

A Beach within Reach

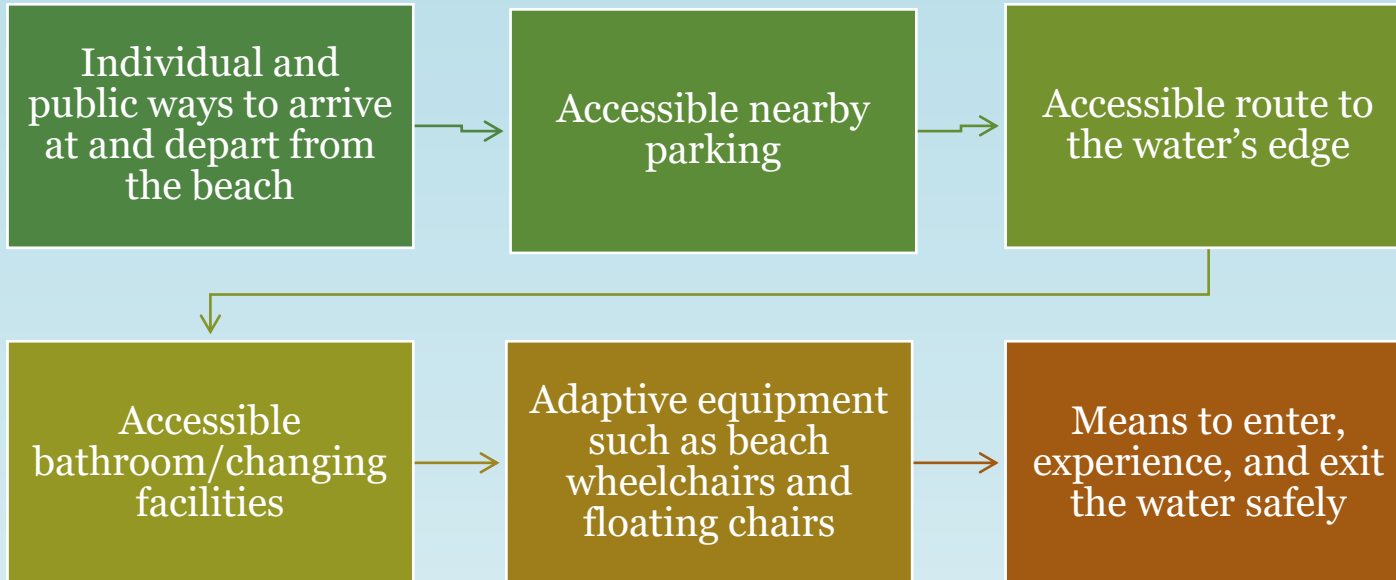
An Accessibility Initiative
of
Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard,
Martha's Vineyard Community Services Disability Services, and
The Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities



An Update, Summary of Phases I & II, and the Work Ahead

February 2024





What Makes a Beach “within Reach?”

- Individual and public ways to arrive at and depart from the beach
- Accessible nearby parking
- Accessible route to the water's edge
- Accessible bathroom/changing facilities
- Adaptive equipment such as beach wheelchairs and floating chairs
- Means to enter, experience, and exit the water safely for swimming or boating

Project Phases and Timeline

- Phase I (June-September 2023) – Survey of accessibility features, based on current law and best practices, completed by island Beach Managers
- Phase II (September-October 2023) – Site visits to island beaches by the Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities and trained volunteers
- Phase III (October 2023 – April 2024) – Data analysis; feedback to Beach Managers with short-term recommendations for accessibility improvements; reports of aggregate findings and presentations to public and community leaders
- Phase IV (Spring 2024) – Opportunity for public comments; ongoing collaboration toward longer range action plans and improvements

Phase I (June-September 2023)

- Managers of every public beach on Martha's Vineyard contacted by phone and email to describe the project and request their responses to a 27-question online survey
- Survey accompanied by resource materials detailing current laws and best practices for reference and information
- Data collected and analyzed for 34 beaches throughout Martha's Vineyard (Towns of Aquinnah, Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Vineyard Haven and West Tisbury)
- Including beaches managed by each town, Dukes County, the Trustees of Reservations and the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Commission.
- After removing duplicates and other replies outside the scope of the project, there are 30 beaches represented in this report.

Phase I Survey Questions

- Accessibility from parking or transit stops to beach entrances and from beach entrances to high water marks?
- Availability of accessible changing and toilet facilities?
- Availability of large-wheel chairs for sand and floating chairs?
- Presence of staff or volunteers to assist (including training provided)?
- Whether and how they are publicizing their accessible features and equipment?
- Whether they've done their own assessment of compliance and have a transition or compliance plan?
- Anything they wish to add



Phase II (September-October 2023)

User experience site visits were conducted by the Dukes County Associate Commissioner for Disabilities and trained volunteers to provide their perspectives on accessibility.

Next:

- Follow up data sharing and conversations with Beach Managers
- Recommendations to the Beach Managers including potential short term improvements effective Summer 2024
- Project updates and reports to the partners' organizations and the public



Some of What We Learned from Beach Managers and Follow Up Visits

Martha's Vineyard beaches are as diverse as the people who use them.

- Several beaches are relatively close to being a “beach within reach.”
- Over 2/3 of beaches (21) have at least one accessible parking space, but just over half (17) report having an accessible route to the beach entrance from the parking lot or transit stop.
- Based on the Beach Managers' surveys and follow up visits, no beach is fully accessible to the water's edge or, for a tidal beach, high tide level, but as many as 1/3 of them (11) are close to meeting standards.
- Half (15) of the sites have beach wheelchairs with large wheels designed to go over sand.
- Floating beach wheelchairs are rare.
- Nearly half (14) have accessible toilet facilities.
- Few have trained staff or volunteers with responsibility to help with accessibility issues.
- Beach accessibility features are not widely publicized.

There are numerous opportunities for improvements, some at relatively low cost and effort.

What's happening now and next?

- Phase III (October 2023 – April 2024) – Data analysis, feedback to beach managers, release of report summarizing findings, partner and public updates, with short term recommendations for Summer 2024
- Phase IV (Spring 2024) – Opportunity for public comments
- Spring 2024 and forward – Collaboration toward longer range action plans and improvements

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