

**Oak Bluffs Town Beach<sup>1</sup>**  
Update on Progress on Implementation of the March 2024 Recommendations<sup>2</sup>  
and Compliance with Accessibility Standards<sup>3</sup>

Note: The original March 2024 recommendations are in black conventional text. *Progress report observations and findings are in red italics, with further recommendations in bold, red italics.*

*Overall, Oak Bluffs has made highly commendable and significant progress as reflected in the observations under each original recommendation. The reason for the somewhat extensive narrative compared with some other Island beaches is that much of the work that remains is more nuanced as most of all the core or main improvements have been made.*

We understand from the survey responses that plans have been developed for several areas mentioned in the survey. Our recommendations support those plus call for several others to help achieve accessibility.

**I. Southern Section from SSA to Waban Park (about .3 miles)**

- A. In the [2023] survey responses it is mentioned that at the Pay/Inkwell beach there is a need to improve grading as well as to extend the beach mats to the high-water mark. We agree. This of course is the only section in this area that has beach mats and beach and floating wheelchairs. The necessary grading to eliminate or minimize the cross slope and the running slope especially on the Inkwell side is somewhat challenging but doable and may among other things require some retention or other method to address the cross sloping and to assure that the route does not erode or deteriorate. For allowable maximums on cross and running slopes, see attached resource sheet or the link in the footnote below.

*To address particularly the cross slopes on the south side of the beach, a substantial quantity of sand was brought onto the beach and placed parallel to the accessible beach mat route to level off the cross slope. It was successful as only a minor, compliant cross slope remains. It has held fast throughout the summer and on the 9/11/24 visit as well as a 11/21/22 visit. **As beach replenishment is often a temporary measure, this area requires monitoring in the event further replenishment is needed periodically or if a more permanent, hard solution becomes necessary, such as a wooden stable walkway.** The Park Commission is aware of this and committed to it, including consideration of a more permanent solution in order to maintain a compliant accessible route.*

***As stated in the general recommendations Oak Bluffs should have a maintenance plan to include daily or as needed sweeping of mats.** On multiple occasions I have seen portions of the mats on both*

<sup>1</sup> The Oak Bluffs town beach encompasses the strip of beach from Waban Park to the Steamship Authority Wharf (aka Pay/Inkwell Beach covered in Section I and North Bluff Beach from the Steamship Authority Wharf for the Harbor Jetties covered in Section II).

<sup>2</sup> The original recommendations were furnished in March 2024 and were based principally on June 2023 beach operators' self-surveys and September and October 2023 follow up on-site visits by Dukes County Assoc. Commissioner for Disabilities. This progress report was based on site visits on August 29 and September 11, 2024, other visits before and after, Oak Bluffs April 23, 2024 draft action plan, and verbal reports from Parks' Commission Chair, Tony Lima.

<sup>3</sup> For specifications/dimensions for beaches, see attached resource sheet or the USDA's Forest Service *Accessibility Guidebook for Outdoor Recreation and Trails*, 8/2012 <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Accessibility-Guide-Book.pdf>.

Field Code Changed

*the south and north sides of this beach relatively heavily covered with sand, defeating the purpose of the mat. A small vehicle next to the lifeguard stand sometimes blocks part of the mat adjacent to the lifeguard stand.*

*Of note, and not part of our recommendations, at the first entrance down from the pay/inkwell beach (going north), Oak Bluffs placed a wooden walkway (smartly salvaged from Marinelli Beach) adjoining the bottom of the stairway to that section of the beach. The wooden walkway runs from the stairway about 50 feet toward the water. The stairway, itself was installed about nine years ago. Because of the steepness of the slope from the sidewalk down to the beach, a stairway was needed and permissible. While the stairway is not usable by a wheelchair user and likely others with significant mobility impairments, this well constructed, dual landing stairway coupled with the wooden walkway on the beach, makes it much easier to access this section of the beach for many, young and old alike, with more mild or moderate physical disabilities who are able to use stairs. When there on an August 2024 visit, I observed an elderly women alone using a walker exiting the beach comfortably first using the wooden walkway and then the stairway holding the walker in one hand and the railing with the other.*

- B. There should be at least two designated accessible parking spaces at the Pay/Inkwell beach entrance with appropriate curb cuts. One or two accessible spaces should be provided at one or two other entrances. While the other entrances may not be accessible to wheelchair users or others with significant mobility challenges, there are individuals with moderate disabilities who need accessible parking close to those entrances. This includes seniors with some impairment, people with pulmonary issues who cannot walk long distances, and others who have accessibility placards. We recognize that parking along Seaview Avenue is under the jurisdiction of the State and thus they would need to be contacted.
- C. Accessible parking signage and markings on pavement are needed. And most or all other entrances should have accessibility signage pointing to the Pay/Inkwell beach entrance.

Update with respect to B & C above.

- (1) *Oak Bluffs is planning to create accessible spaces and curb cuts at the pay/inkwell beach entrance. This is scheduled to be done prior to the 2025 season. **This should include accessible parking signage and markings on pavement, as well as a sign indicating that this is the accessible entrance. It should be high enough (at least 6/6.5 feet) so drivers or passengers in passing vehicles can see them over parked cars.***
- (2) *A sign at the first entrance down from the pay/inkwell beach (going north) pointing to the accessible pay/inkwell beach entrance has been installed. However, it is only 2 to 3 feet off the and for the reasons mentioned above it should be raised to at least the 6/6.5 feet level. Additionally, given quasi-accessible nature of this entrance and the relatively few accessible parking spaces along this whole strip, it is recommended that at least one accessible space be designated next this entrance.*
- (3) *At the entrance just south of the pay/inkwell entrance (across from Waban Park), a sign pointing the accessible entrance should likewise be installed and at the recommended height. It would also be desirable, although not perhaps required, that at the second entrance down from pay/inkwell (going north) such signage pointing to the pay/inkwell should be installed..*

## II. North Bluff Beach

- A. The second half of the ramp is submerged under the sand. It is understood that there are plans to address that issue and then provide a beach mat from the ramp's end to the high-water mark. Given that this is a relatively new ramp, and the one accessible entrance onto the beach, we recommend this issue be prioritized, if it has not already.

*The above has been done. Several issues remain that were observed on several visits during the summer. One, is that the last part of the cement ramp and first part of the connecting route is covered with a heavy amount of sand. Periodic sweeping often enough to keep the route free from sand is needed. Two, there is also at least a one-inch rise from the cement ramp to the adjoining walkway, exceeding the ½ inch maximum. Beveling is needed. A pre-made hard rubber beveling strip installed at the entrance to the walkway to the public restrooms in Menemsha may offer a simple solution. Photos available. Three, a three-inch gap between the two walkways was also observed and needs to be addressed. It should be no more than a half inch.*

- B. Accessible signage at the ramp entrance, visible from the boardwalk and the street should be installed as well as signage at the other beach entrances pointing to this accessible entrance.

*This has not yet been accomplished. The following is recommended going from south to north. With the exception of the first one listed, all should be at least 6/6.5 feet high, and all should have the wheelchair symbol, in addition to a verbal message.*

- (1) At the beach entrance adjacent to the steamship authority, and specifically at the top of the stairway down to the beach, it is suggested that a sign be installed (and it could possibly be on the existing railing) stating "Accessible Beach Entrance" with an arrow. The reason for referencing an "accessible beach entrance" as opposed to just the term "Access" or "Accessible Entrance" with an arrow is to avoid confusion that could arise as to whether this is referring to an accessible entrance to the nearby steamship authority office or wharf as opposed to an accessible entrance to the beach. This makes it clear that it is the beach.*
  - (2) By the handicapped parking area on the street just to the right of the rest rooms, a sign with the same message mounted 6/6 ½ feet should be installed.*
  - (3) At the middle entrance (one entrance south of the accessible entrance), the same sign should be installed. There appears to be room to do this on the existing signpost.*
  - (4) At the accessible entrance itself, a sign should be mounted stating "Accessible Entrance." It could be mounted on the existing handicapped parking sign.*
- C. Ideally at least one beach wheelchair should be provided in this area, and if lifeguards are present, a floating wheelchair as well, to be used water conditions permitting. *Chairs are being ordered.*

*III. See also accompanying Recommendations Applicable to all Beaches. For an update on the progress made on the cross-cutting recommendations with respect to this beach and Oak Bluffs other beaches, see accompanying Progress report on those recommendations.*

Richard Cohen, Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities  
November 20, 2024