

RECOMMENDATIONS APPLICABLE TO ALL BEACHES (March 2024)

Update on Progress for Tisbury (October 11, 2024)

Progress/Update Observations *in red italics.*

These recommendations apply to most¹ or all the surveyed beaches and take into account that each town and other entities operate multiple beaches and therefore apply many of the same policies, procedures and practices to all their beaches. These recommendations also recognize and reflect the possibility that improvements may be phased in over more than one year.

1. Publicize and otherwise inform the public of the accessibility features of your beach on your own website and print publications as well as through other websites, social media, print publications, and rating sites that the public commonly uses. Below is a non-exhaustive list of suggestions of the latter.

There is a very good parks and recreation page on the town's website. There is a link to each beach and on the pages for the two Owen beaches "wheelchair access" is noted. That is not the case with respect to Tashmoo, nor is there any other reference to accessibility at any of the beaches.

2. Determine and install appropriate signage near and/or at the beach with regard to accessible parking, accessible entrances, accessible facilities, large beach wheelchair(s) and floating wheelchair(s). *No change.*

2A. With regard to **large beach wheelchairs** we have recommended that at least one be available per beach and generally onsite at the beach entrance or lifeguard station or alternatively a phone call away. As to **floating wheelchairs**, we are recommending they should only be available in a similar fashion but only when a lifeguard is present and weather conditions permitting. While both types of chairs can be locked up. If they are, there should be a quick, consumer-friendly and accessible way to unlock them for use. FYI—At least three or four town or other entities, keep their wheelchairs or floating chairs unlocked, including over-night, and in one or two cases, year-round without apparent incident.

3. Ensure that involved staff have the requisite information to carry out their responsibilities with respect to accessibility e.g. staff who are the contact points for inquiries, calls and information; lifeguards; or other onsite or offsite staff. *Undetermined.*

4. We recommend that the elements and actions necessary to achieve accessibility be organized into an action plan with timelines and responsible persons and be approved by the necessary authorities to best assure that the goals are achieved. Also, set timelines for easily achieved elements so that they can be in place for the upcoming season. For other elements, a phased-in approach over one or more of the following seasons may be reasonable or necessary.

None provided and not aware of creation of an action plan.

¹ Some towns or other entities may be implementing some of these procedures or practices already in which case they might be reviewed to see if they are in need of modification or updating.

5. One additional caveat. The recommendations made for each beach took into account that there are recognized situations in which full accessibility cannot be achieved. These are incorporated in various federal and state laws and standards. Most relevant are exceptions contained in the USDA Accessibility Guidebook, pp. 31-35, 76.² Four exceptions to full accessibility compliance are recognized—

- a. Where compliance is not practical due to terrain.
- b. Compliance cannot be accomplished with the prevailing construction practices.
- c. Where compliance with the technical requirement would fundamentally alter the function or purpose of the facility or the setting.
- d. Where compliance is precluded because cultural, historic, or significant natural features are protected under federal, state, or local law.

In the beaches we reviewed across the Island, with very few exceptions we found that full accessibility compliance was feasible. However, we did not perform the kind of in depth assessment that may have revealed all the facts or factors which would trigger one the exceptions. That said under the USDA guidebook, given modern technology and the importance of accessibility, the standards for each exception are very strict. And even when full accessibility cannot be achieved, as much accessibility as possible should be provided.

6. For any significant changes or improvements to the beaches, it is recommended that input be obtained from the public, including especially from individuals with disabilities or other groups most directly affected, such as senior citizens. This could be done by surveying, solicitation of written or electronic communication, and/or at a public hearing.

Not apparent though on the main website pages on parks and recreation, there is an invitation to the public to provide input on parks. That could be expanded to explicitly include beaches.

Here are some apps or websites that can, and in some cases already provide, information about accessible elements and features about Martha's Vineyard beaches.

- Trails MV (maintained by Sheriff's Meadow Foundation)
- MV Chamber of Commerce <https://www.mvy.com/beaches-marthas-vineyard/?ss360SearchTerm=beaches>
- Vineyard Visitor by MV Times <https://vineyardvisitor.com/category/see-do/beaches/https://vineyardvisitor.com/2017/09/11/shoulder-season-way-onto-lamberts-cove-beach/>
- <https://mvol.com/beaches/> MV Gazette
- MA DCR. https://www.mass.gov/info-details/accessible-beaches?_gl=1*1suykta*_ga*NDI2ODMxMzE2LjE3MTAwMzcyMTY.*_ga_MCLPEGW7WM*MTcxMDAzNzMyNi4xLjAuMTcxMDAzNzMyNi4wLjAuMA

Richard Cohen, Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities
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² <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Accessibility-Guide-Book.pdf>

