

The Daily Item

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MEETINGS TO FOCUS ON BEACHES, STATE FUNDING

By MATT DEMIRS and THOR JOURGENSEN | May 22, 2017



COURTESY PHOTO A child enjoys King's Beach.

LYNN — Summer is still a month away but a meeting scheduled for next Tuesday and another for June will focus on area beaches and their state funding.

The Metropolitan Beaches Commission's (MBC) May 30 hearing at the Lynn Museum, 590 Washington St., starts at 6 p.m. and is scheduled for two hours. A second hearing is scheduled for June 12, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the State House, room 222.

Topics will include water quality improvements throughout local beaches this summer, as well as algae removal. According to an MBC press release, the hearings will also focus on potential budget cuts affecting free events and state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) beach operations in Lynn and Nahant.

The hearings overlap state Rep. Lori Ehrlich's push to spend \$50,000 to eliminate beach algae — an annual source of odor complaints.

"This funding is crucial to combatting the algae, a long-standing problem for residents and visitors to the beach because of the annual buildup and noxious odor it releases," Ehrlich said. "The algae is unique

to our beaches and just one beach elsewhere in the world, and needs to be dealt with promptly each spring to prevent the smell from worsening through the summer and fall, when it becomes unbearable."

MBC lead consultant Bruce Berman said legislators are playing lead roles in restoring beaches, especially state Sen. Thomas McGee, who Berman said "has saltwater in his blood." Created in 2006 by the Massachusetts Legislature, MBC is co-chaired by McGee of Lynn, and Rep. RoseLee Vincent of Revere.

Ehrlich's push to fight beach algae comes as beach-goers face potential parking fee hikes.

The State House News Service reported that DCR plans to double the fee for parking at Nahant Beach to \$10. The Baker administration is hiking the parking fees for non-Massachusetts residents at Nahant and Nantasket Beach south of Boston to \$20, the News Service first reported in March.

Though he publicly opposes tax and fee increases, Gov. Charlie Baker did not move to reverse DCR fee increases after taking office in 2015.

The News Service reported DCR's fee hikes were pushed through more than two years ago by the outgoing Patrick administration.

"The previous administration actually raised the rates just before we came in, and so we've been rolling out that increase," DCR Commissioner Leo Roy told the News Service.

He said, "We're using the rate increase that was previously done by the previous administration, but it hadn't been rolled out across the state and that's what we're doing."

By July 1, Roy is hoping "we'll have the whole state on the new rates."

Roy told the News Service the fee hikes will help his agency increase its retained revenue to an estimated \$20 million in fiscal 2018, up \$2.3 million over the amount expected in the fiscal 2017 budget. The department is also seeking to make more money from permits issued for use of state parkland, Roy said.

DCR is allowed to keep 80 percent of the revenue it raises, said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matt Beaton, who told the News Service he expects DCR will raise a total of \$25 million — including \$5 million for the General Fund — and some estimates indicate the department could bring in a total of \$27 million.

Beaches in Nahant, Lynn, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull are among coastal recreation areas Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and MBC seek to protect.

According to its website, Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's current programs are "designed to restore and protect Boston Harbor and Massachusetts Bay, and share and reconnect all Bostonians, the region's residents, and especially underserved youth and teens and low-income families to the harbor, waterfront, beaches and islands we have worked so hard to restore and protect."

The Lynn and State House hearings will precede publication of a beach water quality study by the Beaches Science Advisory Committee.