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Storm Damage Remains an Issue for Metropolitan Beaches Commission

This past winter saw several storms and weather conditions that heavily impacted the metropolitan beaches in the Greater Boston area. To discuss the impact and the general state of area beaches like Revere Beach for the coming months, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission (MBC) held a hearing on Monday, June 18, at the Massachusetts State House.

“There were three storms in March of ’18 that caused significant damage up and down the coast,” said Leo Roy, commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

The storm cleanup and damage cost totaled \$274,793, which included \$49,181 in Revere for debris removal and \$111,027 in Winthrop for debris removal and infrastructure repairs from water damage to sidewalks.

As a department, the DCR estimated costs of \$900,000 for staffing, which includes lifeguards, rangers, and administration staff, among others. Roy praised the performance of the 116 lifeguards that patrol metropolitan beaches, who reported 150 rescues during the 2017 summer which included up-current saves, administration of CPR and assisting distressed swimmers.

The department also spent \$11.53 million on capital infrastructure and maintenance at various beaches and \$677,130 on equipment like trucks.

“Our beaches are used year-round,” Roy said. “There’s this fantasy that beaches are only active in the summer, but ... [recreational beach activities] happen year-round, and that means our attention to these facilities is a 365-day-a-year activity.”

With much conversation on the finances of the operation, Roy spoke of the DCR partnership

matching funds program, which matches public donations—DCR will double the donation up to \$25,000, and anything beyond, they will match. He noted the importance of public support.

Revere Mayor Brian Arrigo also spoke of the importance of collaborations and public supports, citing the success of Waterfront Square’s development as the most prominent contemporary product between the City, the DCR and the MBTA. “The potential for Revere Beach is as endless as the horizon on which many of its visitor’s gaze,” Arrigo said.

However, despite these successes, much maintenance is still necessary such as:

Algae removal continues to be a challenge, as the process is particularly expensive due to the disposal process. Current method involves removing algae as soon as possible once it appears, transporting it off site to New Hampshire. DCR is hoping to find a closer disposal location, Roy said. The MBC members noted algae can render beaches unusable due to its odor, among other factors.

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay’s Beach Water Quality Report Card seemed to show a downward trend in 2017, but the results were no surprise considering that 2017 was a relatively rainy season.

Bruce Berman, director of strategy and communications at Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, suggested looking at average of around five years, rather than focusing on the single-year change. On that end, the metropolitan beaches averaged a strong 94-percent rating.

“They are so much cleaner now than they were a decade ago,” Roy said.