

East Providence Harbor Management Commission Report

on

Public Access to the City's Shoreline

September 1, 2009

A review of the fifty-four (54) public access points – as identified in the City of East Providence Harbor Management Plan (HMP) dated 1992 – was conducted and completed per the direction of the Chair of the Harbor Management Commission.

In general, the 54 public access points range from large public parks, to dead end or “paper” streets, and to five-foot (5’) paths between residences. Similarly, their conditions range from well-maintained and accessible, to overgrown and impassible, and/or intentionally or unintentionally disguised by abutting property owners.

The attached spreadsheet includes all public access points listed in the 1992 HMP and was revised to include adjacent addresses as well as the Assessor’s plat map numbers. Significant findings follow:

The following access points were found to be generally accessible and convenient to use: All City and State Parks, Veteran’s Memorial Parkway parking areas, East Bay Bicycle Path entrance areas, Beach Road (#17), Richmond Point (#’s 18-21) - which could be improved as recommended in 1992 - and most of the points on “The Terrace,” to include Terrace Avenue (#’s 73, 76, 77 & 78), all Riverside Drive sites (#’s 80-83) and a Bullocks Point Avenue site (#84), which is a site that was previously mislabeled as Riverside Drive.

The following group of access points is comprised mainly of the terminus of dead end or paper streets – although some are perpendicular to Terrace Avenue - and, in order to access the waterfront, they require transit over rocks, through brush, and down steep slopes or direct drop-offs such as seawalls, bulkheads or bridge/pier abutments. They all are assigned a “slope” factor of 3 or 4, and should be considered hazardous in terms of passages for those who choose – at their own risk - to utilize them. They are site numbers 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 72, 74, 75 and 79.

Other dead end and paper street access points, which are less hazardous, are located on the northern reaches of Bullock Cove, above the causeway and bike path. They are numbers 22 through 32 with slight and moderate slope factors of 1 and 2, respectively, but are generally obstructed by vegetation and lack established paths or trails. While they make for good neighborhood access, limited parking, lack of water at low tide, and there locations well off the main roads make them ostensibly less desirable destinations.

Of the access points that are seemingly safe for transit, all need to be better marked to aid public access, as it is difficult to ascertain where, exactly, a 5' to 40' span of city/state property begins and ends. While some access points are relatively clear due to the overall narrowness created by hedges or fences, others are longer and wider expanses of land. In the case of many of the wider expanses, some of these access points are blocked, or partially blocked, by stored boats, temporary structures, gardens, and parked vehicles. A survey – or a professional review of existing survey results – would be necessary before placement of signage and appropriate enforcement action could be conducted.

Furthermore, two sites listed do not readily appear on the Assessor's maps. While site #9, on Maple Avenue in Riverside, is generally considered a public access point (which is usually blocked by an RV), it is not apparent on Assessor's Map 312. In fact, there is no break on the map between the adjoining privately-own properties, nor is Maple Avenue continued as a paper street to the water's edge, as is the case with other access points. Likewise, Warren Avenue (site #4) does appear to terminate at the water's edge, but at the railroad tracks (shown on Assessor's Map 016) some 500' from the river. It does not appear to pick up on the other side of the old tracks, where it would then have to cross Water Street before reaching the river's edge over 400' feet away. These issues should be reviewed by the Assessor or Planning Department in order to determine if they are actually public access points. Whatever the case, presently, neither area allows safe passage to the water anywhere in their general proximity.

Finally, although not on the current public access list, arguably the best beach in East Providence is generally thought to be inaccessible due to private property signage and rope fencing. However, the eastern terminus of Sea View Drive – according to Assessor’s Map 415 – runs 50’ beyond the current curbing at the corner of Riverside Drive and cuts a swath of approximately 30’ to where it abuts the U. S. Government owned beach and jetty. If the City of East Providence was to clear a swath of what appears to be city land, even 5-feet in width as is the case of many city-owned access points, it would provide access to the 2.15 acre publicly-owned (by the USA) beach which is currently only anecdotally accessible by boat. This minor improvement of city-owned property would provide an outstanding destination for area residents who are barred from the adjacent private property. Further improvements could make it suitable for parking and/or a small park area, such as Lewis Park, but determining ownership and access rights should first be reviewed by the Planning Department in conjunction with the U. S. Government.

In summary, as in 1992, the 2009 Harbor Management Commission recommends that the City Planning Department, or the appropriate public works and enforcement entities available to the City Manager, take action to ensure all access points are cleared of private property, maintained and – in the long term – improved for public use.

Additionally, all public access points should be identified with discreet signage or markers to ensure public knowledge and to prevent trespassing on adjacent private property.

While the Harbor Management Commission was pleased to perform this review, the actions recommended above should be undertaken by paid city employees, with the approval of the City Council and Manager.