

MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER
NO.

LTC # 026-2014

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LETTER TO COMMISSION
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TO: Mayor Philip Levine and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jimmy L. Morales, City Manager

DATE: 01/14/2014

SUBJECT: Response to Sutnick Hour 12/11/13 issues raised by Ms Marcella Paz Cohen

The purpose of Letter to Commission (LTC) is to provide information in response to issues raised at the December 11th commission meeting by Marcela Paz Cohen related to disability issues on Miami Beach.

With reference to the 53rd street area where a CIP project is currently in process: The construction of the new restroom facilities at 53rd Street is currently underway. The provision of temporary restroom facilities were not included in the original scope of work of the project, however the capital improvements office is currently finalizing the procurement process for the provision of an ADA-compliant restroom trailer facility for the remaining duration of the project. The bathrooms are expected to be on site within the next 3 to 4 weeks. The contact person in CIP is Thais Viera ext 2702 for additional information.

Secondly, in regard to Ocean Rescue; the city currently has 29 lifeguard stands positioned in order to provide lifeguard services to all publicly accessible beaches. The criteria for publicly accessible is a beach that is adjacent to a city parking lot or city park and has a designated beach entrance. The location of lifeguard stands is reflected in the maps accessible through the links below, which also distinguishes single towers from double towers. Currently there are 9 double lifeguard towers and on a daily basis, the operations supervisor may use extra personnel if available or overtime at his discretion to increase the number of double towers to address changing conditions. Ms Paz Cohen's comments generated discussion on two issues.

1. Doubling all towers: This approach is not the most effective way of increasing coverage of the beach. The subject of lifeguard coverage is increasingly coming up at various meetings and the sentiment normally expressed by those citizens who feel coverage is not sufficient normally argues either that there is not sufficient coverage in the condo areas of the beach or hours of operations are not long enough. Doubling all towers would not address either of these two concerns, and while two lifeguards can certainly provide better coverage than one, this approach simply increases service in areas already serviced without increasing coverage to areas that are not publicly accessible, but frequented by residents who perceive the current standard as not being responsive to residents needs. Rather than doubling the number of personnel on the towers without the benefit of a comprehensive reevaluation of coverage, I propose a more comprehensive approach so that citizen input can be considered and quantifiable data can be generated to redefine the standard of cover and allocate funding to implement any additional coverage deemed to be beneficial.

2. Placing rope lines in front of all towers: While the rope lines provide assistance to persons with disabilities or persons who do not know how to swim, the benefit has to be carefully balanced against the danger of facilitating their entrance into a potentially dangerous environment. A person who requires the assistance of a rope line to enter the ocean very likely has a reduced ability to self rescue or even to alert others to their need for help when an unanticipated condition develops, thereby placing an increased demand on lifeguards. Ideally rope lines should only be placed where the benefit of a double tower is available. There are currently rope lines in place that are not consistent with this reasoning. My recommendation is that any future placement of lines be coordinated with the Fire Chief who will coordinate with the Ocean rescue administration to ensure lines are only placed where resources allow for the on duty personnel to prevent hazards or react to the needs of the persons using the rope line to access the ocean.

Lastly, in terms of developing an ADA beach. The Disability Access Committee, and specifically Sabrina Cohen (Sabrina Cohen Foundation) are leading the discussion on developing an ADA beach.

For additional information please contact Marcia Monserrat

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