

New Bedford Port Authority Provides Statement on Marine Park and Playground Parking

The following was provided by the New Bedford Port Authority:

The children and families who use the Noah's Place playground have always been given front and center consideration in the work to formulate a new parking policy at Marine Park, especially families with children with disabilities. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the many efforts undertaken over the past several months to engage supporters of Noah's Place, refine the parking approach based on their feedback, and ensure that these children and families are not unfairly burdened.

First and foremost, it is important for families with children with disabilities to understand that ANY vehicle displaying a valid disability placard/plate has free and unlimited duration parking access at ANY parking space located in Marine Park, whether metered or not, and whether designated as a handicap space or not.

Vehicles with handicap placards/plates will never be ticketed at the more than 200 spaces located across the playground and park. (There are four spaces at the playground specifically reserved for vehicles with disability placards/plates, and eight spaces within the parking area designated for the marina).

This practice is consistent with the approach elsewhere in the City of New Bedford and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. City parking supervisors do not ticket vehicles with disability placards at downtown meters, and vehicles with disability placards are not charged at state parks, state beaches, or other ADA-accessible facilities across the state.

Families using vehicles without handicap placards/plates have 25 dedicated spaces adjacent to the playground available to them. These families are being provided free parking during the first two hours of their visit to the playground.

The new parking policy is designed to be a seasonal, text-to-pay program, in place from April 15 to October 31. Signage at the 29 (25+4) total playground spots and the 172 (164+8) total Marine Park spots will provide instructions and background information for the text-to-pay program. The same program was implemented successfully in the summer of 2021 at New Bedford public beaches.

As noted above, visitors who sign-in via a phone-based app receive two free hours at the playground. These visitors receive a text message 15 minutes prior to the expiration of their two free hours. They can then choose to extend their time via their phone. Mistaken claims have been made to the media claiming that the app would automatically charge visitors for additional time if visitors fail to “check-out” via the app. This is not correct. Visitors can simply leave at any time without taking any further action, without concern about charges or enforcement.

The new parking policy for the playground and Marine Park came before the Park Board on two separate occasions, in February and March. Supporters of Noah’s Place were engaged well before any Park Board votes took place, and offered input on several issues, including the number of initial hours made free to families without handicap placards/plates who visit the playground.

The need for a new parking policy became evident over the summer of 2021 as the seasonal demand on parking spaces and a related increase in trash, drew widespread complaints from families, recreational boaters, and other users of the Marine Park. The New Bedford Port Authority and City of New Bedford Department of Parks, Recreation, and Beaches, worked together

for several months to understand the parking needs of all users, while taking into account the special considerations of families with children with disabilities.

The policy reflects the overall priority placed on family needs: All vehicles with handicap placards/plates can park anywhere for free, for an unlimited duration. For the first time, dedicated spaces are provided to playground visitors. Families receive free parking for a period of time that covers the duration of many playground visits. And any revenues generated from parking will be redirected back into improvements on site.

The City and Port Authority are committed to continually assessing the operation of the parking policy over the coming season and making adjustments as appropriate.

For media inquiries please contact Mike Lawrence, City of New Bedford Public Information Officer at (508) 979-1410, or Michael.Lawrence@NewBedford-Ma.gov