

## MINUTES OF MEETING OF August 13, 2024

Hampton Beach State Park Accessibility Feasibility Study  
Focus Group – Jurisdictions

DATE PREPARED: August 13, 2024

LOCATION: Virtual

ATTENDEES:	Sara Ramsay	NH DNCR Program Assistant - Permits
	Bill Watson	NHDOT / Hampton Beach Area Commission
	John Nyhan*	Hampton Chamber of Commerce
	Johanna Lyons	NH DNCR State Park Planning & Development Specialist
	Nicole Rogers	GPI

\* (via Virtual Meeting Assistant)

PURPOSE: Focus Group Meeting – Jurisdictions

GPI led the discussion following a detailed Agenda. The meeting started with introductions followed by a project debrief and an open discussion period. The following topics were raised:

### **Key Barriers + Preliminary Recommendations**

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Nicole Rogers provided an overview of the key barriers and preliminary recommendations regarding accessibility at Hampton Beach State Park (HBSP). Rogers voiced that accessibility is a community responsibility and therefore, some recommendations fall to the responsibility of stakeholders outside of the NH State Parks. This focus group is a way to communicate some of these preliminary recommendations to the various stakeholder groups. In general, the recommendations are grouped into five main categories:

#### 1. **Transportation & Parking:**

- **Accessible Parking Spaces:** Recommendations include meeting dimensional standards for access aisles and van-designated spaces, dispersing accessible parking spaces more evenly, and potentially increasing the number of accessible spaces. There was also a suggestion to implement a timing and fee structure to encourage turnover in high-demand areas.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks + DOT*
- **Coordination with Route 1A DOT Project:** Improvements to sidewalks, ramps, and crosswalks along the seawall are critical. The focus is on ensuring safer crosswalks, bike lanes, and more accessible access points, which may involve relocating or adding wheelchair ramps.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks + DOT + Town of Hampton*
- **Public Transit Options:** As the community ages, there's a growing need for additional public transportation options to ensure access to and from the park for older adults and individuals with disabilities.
  - *Responsibility: Public Transit Providers + NH State Parks + Private + Local*

2. **Pedestrian Access:**

- **Conversion of Stairs to Ramps:** The preference for ramps over stairs was noted, leading to recommendations for converting stairs to ramps where possible and repairing existing railings.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks*
- **Enhanced Mobility Mats:** Extending and adding more mobility mats, including pull-off areas, to benefit individuals with disabilities, older adults, and families.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks + DOT*

3. **Recreation & Events:**

- **Visual and Audio Accessibility:** Recommendations include providing ASL interpreters, closed captioning, large screens, and sensory equipment to enhance accessibility during events. This also involves requiring events on state park land to have accessibility plans, including viewing platforms and shaded areas.
  - *Responsibility: Hampton Beach Village District + NH State Parks*
- **Adaptive Equipment:** There is a desire for more options for adaptive beach equipment, such as manually operated beach chairs and adaptive walkers, to cater to diverse visitor needs.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks*
- **Accessible Playgrounds:** Enhancing playgrounds to be accessible for children with disabilities.
  - *Responsibility: Hampton Beach Village District*

4. **Operations & Maintenance:**

- **Accessibility Coordinator:** A recommendation to designate a dedicated accessibility coordinator to oversee accessibility standards and coordinate with various interest groups.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks + Third Party Group*
- **Information and Wayfinding:** Addressing barriers related to information dissemination by improving wayfinding, language accessibility, and reservation systems for accessible amenities. This includes efforts to distribute information through senior housing complexes, independent living facilities, and other community hubs to reach those who may not have access to digital platforms.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks*

5. **Life Safety:**

- **Shade Structures and Emergency Facilities:** Recommendations include adding more shade structures with water stations and emergency medical care facilities.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks*
- **Maintenance for Safe Access:** Ensuring that ramps, stairs, sidewalks, and other access points are well-maintained and clear of obstructions to promote safe access for all visitors.
  - *Responsibility: NH State Parks + DOT + Town of Hampton*

These recommendations emphasize the importance of collaboration between state parks staff and external stakeholders, including the Department of Transportation (DOT) and local transit providers, to ensure that accessibility improvements are comprehensive and effective in meeting the needs of all visitors.

## Discussion Topics:

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### 1. Accessibility of Beach Wheelchairs and Access to Water:

- **Sara Ramsay** shared a personal experience while working with a client at her previous job at 1 Sky, an organization focused on assisting individuals with daily living. She recounted an incident where it was difficult to navigate a beach wheelchair provided by Hampton across the sand and into the water. This highlighted the broader issue of accessibility for those who want to experience the water but face significant physical barriers.
- **Nicole Rogers** responded by acknowledging that these challenges are well-known and under consideration. One solution being explored is the extension of blue mobility mats, which currently help individuals traverse the sand, to reach the high tide mark. However, Nicole noted that the dynamic tide system at Hampton presents insurance and safety challenges. The team is working with adaptive sports specialists to develop tailored recommendations to improve water access for individuals with mobility challenges.

### 2. Event Accessibility at Hampton Beach State Park:

- Events like the Sandcastle contest and Seafood Festival attract large crowds, making it difficult for individuals, especially those with mobility challenges, to fully participate. **Johanna Lyons** noted that the crowds along the railings at the Sandcastle contest often block the view for shorter individuals and those in wheelchairs. Similar issues were reported at the Seafood Festival, which is popular among assisted living communities.
- Proposed Solutions: Suggestions for improving event accessibility included visual and audio enhancements, designated seating areas, and providing shade under the Seashell Complex. There was also a discussion about creating more accessible pathways through crowded areas to ensure that everyone can enjoy the events.

### 3. Parking Challenges and Accessibility:

- **Bill Watson Jr.** discussed his personal experience as a parent of a child with mobility challenges, highlighting the difficulties with parking during busy events like the Sandcastle contest. He noted that while his daughter can walk on hard surfaces like pavement and concrete, navigating sand is much more challenging. The conversation underscored the need for better parking solutions and accessible pathways that extend closer to the water.

### 4. Route 1A Project and Its Impact on Accessibility:

- Project Overview: The Route 1A project is a significant infrastructure initiative aimed at improving the main thoroughfare along the beach. **Bill Watson Jr.** explained that a key focus of the project is ensuring that all crosswalks, sidewalks, and other public spaces comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The project covers a wide area, including the main beach and extending north of Boar's Head, addressing many areas that are currently not ADA compliant.
- Parking: Parking emerged as a critical issue, particularly in the context of the Route 1A project. **Bill Watson Jr.** noted that parking is a complex and often contentious topic in the area. The project aims to balance the needs of various stakeholders, including local businesses, residents, and state agencies. The availability and location of accessible parking spaces are of particular concern, with an emphasis on ensuring that these spaces are conveniently located near key amenities and are compliant with ADA standards.

- **Western Sidewalk:** The discussion highlighted the challenges associated with the Western sidewalk, especially near the casino area. **Johanna Lyons** pointed out that this sidewalk is crucial for accessing local businesses and ensuring that the area is fully accessible. The Route 1A project includes plans to improve the sidewalk's accessibility, but there are ongoing challenges related to jurisdiction, right-of-way issues, and the integration of local ordinances with state regulations.
- **Community Involvement:** The project involves collaboration with various stakeholders, including local businesses, residents, and state agencies. **Nicole Rogers** emphasized the importance of aligning the beach accessibility study's findings with the Route 1A project's goals to maximize the benefits for the community.

#### 5. **Barriers and Pedestrian Safety:**

- **Safety Measures:** The group discussed the installation of barriers to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic along Ocean Blvd. While these barriers were primarily introduced for safety reasons, there was concern about their impact on accessibility. **Johanna Lyons** mentioned that the barriers can make it difficult for drivers to see pedestrians, especially near crosswalks, and that not all crosswalks provide an accessible route, particularly near the casino area.
- **Potential Improvements:** The conversation highlighted the need to carefully consider the placement of barriers and ensure that they do not inadvertently create new accessibility challenges.

#### 6. **Business and Community Accessibility:**

- **Business Accessibility Assessments:** **Johanna Lyons** mentioned upcoming efforts with Access Navigators, an organization that assesses the accessibility of business communities. While some businesses on Route 1 have been assessed, many at the beach have not. The goal is to ensure that businesses are accessible to all, particularly in areas like the Western sidewalk near the casino, which plays a crucial role in accessing local businesses.
- **Coordination Among Stakeholders:** The discussion underscored the importance of collaboration between businesses, state agencies, and community groups to enhance overall accessibility. There was a suggestion to appoint an accessibility coordinator to oversee and integrate these efforts across different stakeholders.

#### 7. **Communication and Outreach:**

- **Challenges in Public Engagement:** **Nicole Rogers** expressed difficulties in gathering sufficient responses to surveys related to the beach accessibility study. She inquired about the public outreach methods used for the Route 1A project. **Bill Watson Jr.** explained that their consultant has employed targeted marketing efforts to engage both seasonal visitors and year-round residents.
- **Opportunities for Collaboration:** There was a discussion about the importance of continuous public engagement, particularly in capturing diverse perspectives. **Johanna Lyons** noted that early surveys for the Route 1A project focused on bike and pedestrian issues, but there remains a need to gather more input on broader accessibility concerns.

#### 8. **Suggestions for Improvement:**

- **Accessibility Coordinator:** The idea of appointing an accessibility coordinator was discussed as a way to ensure that all accessibility initiatives are well-coordinated and effectively implemented. This

coordinator could work with various stakeholders to maintain a community-wide focus on accessibility.

- **Cost-Effective Changes:** **Johanna Lyons** pointed out that many accessibility improvements do not require significant financial investment but rather a shift in perspective and practice. Simple changes, like using duct tape to test new layouts, can be an iterative way to enhance accessibility over time.
- **Sara Ramsay** suggested that information/surveys be shared with organizations requesting special use permits at the beach.

### Recommendations Summarized:

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- **Accessibility Coordinator:** The idea of appointing an accessibility coordinator was discussed as a way to ensure that all accessibility initiatives are well-coordinated and effectively implemented. This coordinator could work with various stakeholders to maintain a community-wide focus on accessibility.
- **Cost-Effective Changes:** Johanna Lyons pointed out that many accessibility improvements do not require significant financial investment but rather a shift in perspective and practice. Simple changes, like using duct tape to test new layouts, can be an iterative way to enhance accessibility over time.
- Carefully consider the placement of barriers and ensure that they do not inadvertently create new accessibility challenges.
- Align the beach accessibility study's findings with the Route 1A project's goals to maximize the benefits for the community.
- Suggestions for improving event accessibility included visual and audio enhancements, designated seating areas, and providing shade under the Seashell Complex. There was also a discussion about creating more accessible pathways through crowded areas to ensure that everyone can enjoy the events.
- Share information with agencies/organizations requesting special use permits for beach activities.

### References Shared:

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- Route 1A Project Website: <https://www.dot.nh.gov/projects-plans-and-programs/project-center/hampton-40797>
- NHDOT ADA Title II Program: [ADA Title II Program | Department of Transportation \(nh.gov\)](#)
- Access Navigators: [Access Navigators - Taking the mystery out of accessibility](#)

### Action Items:

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- Nicole to follow up with email containing the meeting transcript and notes.
- Participants encouraged to take and share the survey within their networks.
- Suggestions for further groups to contact for more diverse input.

These minutes constitute our understanding of the discussions and conclusions reached. Please advise us within ten (10) days, in writing, of any exceptions or corrections.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole Rogers  
Project Manager

cc: Robert White, GPI  
Travis Pryor, GEI  
Alison Brady, GEI