

Newport Beach Commission 2023 Annual Report to City Council

Meetings:

The Commission held twelve meetings during 2023.

Commission Members and Attendance in 2023

Richard Klaffky - Chair (No Absences)
Mark Fitzgerald – Vice Chair (One Absence)
Aly Oakley (Secretary) – (Two Absences)
Demetri Damaskos – (Two Absences)
Elaine Trainor – (Two Absences)
Scott Skuncik – (Two Absences)
Roan-William Iribarren- (Two Absences)
Nick Zambotta (No Absences)

- Elaine Trainor resigned from the Commission in September upon reaching end of her term
- Nick Zambotta joined the Commission in November
- The Commission has two vacancies at year end.

Activities

- Proposal for Construction of New Beach Facilities

A prominent issue before the Commission in 2023 continues to be the development of the proposal for the future of three principal structures at Easton's Beach- the Rotunda, the Snack Bar Building, and the Carousel Building. Upon the City Council receiving the proposal by DBVW Architects in October of 2022 along with the preliminary cost estimate of \$35 million, it became clear that the proposal needed to be substantially downsized.

On January 4, the Commission submitted its Review of the Plan to the City Manager, the Director of Public Services and the City Council. This Review focused on ranking the priority of various aspects of the proposal given the Commission's view that the primary mission of Easton's Beach is to provide ocean access and beach recreation to citizens of Newport and its visitors. This requires space for staff and equipment providing core support services such as lifeguards, first aid, maintenance, safe and adequate parking, ADA compliant rest rooms and access to the existing dunes and sands. Secondly, the mission is to provide access to amenities which will enhance the Beach experience. Accordingly, the Near Term Recommendations in the Commission's Review were:

1. Continued funding of engineering and design for beach nourishment to protect the beach itself, its facilities and its surrounding area from increased threat of rising water levels, and inundation from storm surge.
2. Identify external funding sources with respect to improved resilience of the area
3. Relocate the Carousel to storage to prepare for demolition of the Carousel building
4. Convert the Beach Store to Staff and Operational Needs

5. Demolish the Carousel Building which is not salvageable
6. Restore the Rotunda building to functioning space

On March 10, as discussions with city management turned toward the specifics of the demolition phase of the project, the Beach Commission submitted follow-up recommendations as to the sequence of which buildings should be demolished first and which should be retained until the final construction phase was ready for implementation. These recommendations were:

1. Move the Carousel to storage
2. Demolish the Carousel Building
3. Make the Rotunda and Snack Bar Buildings viable through to the new construction phase (assuming no dangerous deterioration in condition)
4. Do not introduce food trucks as a Snack Bar alternative.

Through these actions we believe that the Beach can continue to function at near normal levels through to the new construction phase.

- **Focus on Water Quality factors at Easton's Stream and Easton's Beach**

A second focus of the Beach Commission's efforts in 2023 has been to examine more closely the factors leading to high bacteria measurements in Easton's Stream. Clean Ocean Access made available its historical bacteria measurements from 2009-2022 which show consistently elevated enterococci bacteria levels in the Stream. Although the Stream itself is not a swimming area, its very high bacteria counts given its proximity to the Beach are a serious ongoing concern. In this study the Beach Commission met with several experts in such water quality measurements including:

Casey Tremper- Program Manager Clean Ocean Access

Dr. Jameson Chace – Professor of Biology and Environmental Sciences at Salve Regina University

Robert Schultz, Director of Utilities for the City of Newport.

It is not clear at this time what the precise sources of this bacteria are, and the likelihood is that there are many diverse sources. However the data does show that there is often an increase in bacteria counts that occurs between the UV facility and the Ocean. We see this as an important water quality issue that warrants close and continuing inspection. Incremental improvements can make a major difference over time. Consequently, on December 10, the Commission submitted its recommendations to the City Manager, The Director of Utilities and the City Council requesting:

1. Funding the exploration of new technologies for bacteria neutralization
2. Funding planning for the end-of-life of the UV Plant currently estimated at 5-7 years.
3. Supporting engagement with Middletown to explore possible contamination sources around their pumping station
4. Supporting investigative projects to determine sources of Easton's Bay contamination beyond the mouth of the Stream

- **Sea Wall Repair-**
- The sea wall along Memorial Boulevard bordering Easton's Beach is in serious disrepair. Representatives of the Commission have pointed out safety risks at the many impaired sections and requested that the city address these concerns. Representatives of the City have responded that Memorial Boulevard is a state road and that the wall is not a city asset. Commission representatives later inquired of the DOT but were told that the construction of the wall pre-dates the DOT itself, is therefore not owned by DOT and repairs are not DOT responsibility. The Commission has found cost estimates for such repairs continues to seek a way to complete the repairs along this high traffic walkway.

Respectfully Submitted
Newport Beach Commission
December 28, 2023