sure that people both in Massachusetts and in the Greater Boston area, but also those tourists who come here, say beaches we have in Metropolitan Boston are great beaches and a great resource for our future—it’s about quality of life and it’s about growing our economy, and by making these government investments, we really can transform this region.

We’re looking out at South Boston, and I’m looking our at the water and how great it is, and I tell my staff all the time, when I worked in Boston in the ‘70s, Fort Point Channel was a place you really didn’t want to go down to. When I used to sail with friends of mine in Nahant, raw sewage was just coming out of the pipes about a mile off of Nahant. Our waterways were in tough shape. Because we made a commitment to clean up Boston Harbor and surrounding harbors, because we made public investments we have transformed our economy. When you go to Fort Point Channel today, you see high-end hotels, all kinds of activity; people want to be down there. When you go to the Harbor Islands you see clean water that really takes advantage of what a great resource we have in the Greater Boston area. So I’m excited about the opportunity to be on the commission, and I’m excited about to opportunity to continue the work we’ve done to make sure that these investments continue, and that people understand that when we’re talking about government investment, we’re talking about it when we walk to our beaches, they’re clean, they’re beautiful, and we bring our families there and really enjoy life because we live in an area that’s really some of the best places to live in the world.

So again I want to thank my colleagues on the commission. You’re going to see all of the input that we got from the public, and we look forward to the final report coming out and working together to make progress to make sure that the beaches in this area are great beaches.”

Following Senator DeLeo’s remarks, Patty introduced DCR Commissioner Jack Murray.

“I’m also pleased to invite DCR Commissioner Jack Murray up to say a few words. Over the course of the last eight or ten years, we have been more than fortunate to have DCR commissioners who not only take their job seriously but also value and appreciate the opportunity and privilege to serve the public and to serve in government. That absolutely holds true for Jack Murray. He is a terrific and effective steward on behalf of all of the Commonwealth’s open spaces, beaches, and public parks.”

Commissioner Jack Murray spoke about an ongoing capital project in Winthrop, the maintenance that DCR has been continuing on the beaches throughout the winter, and the changes that DCR has made within the last five years.

“Thanks Patty. On behalf of Governor Patrick, Secretary Sullivan, I want to thank Patty and Bruce for your continued advocacy and your support of DCR all these years. You’ve been great friends and I want you to know how much we appreciate that. And to you Senator McGee, and our elected officials, thank you for your time and to all of the Commissioners for all of the work you’ve done on behalf of the Commission and the beaches programs. As a result of the findings back in 2007 we were able to add resources to the agency that really made a difference in what we’ve been able to accomplish over the past five years.

I’d like to add a thank you to my predecessor Secretary Sullivan, who, in 2007 and 2008 embraced the findings of the original beaches commission report and directed us at DCR to implement them, and we did, and I think you saw a difference.

To my most recent predecessor, Commissioner Lambert, thank you for sharing this space with us today. Commissioner Lambert helped kick this campaign off this spring, he gave a PowerPoint presentation and testified to the Commission about some of the accomplishments and some of hurdles that we at DCR face, and many of you don’t know this, but Commissioner Lambert was one of key architects of brokering negotiations with our own Department of Administration & Finance to release the $22 million dollars to get the Winthrop project jumpstarted. You’ll all be very excited to see trucks rolling within the next month on that Winthrop project which has been twenty years in the making, and it’s certainly going to be a great legacy to your tenure Commissioner Lambert, so thank you for your hard work there.

So it really feels like a beach day out there today doesn’t it? Despite the fact that it’s January, beaches are a year round business for us. In addition to keeping barrels empty and clean, we’re constantly out there removing trash, working on issues such as public safety, our staff’s focus shifts when it snows because we realize how important these beaches are as year round facilities. We’re clearing snow on adjacent sidewalks to provide opportunities for healthy living for our residents.

I know all of the hard work you’ve done over the course of the past summer—the meetings that you’ve attended, you’ve traveled many miles, spent many hours visiting beaches, collected lots of information, and due to the work that you all did in 2006 and 2007, DCR received an infusion of about 5 million dollars. That is a huge amount of money. With that five million dollars we were able, within a single year, to hire 64 staff whose principal responsibilities were to be dedicated to beach operations. With that money we were also able to buy a million dollars of equipment, like new trucks and beach rakes, that help us to do our jobs better. And it was very reassuring to hear during meetings this summer that the community felt that we had done a good job in the last five years, and it was due in part to the efforts of the legislature in appropriating that money.

I’d like to just take a minute to highlight some of the work that we’ve done in the last five years, some of the changes that we’ve made; we’ve instituted a new beach management program that includes 7 day a week staffing for beaches. We’ve created later shifts that allow for more frequent beach cleaning and maintenance. In addition we’ve invested in capital projects; we’ve reopened the Ward Bathhouse in Lynn, we’ve got a new bathhouse and beach house at Constitution Beach, we’ve made improvements to the Sugar Bowl, and we’ve opened a Marine Park Comfort Station in South Boston. We’ve completed the Wollaston Beach rehabilitation, we’ve invested ten million dollars in a new visitors center at Georges Island, another several million dollars with the help of Island Alliance out on Peddocks Island, a million dollars in the chapel at Peddocks Island, and Phil Griffiths is here from Island Alliance, we’re going to be bringing that chapel online this year, a great new feature for people to visit, to learn about some of the interpretive history there, and to possibly do events there as well. We’ve effectuated safety and access improvements at Nantasket Beach, finally, after about ten years we’re investing $125,000 and completing the master plan for Nantasket Beach, and working with the town of Hull on that. We’re finishing the 3 million dollar project at Short Beach, and we’re currently in the process of getting the Winthrop beach contract out on the street and we’re finishing the Nahant causeway project, an 18 million dollar job in Lynn and Nahant and we’re very excited to be able to ribbon cut that project this spring. We’ve established a statewide aquatics team. A couple years ago after an internal study we determined that our aquatics and our safety standards weren’t where we wanted them, so we’ve established a team who works year-round exclusively on recruiting lifeguards and new training methodologies in aquatic safety. All of this to reassure you that with your confidence and your investments we are putting taxpayers money to good work. We are passionate about our beaches, our staff maintains a very high standard of quality and care, and I’d like to just acknowledge some of the staff here—Thank you personally for all the hard work you do, thank you for all the encouragement and support of the community, and we’re certainly excited to hear about findings of the commission, and look forward to working with you over the next several years as we continue to improve the beaches here.”

After Commissioner Murray’s remarks, Bruce Berman, Director of Communications, Strategy and Operations at Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, and David Spillane of the urban planning firm Goody Clancy took the podium to deliver the PowerPoint presentation which essentially reviewed the information that will be relayed in the upcoming report—progress made since 2007, suggestions for the future moving forward. The PowerPoint is available for download at <http://savetheharbor.org/MBC2013/>

After the presentation, Senator Tom McGee delivered closing remarks, introducing the public input portion of the meeting, saying,

“Thank you all for coming. The most important part of today, the most powerful part of this process is the public input, and having your ideas and your concerns voiced clearly, and we take that seriously, it’s all part of the report. Now’s the time to get to the tables, let us know what we need to do better, and thank you for being here today, it’s been great. And thanks everyone for putting this together.”

Bruce Berman then directed meeting attendees to the nine tables set up with stickies and informational two-pagers.

**Sticky Summary**

Bruce Berman asked meeting attendees to report to breakout groups organized at nine tables representing each beachfront community. At each table there was a stack of two-pager reports identifying successes, current challenges, and needs and opportunities specific to that community’s beach or beaches. Attendees were encouraged to write down positive and negative comments about their beaches on sticky notes available at each table. Between all nine groups, 164 stickies were collected. Seventeen stickies recorded positive comments regarding things that are working well and/or have improved on the beaches, and 147 stickies recorded things that need improvement.

Positive stickies recorded an appreciation of clean water, clean sand, and improved maintenance—an issue that has been addressed successfully since 2007.

Many stickies spoke to a desire for more programming and partnerships on the beaches, including food trucks, boat rentals, and volleyball nets. Stickies also showed a desire for year-round amenities instead of limited seasonal availability of bathrooms and trash receptacles.

Beach access for dogs remains a mixed issue with some people favoring year-round beach access for dogs, and others opposing the notion. Other issues of concern include accessibility, traffic and parking for cars and bicycles, and facilities.