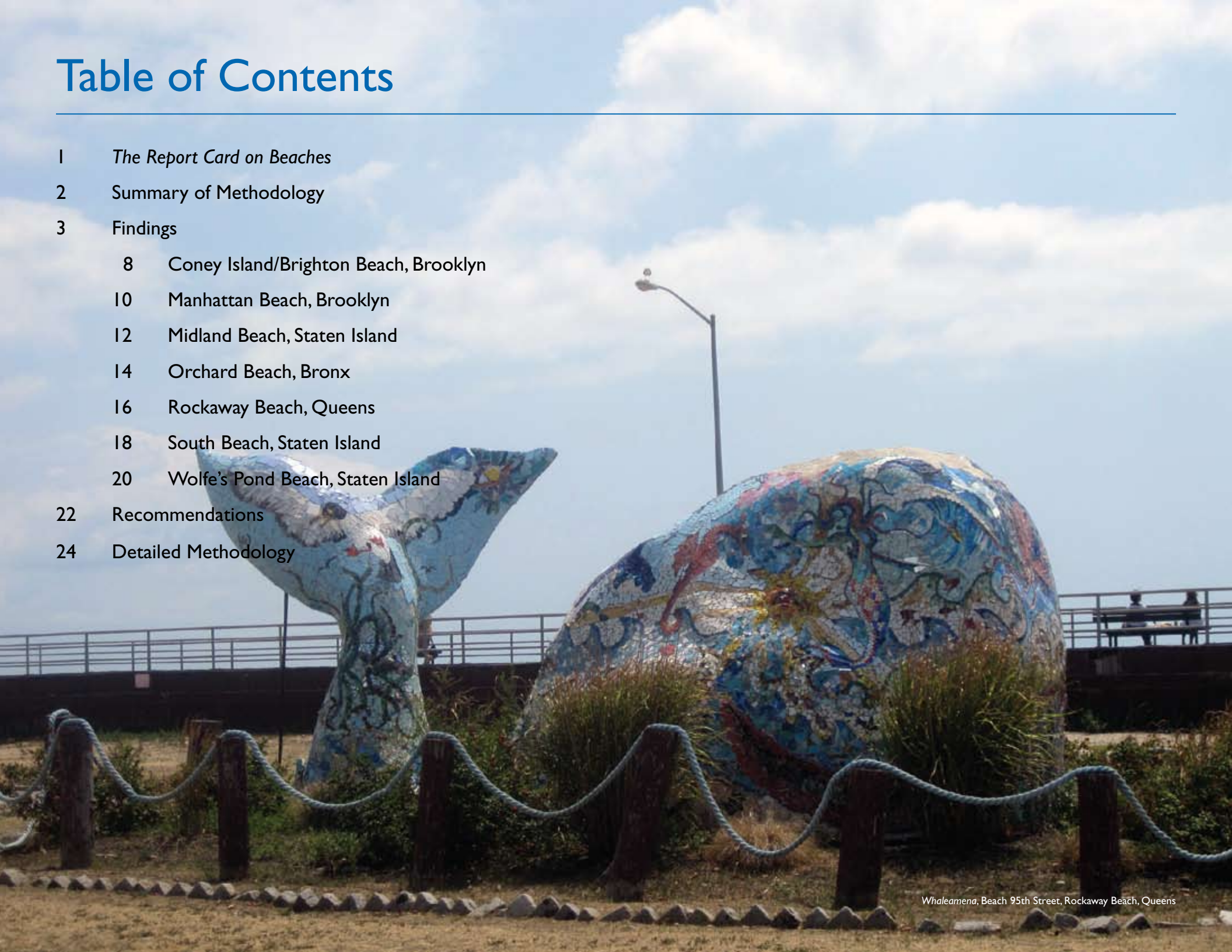
THE 2011 REPORT CARD ON BEACHES

An Independent Assessment of New York City's Public Beaches

NEW YORKERS FOR PARKS

Table of Contents



Whaleamena, Beach 95th Street, Rockaway Beach, Queens

The Report Card on Beaches

The Report Card on Beaches, a project of New Yorkers for Parks' award-winning *Report Card on Parks*, is a comparative analysis of New York City's seven municipal beaches. *The Report Card* was designed to be an easy-to-use tool for communities and public officials to assess their local beaches, both in comparison to one another and to past conditions.

In 2007, New Yorkers for Parks released its first *Report Card on Beaches*, designed to highlight successes, identify challenges, and make recommendations. In 2009, we released a follow-up *Report Card* that examined the same features surveyed in 2007. This third report looks at the same seven properties with an eye toward trends across the six years.

The Report Card on Beaches has the following goals:

- To provide city residents and public officials with an assessment of how our seven City-operated beaches compare to one another.
- To provide an independent assessment of beach performance from year-to-year against defined benchmarks of service.
- To highlight high- and low-performing beaches, as well as systemic issues, and make informed recommendations for their improvement.

Why Beaches?

New York City has 520 miles of waterfront. Over the past few years, urban planners and advocates have placed a renewed focus on the city's relationship to the water, investing significant resources into revitalizing the waterfront and reconnecting the land and its residents to the water. The NYC Department of Parks & Recreation manages 14 miles of public beaches along the waterfront and is responsible for ensuring that these beaches are clean, safe, and available for public use. The results of the 2007, 2009, and 2011 *Report Card on Beaches* show that our beaches require unique maintenance strategies and that the Parks Department has focused on and improved the condition of these sites in recent years.

The Report Card on Beaches is the only independent, citywide evaluation of the maintenance conditions of New York City's public beaches.

Summary of Methodology

The survey is designed to fairly rate the features that beach-goers care most about.

This report builds on New Yorkers for Parks' award-winning *Report Card on Parks* survey methodology, first implemented in 2003. In 2005, the *Report Card on Parks* received a Community Indicators Award from the Community Indicators Consortium, a program of the Brookings Institution's Urban Markets Initiative. A full discussion of the methodology can be found in the Detailed Methodology section of this report on page 24.

The Report Card on Beaches focuses on the seven municipal beach properties that are open to the public for swimming and where the Parks Department provides lifeguards and swimming-related facilities and programming. An eighth swimming beach, Cedar Grove, was opened in 2011, but because it was not a public swimming beach during the 2006, 2008 and 2010 survey periods, it was not included in this, or previous, beach surveys.

Because of the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property is not feasible. To address this challenge, each beach property is divided into transects that are 50 yards wide, and 10% of these transects are randomly selected for inspection.

The survey examines four Major Service Areas (MSA) at each beach: Shorelines, Pathways, Bathrooms, and Drinking Fountains. A focus group of park experts and community leaders helped define the MSAs and a scale of weights for each.

The four MSAs are evaluated for maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity. The Shorelines and Pathways within the randomly selected transects are surveyed, and every Drinking Fountain and Bathroom at the seven beaches is evaluated, whether or not it falls within a selected transect.

Each beach is assigned a numerical score from 0 to 100 in each applicable MSA, and letter grades corresponding to these numerical scores comprise the final ratings (see conversion table at right).

In 2007 and 2009, beach scores ranged from 0% to 77%. For those two *Report Cards*, the numeric scores for each beach were translated into three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%), and Unsatisfactory (59% and below). In 2011, a number of scores exceeded 80%, and two new categories were established: Very Good (80% to 89%) and Excellent (90% to 100%).

New Yorkers for Parks' surveying staff at Orchard Beach, Bronx

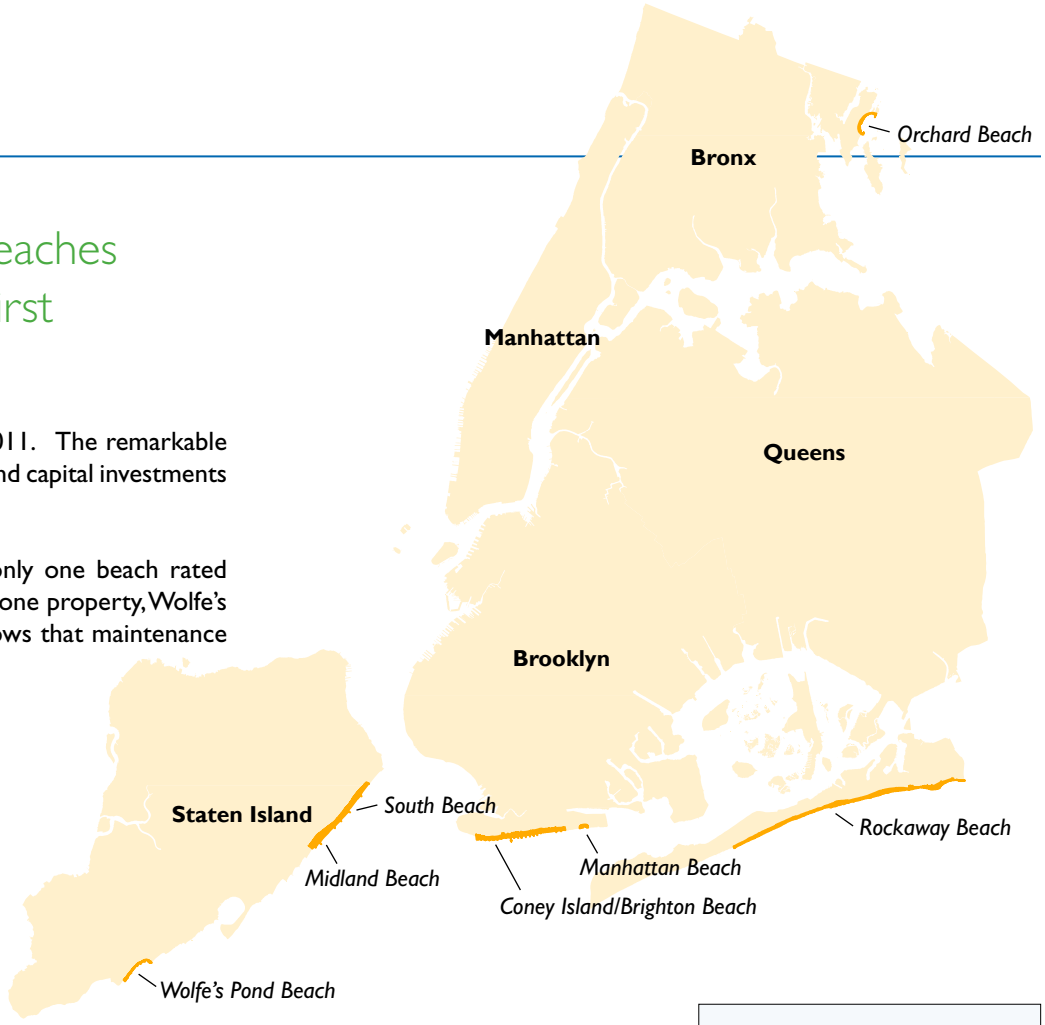
Raw Numerical Grade	Letter Grade	Category
97–100	A+	EXCELLENT
93–96	A	
90–92	A-	
87–89	B+	VERY GOOD
83–86	B	
80–82	B-	
77–79	C+	SATISFACTORY
73–76	C	
70–72	C-	
60–69	D	CHALLENGED
59 and below	F	UNSATISFACTORY

Findings

The news is overwhelmingly good: the City's beaches have shown extraordinary progress since the first *Report Card on Beaches* in 2007.

The average beach score has increased from a 59 (F) in 2007 to an 87 (B+) in 2011. The remarkable improvement across six out of seven beaches suggests that targeted maintenance and capital investments have resulted in significantly cleaner and safer beaches across most of the system.

The performance of all seven municipal beaches improved in 2011. In 2007, only one beach rated Satisfactory, and in 2011, three rated Very Good and three rated Excellent. Only one property, Wolfe's Pond Beach, was rated Challenged in 2011. Its continued poor performance shows that maintenance needs persist.



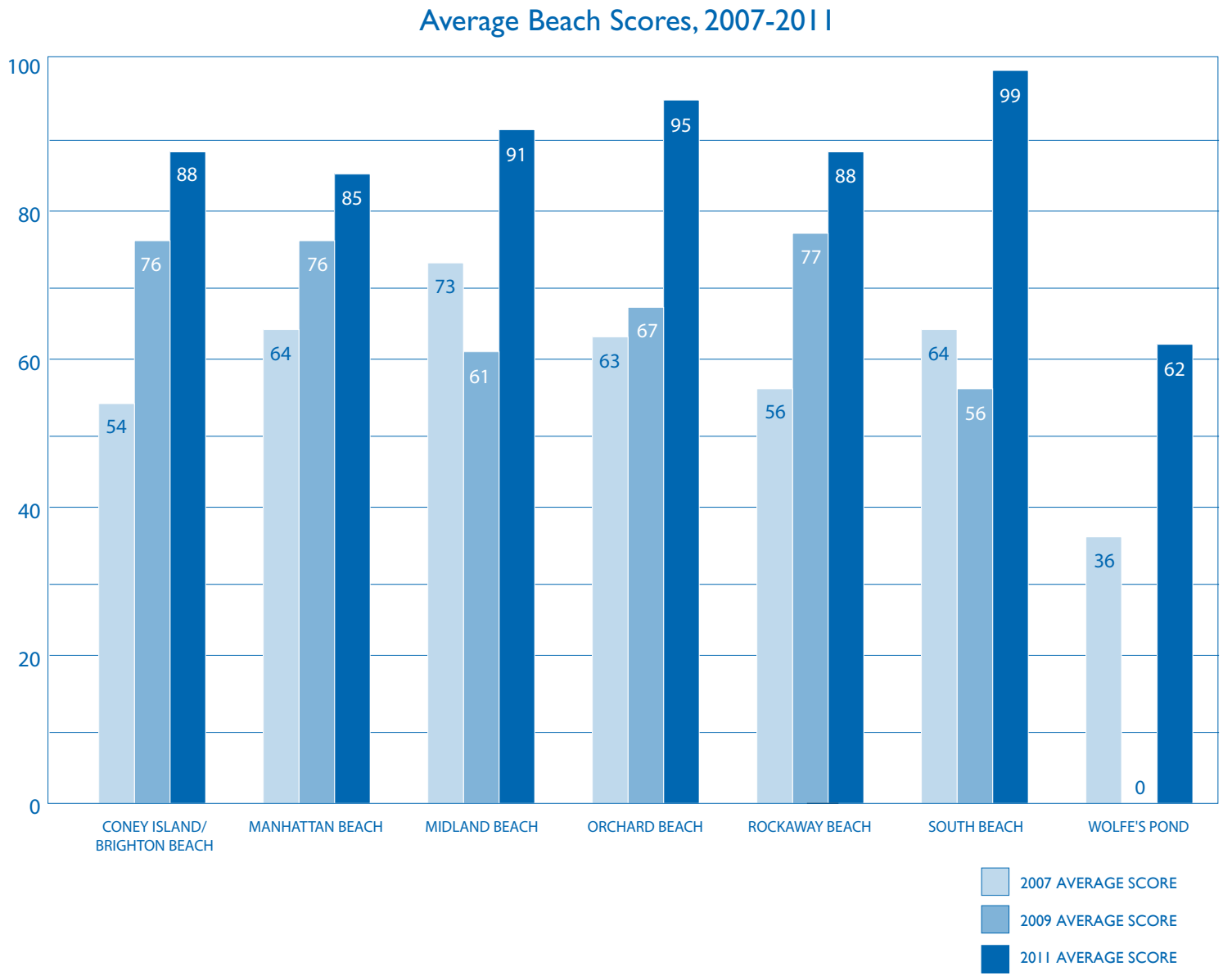
Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*
Coney Island/Brighton Beach	Brooklyn	54 – UNSATISFACTORY	76 – SATISFACTORY	88 – VERY GOOD
Manhattan Beach	Brooklyn	64 – CHALLENGED	76 – SATISFACTORY	85 – VERY GOOD
Midland Beach	Staten Island	73 – SATISFACTORY	61 – CHALLENGED	91 – EXCELLENT
Orchard Beach	Bronx	63 – CHALLENGED	67 – CHALLENGED	95 – EXCELLENT
Rockaway Beach	Queens	56 – CHALLENGED	77 – SATISFACTORY	88 – VERY GOOD
South Beach	Staten Island	64 – CHALLENGED	56 – UNSATISFACTORY	99 – EXCELLENT
Wolfe's Pond Beach	Staten Island	36 – UNSATISFACTORY	0 – UNSATISFACTORY	62 – CHALLENGED
Average Score Across All Beaches		59 – UNSATISFACTORY	59 – UNSATISFACTORY	87 – VERY GOOD

Coney Island/Brighton Beach, Brooklyn

Beach Results, 2007-2011

Scores for all seven beaches improved in 2011.

- Prior to 2011, the highest score a beach obtained was 77. In 2011, six out of seven beaches exceeded that score, and three scored above 90: MIDLAND BEACH, ORCHARD BEACH and SOUTH BEACH.
- In 2007, six out of seven beaches received a failing score. In 2009, that number fell to four beaches. In 2011, only one beach received a failing score: WOLFE'S POND BEACH on Staten Island.
- The highest rated beach in 2011 was SOUTH BEACH on Staten Island. Its score jumped from a 56 in 2009 to a 99 in 2011, the greatest rate of improvement across all seven beaches.
- Both the highest and lowest performing beaches in 2011 are located on Staten Island. The highest performing was SOUTH BEACH. The lowest performing was WOLFE'S POND BEACH.



Rockaway Beach, Queens

Feature Results, 2007-2011

Scores for all four features improved between 2009 and 2011. Drinking Fountains and Shorelines made the most significant advances.

BATHROOMS continued to improve in 2011. Between 2009 and 2011, the average Bathroom score improved 10 points, from 79 to 89. In past evaluations, many bathrooms were closed, but 97% of the bathrooms were unlocked and accessible in 2011. The most frequent challenge to bathrooms was a lack of paper towels and/or hand dryer and structural deterioration to the ceiling, walls, and floors. The beach with the highest performing bathrooms was MANHATTAN BEACH, and the beach with the poorest was CONEY ISLAND/BRIGHTON BEACH.

DRINKING FOUNTAINS have experienced the most significant improvement over the course of the three *Report Cards*. However, with an average score of 77 in 2011, they remain the poorest performing feature at the City's beaches. Conditions at 21% of the fountains made them unusable. The most frequent challenge was the inability to drain due to standing water, broken glass, or debris in the drinking basin. Algae, structural damage, and leaks were also common. The beach with the highest performing drinking fountains was SOUTH BEACH, and the beach with the poorest was MANHATTAN BEACH.

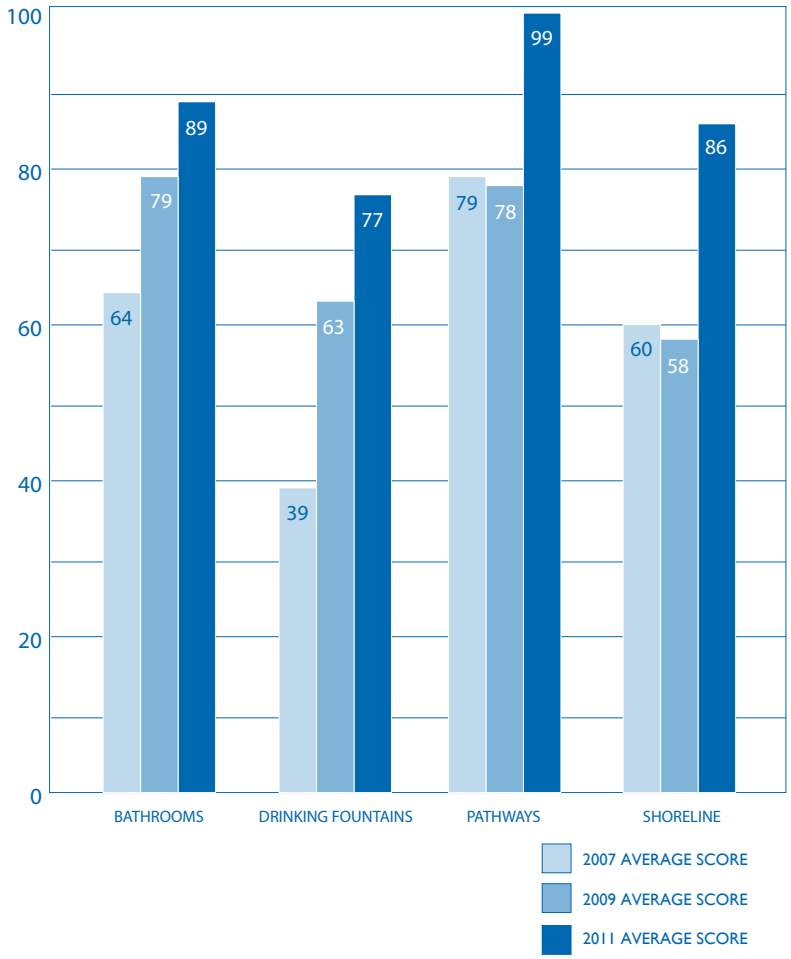
PATHWAYS were the highest performing feature in 2011. With a score of 99%, pathways made of all materials – concrete, pavers and wood – were found to be in excellent condition. The average Pathway score increased from 78 in 2009 to 99 in 2011, a 27% improvement. Pathways at MANHATTAN BEACH, ROCKAWAY BEACH, and SOUTH BEACH received perfect scores.

SHORELINE scores improved dramatically in 2011. For this study, the Shoreline is defined as the sand section of the beach starting where the water meets the sand and ending at the dune or pathway. Citywide, the average score for shorelines increased by 48%, from a 58 in 2009 to an 86 in 2011. The beach with the highest performing shoreline was ORCHARD BEACH, and the one with the poorest performing shoreline was WOLFE'S POND BEACH.

Based on focus group feedback, the performance of shorelines is the feature given the most weight in the *Report Card* evaluation. The cleanliness and safety of the shoreline has the greatest impact on a beach user's experience, yet shorelines continue to pose maintenance challenges. In 2011, the most common challenges to the shorelines across the seven beaches were litter, unprotected sand dunes, and unsafe entrances to the beach.

In 2007 and 2009 shorelines performed very poorly. Broken glass and litter were common, as were unsafe entrances to the beach and unprotected sand dunes. As in 2007 and 2009, surveyors for the 2011 *Report Card* found that areas staffed by lifeguards and available for public swimming were usually well-maintained; however, unsupervised and ungroomed areas, such as those at WOLFE'S POND BEACH, need increased attention and targeted investment.

Average Feature Scores, 2007-2011



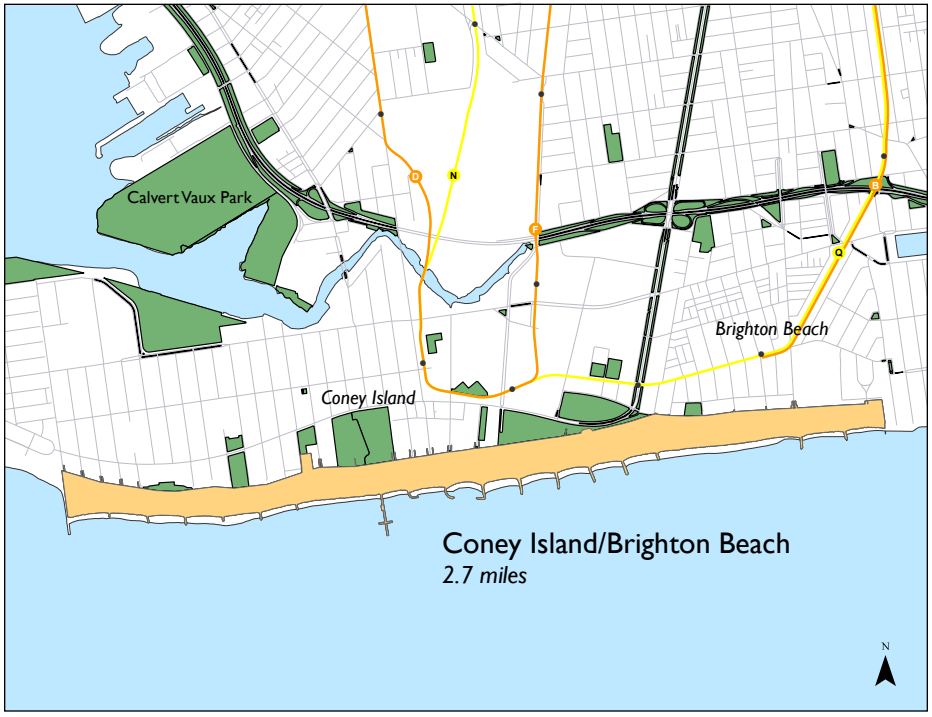
Coney Island/Brighton Beach – VERY GOOD

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Coney Island/Brighton Beach	Brooklyn	54 – UNSATISFACTORY	76 – SATISFACTORY	88 – VERY GOOD	47, 48	13

Over the course of the three *Report Cards on Beaches*, Coney Island/Brighton Beach in Brooklyn has shown one of the highest rates of improvement. Its score rose from a 54 in 2007 to an 88 in 2011, a 63% increase.

Successes

The feature at Coney Island/Brighton Beach showing the greatest improvement over the course of the three *Report Cards* was Drinking Fountains. The score for fountains improved from an F in 2009 to a B+ in 2011. In 2011, there were sections of splintered boardwalk near some fountains, but the problematic conditions encountered in past surveys were not present. Generally, the fountains were found to be free of clogs, leaks, algae, glass, and litter.



Another feature displaying marked improvement was the Shoreline. Since 2007, the Shoreline rating has increased from an F to a B+. Whereas surveyors found broken glass in the sand in 50% of the surveyed areas in 2007 and 2009, the shoreline in 2011 was completely free of glass.

Pathways at Coney Island/Brighton Beach scored an A+ in 2011. This is a significant improvement from its C grade in 2009, when surveyors encountered roots, weeds, cracks, holes, and missing, raised, or sunken sections of path.

Challenges

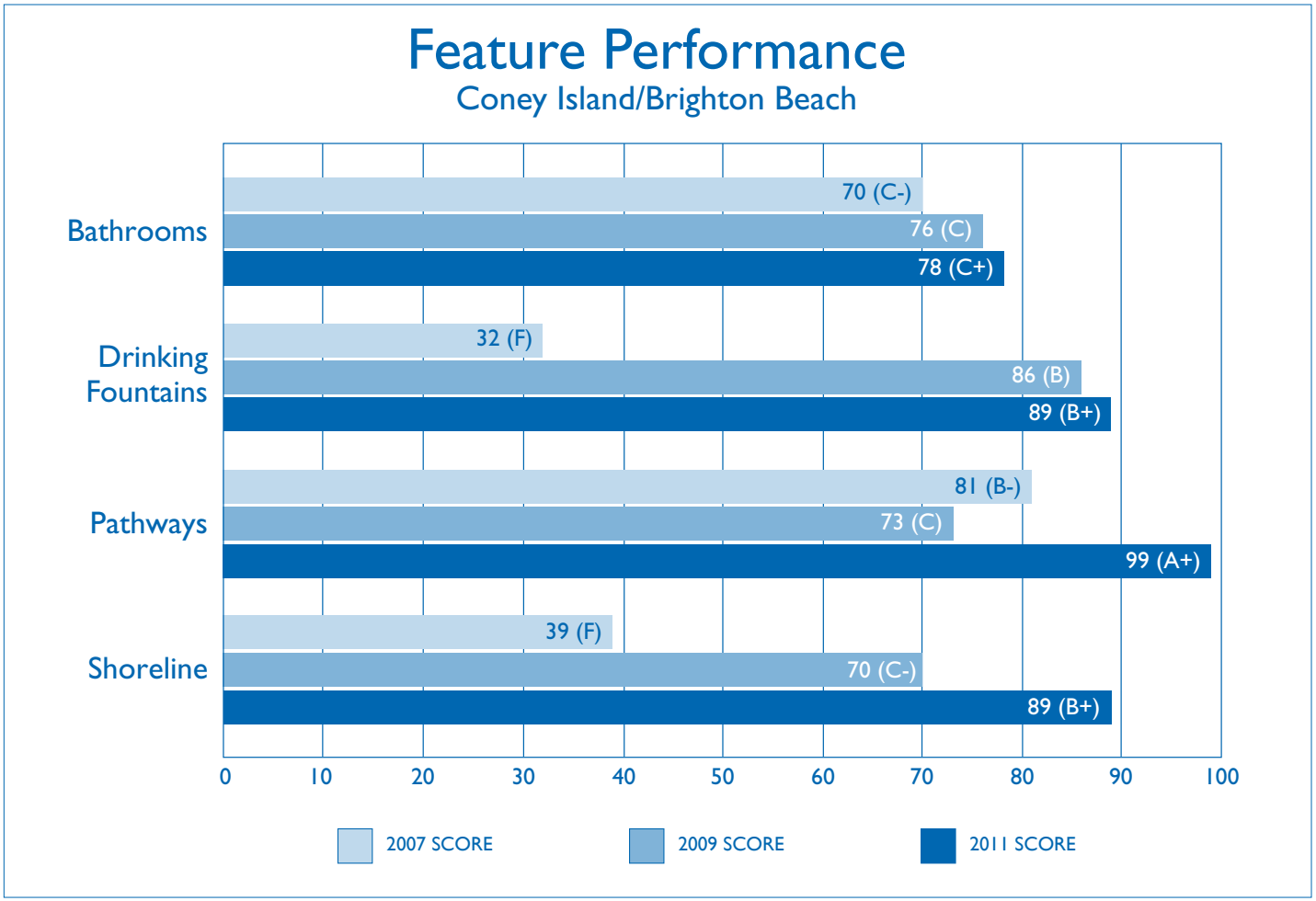
Bathroom maintenance remains a challenge at Coney Island/Brighton Beach. Between 2007 and 2011, the bathroom grade rose only from a C- to a C+. Of the seven inspected beaches, Coney Island had the lowest-scoring bathrooms. Two bathrooms were found to be unusable: one was locked, and the other was deemed unusable due to a combination of broken equipment and dirty conditions. A number of bathrooms were without soap, hand

Drinking Fountains showed the most improvement over the course of the three *Report Cards*.

The boardwalk at Coney Island/Brighton Beach scored an A+.

towels, or a hand dryer. The evaluation identified a number of broken stall doors, damaged sinks, and structural deficiencies in building floors, walls or ceilings. Investment in the bathroom infrastructure is needed to improve these conditions.

Bathrooms continue to pose a challenge at Coney Island/ Brighton Beach due to a lack of adequate supplies and structural damage.



"I've been going to Coney Island/Brighton Beach for over 25 years, and it has gotten better in the last 10 years. Even the water is cleaner, something a lot of Manhattanites don't know! It really is a nice day at the beach."
– Keith

"The cleanliness of Coney Island has improved a lot in the past few years."
– Peter

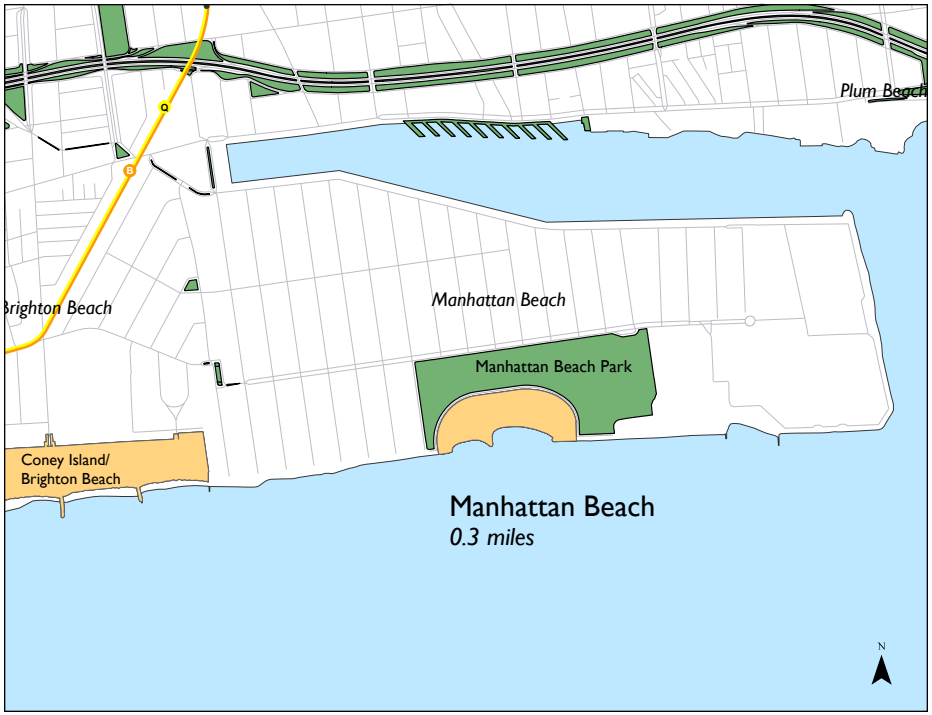
Manhattan Beach – VERY GOOD

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Manhattan Beach	Brooklyn	64 – CHALLENGED	76 – SATISFACTORY	85 – VERY GOOD	48	15

Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn has made steady progress since the first *Report Card on Beaches* in 2007. Due in large part to the improvement in Shorelines and Bathrooms, its overall score jumped from a 64 in 2007 to an 85 in 2011. However, Drinking Fountains failed for the third time in a row, declining from a 2009 peak of 56.

Successes

Shorelines, Pathways, and Bathrooms had excellent scores in 2011. Shoreline performance improved from a 75 (C) in 2007 to a 92 (A-) in 2011. Broken glass or litter was present at more than 50% of surveyed shorelines in 2009, but in 2011 the beach was free of litter and the beach was well-staffed with lifeguards. Both the Pathways and Bathrooms had perfect scores of 100, with the Bathrooms showing a notable (25%) improvement over the course of the three surveys. While damaged equipment, such as sinks, toilets, and stall doors, had been challenges in past years, these elements were found to be in good working order in the 2011 *Report Card* evaluation.

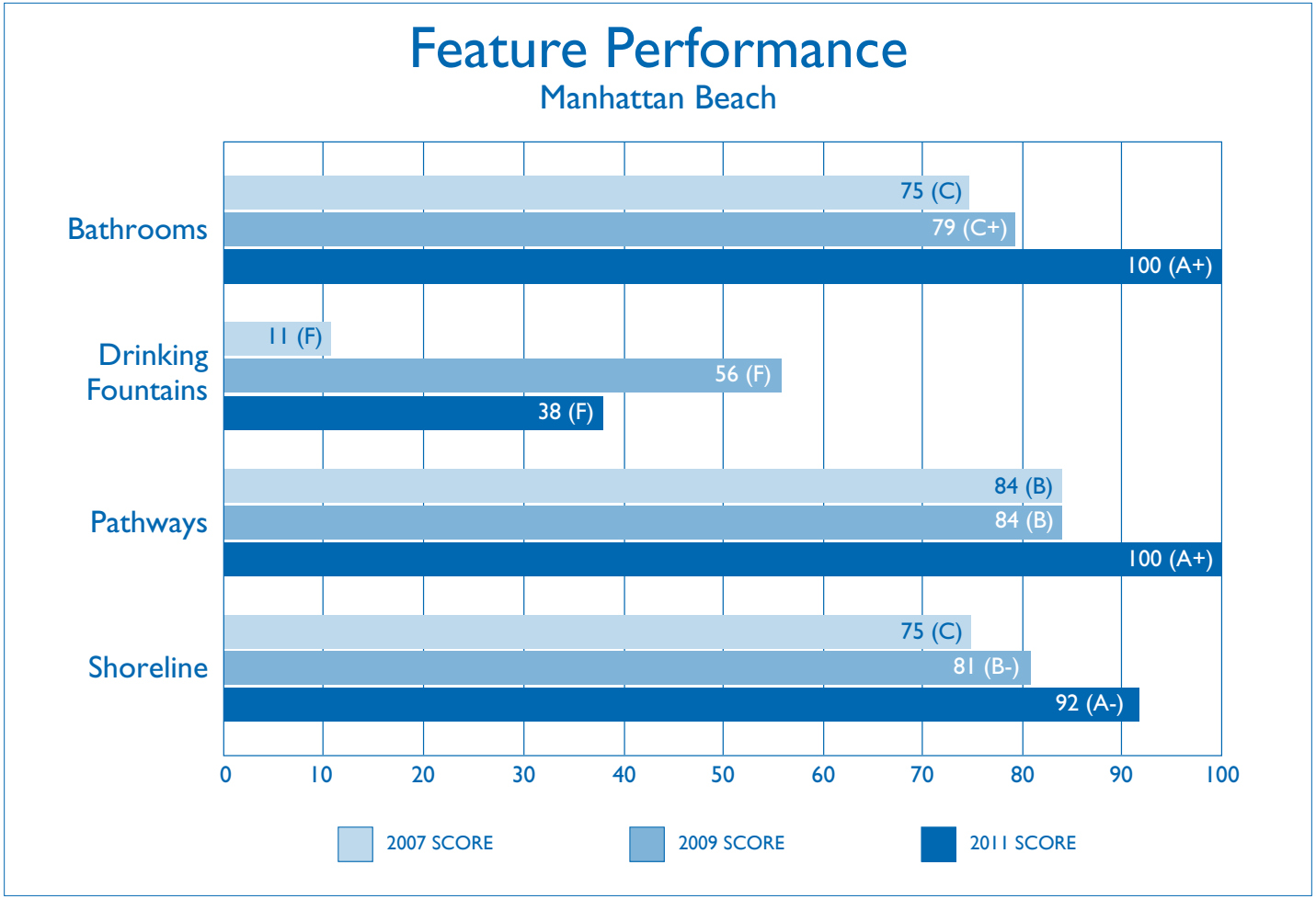


The shoreline at Manhattan Beach was in excellent condition.

The most common challenge to Drinking Fountains was debris-clogged basins that were unable to drain properly.

Challenges

Drinking Fountains remain a challenge at Manhattan Beach. The feature has received a failing score in all three *Report Card* evaluations. In 2011, 60% of fountains at the beach received failing scores, performing more poorly than drinking fountains at any other beach. The most common problem was debris-clogged basins that were unable to drain properly. Other fountains scored poorly due to significant leaks or a lack of water pressure. Maintenance attention and infrastructure improvements are needed to keep the fountains in good working order.



"The people here litter like someone else will clean it up magically. There should be more posters displayed about respecting the community and properly disposing of trash."
– Tom

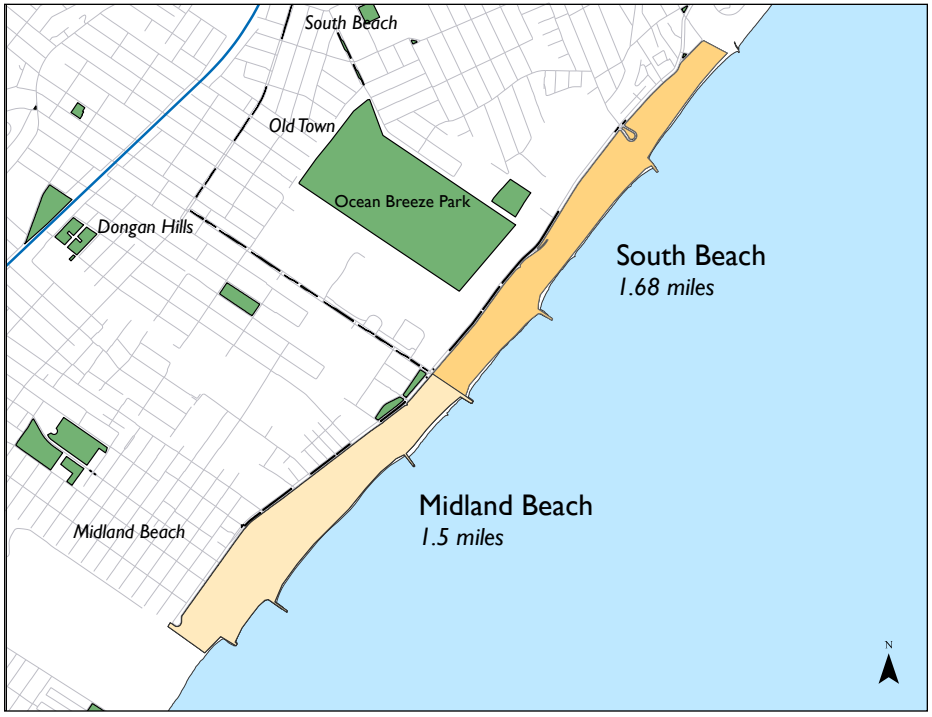
Midland Beach – EXCELLENT

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Midland Beach	Staten Island	73 – SATISFACTORY	61 – CHALLENGED	91 – EXCELLENT	50	2

Midland Beach on Staten Island experienced one of the most significant improvements between the 2009 and 2011 *Report Cards*. Its 2011 score of 91(A-) was an almost 50% improvement over the beach's 61(F) score in 2009. The spike can be attributed to a remarkable increase in the beach's Bathrooms score, as well as improvements to the Shorelines and Pathways.

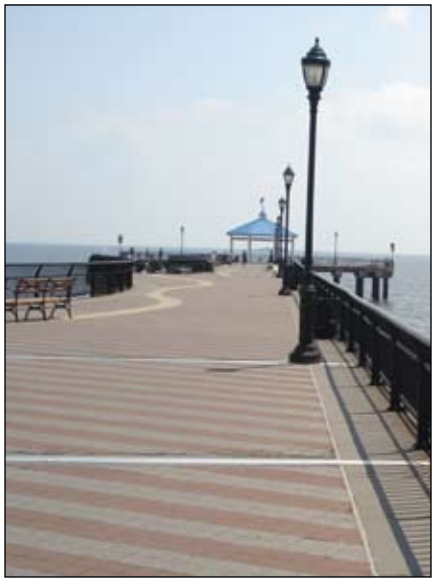
Successes

The most striking improvement at Midland Beach was the performance of the Bathrooms, which jumped from an F in 2009 to an A in 2011. In 2009, Bathrooms received a score of 58 due to dirty conditions and damaged equipment, including toilets, walls, ceilings, windows, and stall doors. Bathroom conditions improved significantly in 2011, but some structural features, such as toilets and sinks, remained damaged.



Shorelines and Pathways both performed very well at Midland Beach. Each feature improved from a C in 2009 to an A in 2011. The beach was free of litter, trash was contained to trashcans, and the pathway's hexagonal pavers remained even and intact.

Drinking Fountains improved dramatically in 2011, rising to a B- from an F in 2009. In 2009, inspections found that 15% of fountains could not be turned on at all, and others contained debris in the basin or leaked. These conditions were much less prevalent in 2011; however, the need for general maintenance, such as repairs to cracks and fresh paint, remain. Fountains were the poorest performing feature at Midland Beach for the third *Report Card* in a row.

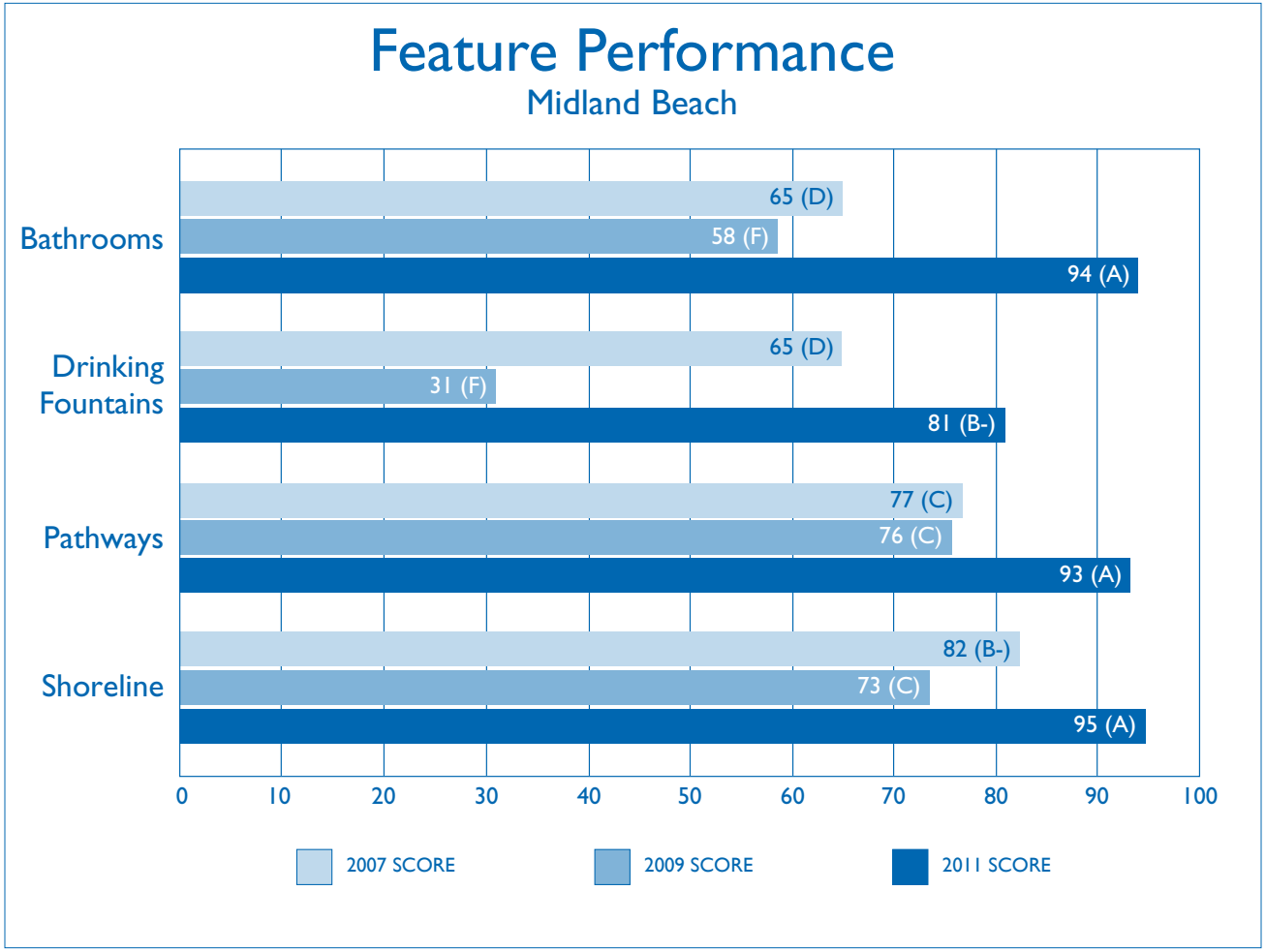


The score for Pathways rose from a C in 2009 to an A in 2011.

Drinking Fountains showed excellent improvement this year after receiving failing marks in 2009.

The combed sands at Midland Beach remain free from litter and debris.

A view of Midland Beach and the Verrazano Bridge in the distance.



"I would like to see them add restaurants at Midland."
– Dominic

Orchard Beach – EXCELLENT

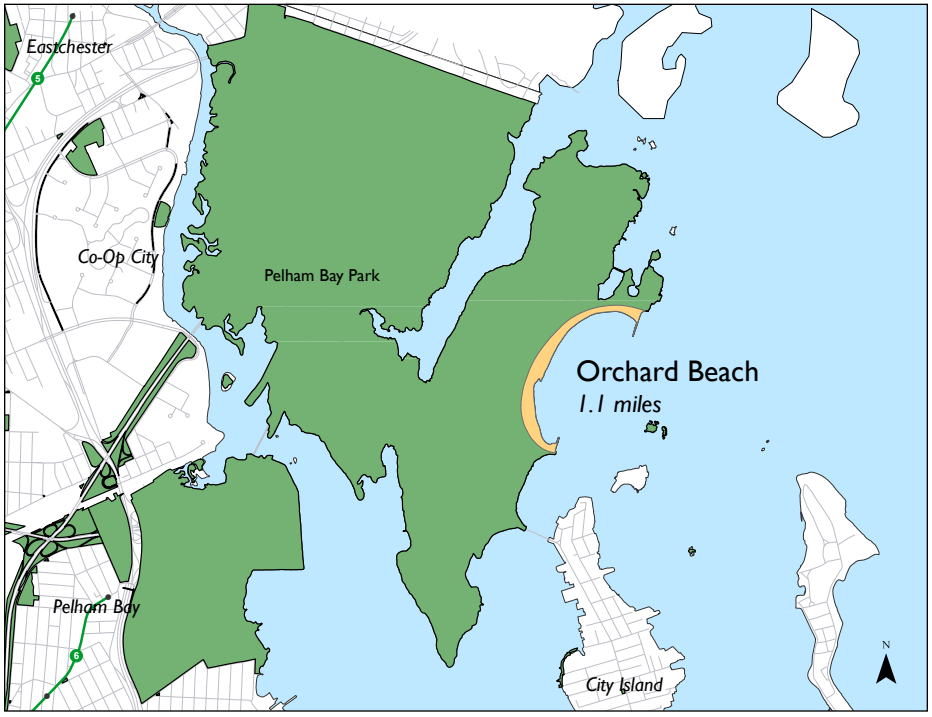
Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Orchard Beach	Bronx	63 – CHALLENGED	67 – CHALLENGED	95 – EXCELLENT	13	10

The conditions at Orchard Beach improved significantly in 2011. Between 2009 and 2011, the beach's score rose 42%. It is the second-highest ranked beach in the city. While every feature showed improvement, Shorelines improved most dramatically, rising from a grade of F in 2009 to a perfect score of 100 in 2011.

Successes

The Shoreline at Orchard Beach received a perfect score in 2011. This was a significant improvement from its failing scores in both 2007 and 2009. Evaluations in those years found litter and glass impacting each surveyed section of the beach. In 2011, all sections were free of glass and litter, trash was contained to trash containers, and entrances to the beach were well maintained and safe.

Pathways and Bathrooms both scored very well for the third survey in a row. Following a slight dip in 2009, both features improved in 2011. Pathways were free of graffiti, and benches were in good condition, offering a safe and pleasant place to sit. Bathrooms generally had empty trash cans and were free of broken glass and litter.



The pathways at Orchard Beach remain in good condition for the third consecutive *Report Card on Beaches*.

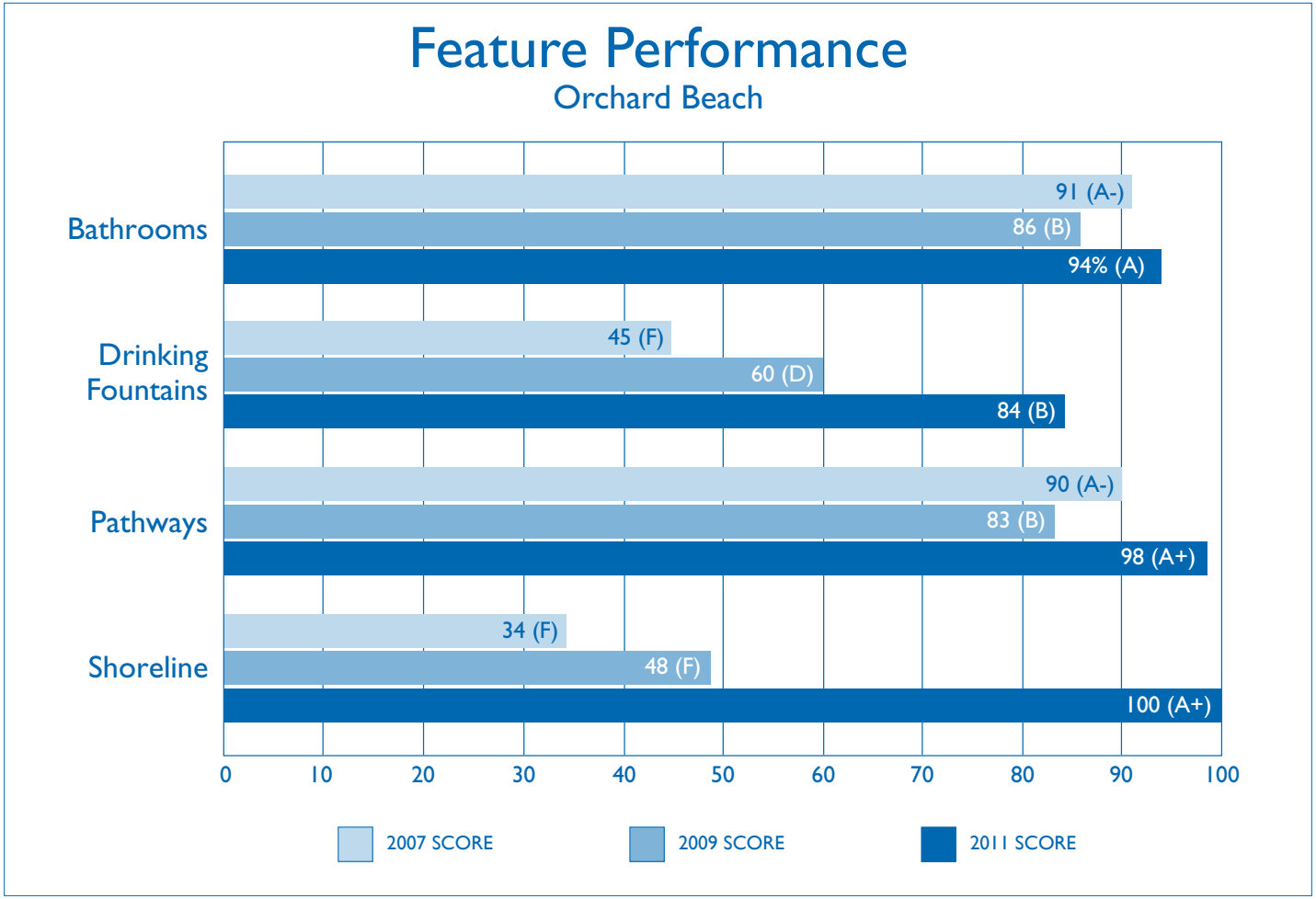
The sandy shoreline at Orchard Beach scored perfectly this year, after two consecutive failing scores in the past.

Algae and standing water were common occurrences at Orchard Beach fountains.

Challenges

A number of Bathrooms lacked hand towels and hand dryers and had stall doors that could not be locked.

Drinking Fountains at Orchard Beach improved from the 2007 and 2009 inspections, but they remain the feature that poses the biggest maintenance challenge at the site. A number of fountains were found to be unacceptable because their immediate area was affected by excessive sand, mud or standing water. Algae was present on the structures of some fountains, and standing water and debris in the basin was a common challenge.



"There should be more staff to pick up trash off the beach, boardwalk, and playground."
– John

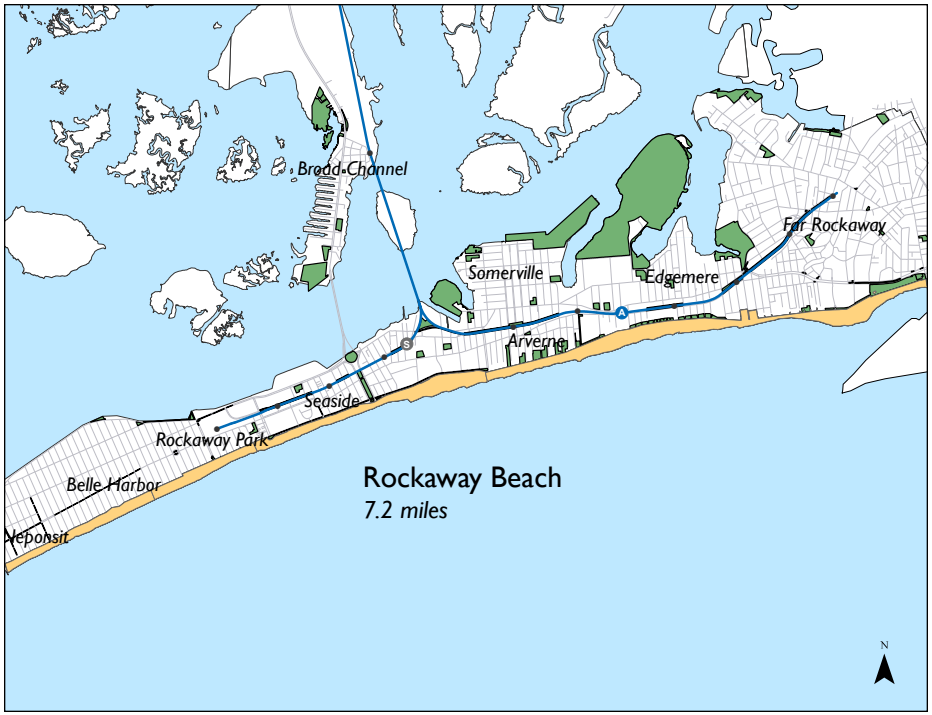
Rockaway Beach – VERY GOOD

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Rockaway Beach	Queens	56 – CHALLENGED	77 – SATISFACTORY	88 – VERY GOOD	31, 32	14

At 7.2 miles, Rockaway Beach in Queens is the city's longest beach. Despite its size, the beach has shown steady improvement between each survey year. Its rating has risen from a 56 (F) in 2007 to an 88 (B+) in 2011.

Successes

Pathways scored a perfect score at Rockaway Beach. This is a tremendous improvement over the C grades that they received in 2007 and 2009. In those years, surveyors found cracks and holes, weeds growing through the boardwalk, and uneven or missing sections. In 2011, all surveyed sections were in excellent condition. This applies to both the wooden boardwalk and concrete sections of path.



The condition of the Bathrooms continued to improve in 2011. All Bathrooms were open and available for public use, and they were largely free of dirty conditions such as uncontained trash and strong odors. The most frequent problem in the bathrooms was the lack of hand towels or hand dryers and some structural deterioration to walls, ceilings, and windows.

The Shoreline at Rockaway Beach was remarkably clean given its length and high rate of use. Most sections were free of litter and glass, and trash was contained to containers. This is a notable improvement over 2009, when 25% of sections were impacted by litter and 20% were impacted by broken glass.

The Shoreline showed much improvement this year.

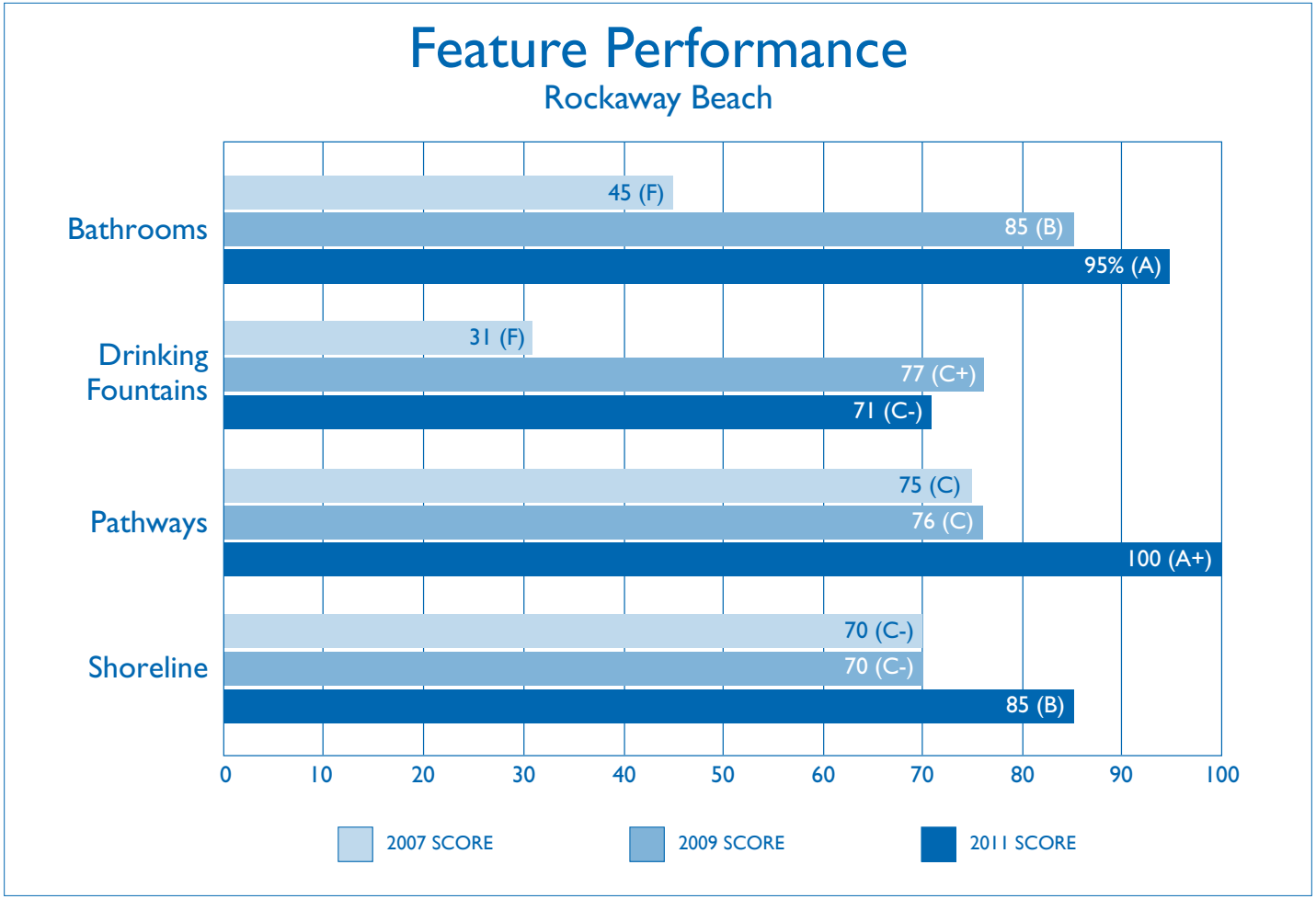
Some entrances to the Shoreline were impacted by structural damage and deterioration.

Drinking Fountains performed poorly this year due to lack of pressure, leaks, and broken spigots.

Challenges

As in 2007 and 2009, some entrances to the Shoreline were impacted by structural damage and deterioration. Additionally, litter and debris were present in the sand dunes in a number of sections.

The performance of Drinking Fountains declined since 2009. A number of fountains were found to be unacceptable because of insufficient water pressure or broken spigots, as well as cracks in the structures and haphazard painting. Maintenance attention to cracks in the structure and sloppy paint jobs is needed.



"Rockaway beaches are nice. Why go to the Hamptons?"
– Don

"I don't believe beach-goers at Rockaway intend to litter, but the sparseness of trash containers and the infrequent container disposal schedule is frustrating."
– David

"It would be great to have bigger, cleaner bathrooms where people can change and more drinking fountains where people can refill reusable water bottles."
– Julia

South Beach – EXCELLENT

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
South Beach	Staten Island	64 – CHALLENGED	56 – UNSATISFACTORY	99 – EXCELLENT	50	2

South Beach on Staten Island was the highest performing beach in the city in 2011. Benefiting from a number of recent capital improvements, the beach's score rose from a 56 (F) in 2009 to a 99 (A+) in 2011.

Successes

Pathways and Bathrooms, both of which performed very well in 2007 and 2009, improved again in 2011. Pathways were in excellent condition, with no loose boards and no cracks or weeds growing through the cracks. The boardwalk was free of litter and broken glass, offering a safe path for walking and biking. Bathrooms performed extremely well, with all Bathrooms open and available to the public. All equipment – such as toilets, stall locks, sinks, walls, and ceilings – was working and free of damage.

The Shoreline, which was marred by litter and broken glass in 2009, scored a perfect score of 100 in 2011. This was an improvement of 92 percentage points since the last survey, the largest improvement of any feature at any beach.

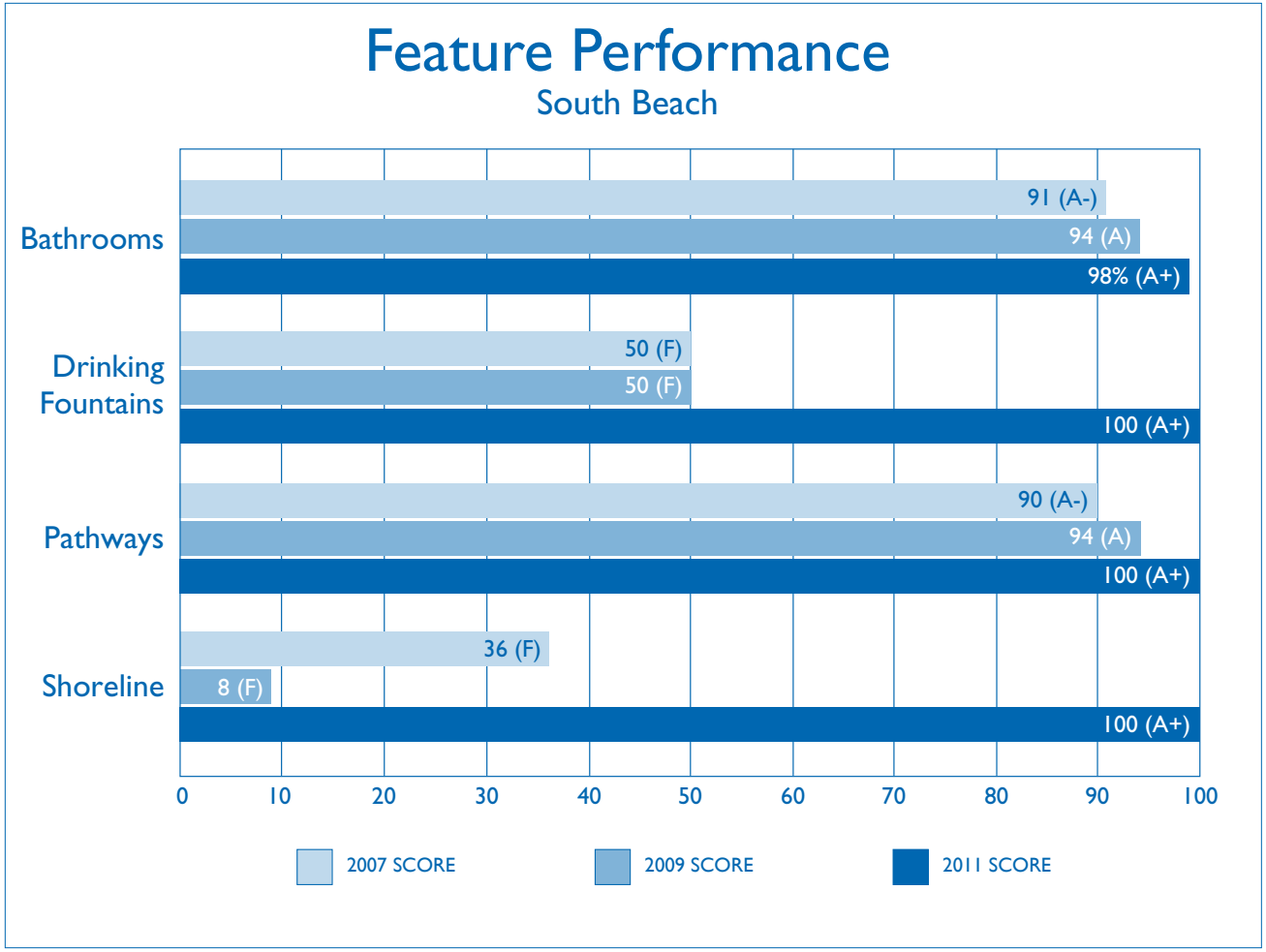
South Beach was the only beach to have Drinking Fountains score higher than a B+. Whereas a number of fountains experienced significant leaking in 2009, the feature scored a perfect score in 2011.

Boardwalks were kept safe and clean at South Beach, as in years past.

Drinking Fountains outperformed those at any other beach this year, scoring an A+.

Pristine sands line the coast at South Beach.

The facilities at South Beach have eclectic design elements.



"I go to South Beach in Staten Island, and I find it very clean and not too crowded. Who needs the Jersey Shore?"
– Peter

Wolfe's Pond Beach – CHALLENGED

Beach Name	*Borough*	*2007 Performance*	*2009 Performance*	*2011 Performance*	*Council Districts*	*Community Board*
Wolfe's Pond Beach	Staten Island	36 – UNSATISFACTORY	0 – UNSATISFACTORY	62 – CHALLENGED	51	3

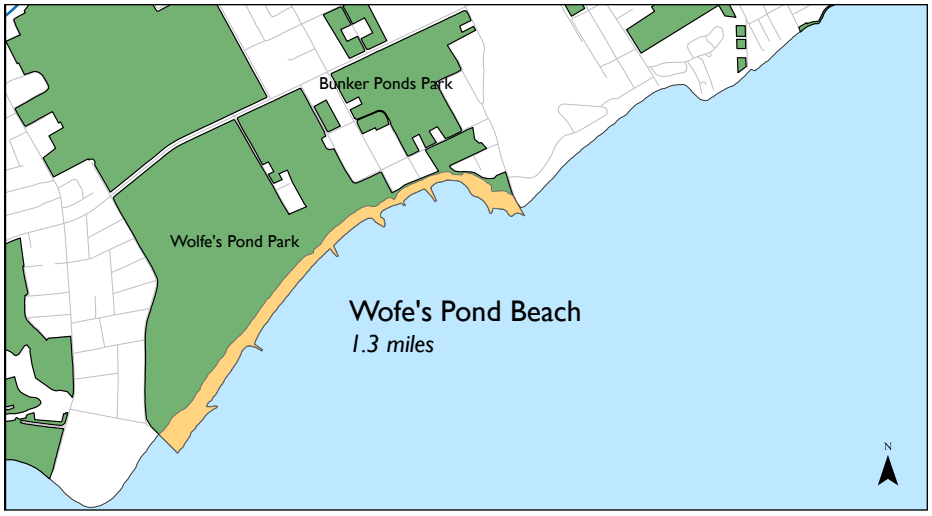
Wolfe's Pond Beach continues to be the poorest performing beach surveyed for the *Report Card on Beaches*. It received failing scores in 2007 and 2009, and in 2011 it barely passed with a score of 62 (D).

Successes

Contrary to past years, both permanent and temporary high-performing Bathrooms were available to the public. This improvement had a significant impact on the beach's overall score.

Challenges

The Shoreline received a failing score for the third *Report Card* in a row. All of the sections randomly selected for the survey were strewn with excessive litter or large natural debris. No signage or fencing was present to protect the sand dunes in these sections. While required signage was present at the three central entrances to the beach, none of the surveyed sections contained signage stating that no lifeguards were present and that swimming was prohibited.



This picture depicts the stark difference between the unmaintained portion of the beach, in the foreground, and the groomed section in the distance.

Litter at an access point at the eastern end of the beach.

Only a small, central portion of the beach was groomed, maintained, and supervised by lifeguards. There are three official entrances to this area, all of which have signs with beach rules, including a warning that swimming is prohibited without a lifeguard present. However, to the east and west of this area there are long sections of shoreline that contain excessive natural and manmade debris. While there are no official entrances to these areas, there are numerous access points where users can enter the beach. These entrances lack posted beach rules and safety warnings.

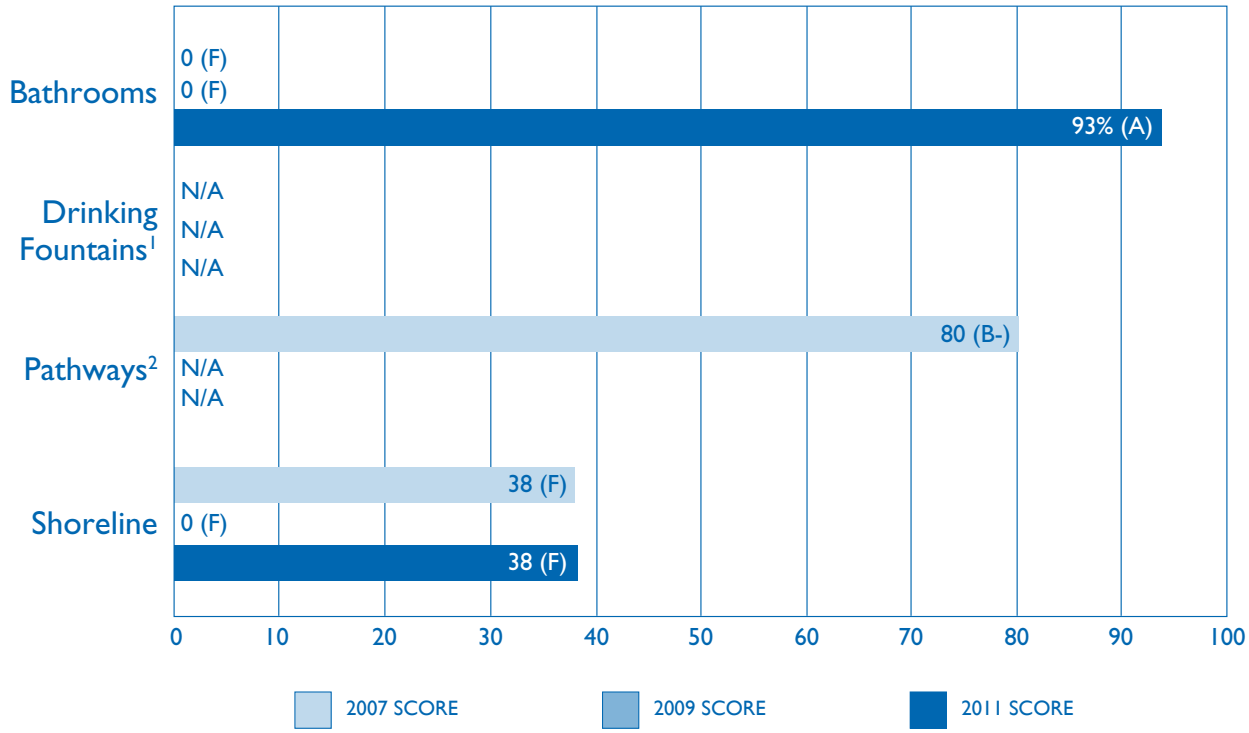
There is no fence separating the section that is kept groomed and supervised by lifeguards from the unkempt section to the east. There are no signs indicating that a user is moving beyond a safe and monitored area, nor are there red flags indicating that swimming is prohibited. The Parks Department has closed off the western portion with signage, discouraging the public from accessing that section. While this mechanism limits access to the beach, it is preferable because it protects visitors from dangerous hazards and warns them of unguarded waters.

Signage on the western edge of the groomed section discourages the public from accessing an area of the beach that is wild and not maintained.

There is no signage on the eastern edge of the groomed section to discourage the public from accessing an area of the beach that is not maintained.

Feature Performance

Wolfe's Pond Beach



1 Every drinking fountain along a beach is evaluated, whether or not it falls within a selected transect. There are no drinking fountains in the immediate vicinity of the beach at Wolfe's Pond.

2 Transects are randomly selected to be surveyed for *The Report Card on Beaches*. If the transect does not include a pathway, then no pathway is surveyed. While the transects randomly selected in 2007 included a paved pathway, those randomly selected in 2009 and 2011 did not.

"Some days it's clean, other days it's not. There are lots of big pieces of trash. God forbid a kid trips and falls."
– Sol

Recommendations

Overall, the Parks Department is to be commended on the vast improvement to the city's municipal beaches. Beach properties require intensive maintenance strategies, particularly during the three months of the year that they are open for swimming. The seven municipal beaches surveyed for this report experience a wide range of usership, from Coney Island and Rockaway, which may see hundreds of thousands of visitors on a single day, to Wolfe's Pond Beach, which attracts far fewer visitors than its peers. The more heavily used beaches demand concentrated and sustained resources throughout the busy season, while the less utilized properties require a more nuanced strategy of targeted safety and maintenance measures.

The Parks Department relies on crews of seasonal staff to perform summertime maintenance and ensure the safety of beach visitors. Improved *Report Card* scores in 2011 demonstrate that high-quality maintenance at New York's beaches is achievable. Sufficient funds and targeted maintenance strategies must continue to be directed toward these unique and important properties.

Invest capital dollars in Drinking Fountains

Drinking Fountains remain the poorest performing feature at the city's beaches. Approximately 21% of the fountains were found to be unusable due to a combination of structural damage, broken spigots, leaks, and insufficient water pressure. Capital investment in fountain repair and replacement is needed at almost all beach properties.

This Drinking Fountain at Rockaway Beach is missing a critical part.

Continue to direct maintenance attention toward Shorelines

Shorelines along the city's beaches present a variety of challenges. The sandy surface makes cleaning techniques used at inland parks obsolete. During high-use periods on weekends and holidays, litter can accumulate quickly, and natural debris washes in from the harbor. Our evaluations have found that the Parks Department's increased focus on keeping the shoreline clean and safe has resulted in improved conditions in the past few years. The Department must continue to invest resources in the beaches, as poor maintenance at these sites can pose hazards to visitors.

Focus targeted maintenance & install safety signage along the Shoreline at Wolfe's Pond Beach

The Shoreline feature at Wolfe's Pond Beach received a failing score for the third *Report Card* in a row. Only a small, central portion of the beach is groomed, maintained and supervised by lifeguards. Outside of this section, excessive litter and large natural debris were found during each survey period. While there are no official entrances to these areas, there are numerous access points where users can enter the beach, and the debris poses a hazard to visitors.

Targeted maintenance should be applied to the unmaintained sections of the beach. In the absence of adequate maintenance, clear signage and a physical barrier should demarcate these sections. Rules and safety warnings should be present at all entrances to the beach.

Excessive litter and natural debris cover the shoreline at Wolfe's Pond Beach.

Orchard Beach, Bronx

Detailed Methodology

The methods used by New Yorkers for Parks in creating the *Report Card on Beaches* are derived from the award-winning *Report Card on Parks* survey methodology, first implemented in 2003. In 2005, the *Report Card on Parks* received a Community Indicators Award from the Community Indicators Consortium and the Brookings Institution's Urban Markets Initiative.

THE METHODOLOGY IS BROKEN DOWN INTO EIGHT SECTIONS:

- Survey Population
- Identifying & Weighting Major Service Areas (MSA)
- Survey Instrument: Feature Forms
- Assigning Numerical Scores
- Sample Calculation: Manhattan Beach
- Converting Numerical Scores to Letter Grades
- Conducting the Survey
- Other Inspections of NYC Beaches

Survey Population

The Report Card on Beaches focuses on waterfront properties that are owned and operated by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) where the public is invited to swim and lifeguards and swimming-related facilities are provided. A total of seven beaches meet these criteria and were evaluated in the survey. An eighth swimming beach, Cedar Grove, was opened in 2011, but because it was not a public swimming beach during the 2006, 2008, and 2010 survey periods, it was not included in this, or previous, beach surveys.

Due to the large size of the beaches, an evaluation of the total acreage of every property is not feasible. To address this challenge, each beach property is divided into transects measuring 50 yards wide, and 10% of these transects are randomly selected for inspection. New Yorkers for Parks (NY4P) used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to divide each beach into transects. A width of 50 yards was identified as the survey's standard size because it corresponds with the Health Department's requirements for lifeguard placement along the beach. For each survey year, the project statistician randomly selects 10% of the transects to be surveyed for the Shoreline and Pathways Major Service Areas (MSAs). Every Drinking Fountain and Bathroom on the seven beaches was evaluated, whether or not it fell within a selected transect.

Identifying & Weighting Major Service Areas

In constructing the *Report Card on Beaches*, New Yorkers for Parks took a user-focused approach to identify four MSAs that affect a beach user's experience. Of the eight MSAs measured through the *Report Card on Parks*, three are included in the *Report Card on Beaches*: Bathrooms, Drinking Fountains, and Pathways. When the *Report Card on Parks* was developed, a focus group of park experts, community leaders, and public officials was convened to help define eight MSAs, along with a scale of weights to reflect the relative importance of different indicators.[3] Participants and park users at Brooklyn's Prospect Park were asked to rate the MSAs on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to their park experience, and 5 being the most important. Participants also provided feedback on the structure and composition of the MSAs.

In order to compare beach survey results to park survey results, the same MSA weights were used in the *Report Card on Beaches*, with the addition of a weight of 5 for the Shoreline. In constructing the Shoreline feature form, a Beaches Advisory Group was convened to provide feedback on form questions

[3] Participants in *The Report Card on Parks*' "First Focus Group" included Councilmember Joseph Addabbo, Jr., former Chair, Parks Committee, New York City Council; Matt Arnn, United States Forest Service, Director, Metropolitan Initiative, NYC; John Ameroso, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York City; Skip Blumberg, Friends of City Hall Park; Frank Chaney, Community Board member; Jim Dowell, Riverside Park Fund, Manhattan Parks and Green Space Coalition; Susan Marraccini, Turnaround Friends, Inc.; Martin Olesh, Friends of Cunningham Park; Robert Pasqual, Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces; and Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney, New York Public Interest Research Group.

Figure 1: Major Service Areas and Relative Weights

Major Service Areas	*Description*	*Weight*
Bathrooms	This MSA evaluates the maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity of each discrete bathroom or comfort station along the beach or boardwalk.	4
Drinking	This MSA evaluates the maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity of each discrete drinking fountain along the beach or boardwalk.	3
Pathways	This MSA evaluates the maintenance, cleanliness, safety, and structural integrity of each type of walkway or boardwalk at the beach, including wood, asphalt, turf, pavers, and concrete.	3
Shoreline	This MSA evaluates the maintenance, cleanliness and safety of the sand shoreline at the beach, starting from where the water meets the sand and ending at the dune or pathway.	5

from the user's perspective.[4] The rankings were then averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number to provide a final MSA relative weight figure. See Figure 1 for MSA weights.

Survey Instrument: Feature Forms

The structure of the survey instrument replicates that of the *Report Card on Parks*. New Yorkers for Parks staff, in cooperation with statistical consultants from the firm of Ernst & Young, developed evaluation forms for the *Report Card on Parks* with which to evaluate the MSAs found in each park. Individual questions were designed to measure the performance of the MSAs in each of the following categories: Maintenance, Cleanliness, Safety, and Structural Integrity.

Whenever possible, the form questions were adapted from DPR's own internal evaluation mechanism, the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). The questions for the Shoreline form were adapted from established *Report Card on Parks* feature forms, including Waterbodies, Natural Areas, and Lawns, as well as research on beach evaluations conducted by other groups. During the development of *The Report Card on Parks*, a second focus group[5] was convened to provide relative weights to individual feature forms on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the least important to users' park experience, and 5 being the most important. Next, the focus group was asked to designate each of the individual form questions as *priority* or *routine*. Priority ratings refer to those conditions of a park feature necessary for its safe use. Finally, the focus group rated questions tagged as routine on a scale from 1 to 5. The survey design team followed this same protocol for the Shoreline form, relying heavily on the results of focus group research used in the creation of the *Report Card on Parks*.

Assigning Numerical Scores

Any beach feature receiving an 'unacceptable' rating on any priority question was assigned a form grade of zero. However, in the large majority of completed forms, beach features received *acceptable* ratings to priority questions. In these cases, the calculation appears as follows:

> Let A denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving *acceptable* ratings. Let B denote the sum of the relative weights of routine survey questions receiving either *acceptable* or *unacceptable* ratings. Each form's final numerical score is then 100 times the quotient or A divided by B. No form score was assigned to a beach that lacked any given feature; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's 4 feature types.

All non-priority questions were scored as *acceptable*, *not acceptable*, or *not applicable*. Following the guidelines of the focus group, each applicable form question was assigned a weight of 1 to 5. Scores were calculated as the weighted ratio of questions scored *acceptable* to those scored *acceptable* or *unacceptable*. This number was then multiplied by 100 to give a final form score.

Forms were averaged to give four MSA scores. No MSA rating was assigned to a beach that lacked any given MSA; in this way no beach was penalized for not having any of the survey's four MSAs.

Each beach's raw score was calculated in a similar fashion. MSAs present for any given beach were weighted following the guidelines of the focus groups. These weighted figures were then averaged to give an overall beach score.

[4] Participants in the "Beaches Advisory Group" included Joel Banslaben, Chair, Surfrider NYC and Executive Director, Coastal Marine Resource Center; Jeanne Dupont, Rockaway Waterfront Alliance; Sean Ghio, Director of Project and Performance Management, Connecticut Policy and Economic Council; and Don Riepe, Jamaica Bay Guardian and American Littoral Society.

[5] Participants in the "Second Focus Group" included four park and advocacy experts: Mark Caserta, Director, Waterfront Park Coalition, New York League of Conservation Voters; Susan Craine, Consumer Advocate, New York Public Interest Research Group; Neysa Pranger, Coordinator, Straphangers Campaign; and Paul Sawyer, Executive Director, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park.

The survey is designed to objectively rate all features that are or should be available to a user visiting a particular beach. By way of example, if a beach has a bathroom facility that is locked or closed without explanation, it will receive a "0" for the Bathroom rating. However, if the beach does not have a bathroom, it will not receive a score for Bathrooms, so a beach will never be penalized for not having a particular MSA.

Sample Calculation: Manhattan Beach

Figure 2 shows actual form and MSA scores for Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn. Figure 4 shows the MSAs, weights, and subsequent beach scores.

Converting Numerical Scores to Letter Grades

To maintain consistency and comparability, the grade conversion system for the *Report Card on Beaches* is based on that of the *Report Card on Parks*. During the creation of the *Report Card on Parks*, a fourth focus group of park managers and open space experts was convened to determine the assignment of letter grades to raw scores.[6] Participants were brought to three parks and asked to provide a letter grade for the park based on a brief description of the MSAs and a tour of the park. These letter grades were consistent with the raw number scores for the parks and

Figure 2: Summary Form and MSA Data – Manhattan Beach

Form	*Form Scores*	*MSA Score*
Shoreline	100, 83	92
Bathrooms	100, 100	100
Drinking Fountains	100, 100, 100, 100, 100, 100, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0	38
Pathways	100, 100	100

Figure 3: Calculation of Raw Score and Letter Grade – Manhattan Beach

MSA	*MSA Score times Weight*
Beaches	92 * 5 = 458 (with rounding)
Bathrooms	100 * 4 = 400
Drinking Fountains	38 * 3 = 113 (with rounding)
Boardwalks and Pathways	100 * 3 = 300
Total	**1271 (with rounding)**

This total, 1271, was then divided by the sum of the weights of the four MSAs. This sum is 15, so that the Manhattan Beach raw score is then 1271/15 = 84.7 (rounded to 85), corresponding to a grade of *B* (see below). Applying this numerical score to the relative categories listed below, it can be seen that a score of 85 corresponds to a rating of *Very Good*.

Figure 4: Converting Raw Scores to Letter Grades

Raw Numerical Grade	Letter Grade	Category
97–100	A+	EXCELLENT
93–96	A	
90–92	A-	
87–89	B+	VERY GOOD
83–86	B	
80–82	B-	
77–79	C+	SATISFACTORY
73–76	C	
70–72	C-	
60–69	D	CHALLENGED
59 and below	F	UNSATISFACTORY

[6] Participants of the "Fourth Focus Group" included Jerome Barth, Director of Operations, Bryant Park Restoration Corporation; Charles McKinney, consultant, former administrator, Riverside Park; and Andy Stone, Director, NYC Programs, Trust for Public Land.

resulted in the raw score/grade assignment chart.

In 2007 and 2009, beach scores ranged from 0% to 77%. For those two *Report Cards*, New Yorkers for Parks translated the numeric scores for each beach into three relative categories: Satisfactory (70% to 79%), Challenged (60% to 69%), and Unsatisfactory (59% and below). In 2009, a number of scores exceeded 80%, and two new categories were established: Very Good (80% to 89%) and Excellent (90% to 100%).

Conducting the Survey

Survey work for the *Report Card on Beaches* took place Tuesdays through Thursdays in August 2010 from the hours of 10 AM to dusk. New Yorkers for Parks trained four staff members to complete the survey work. New Yorkers for Parks senior staff held one full-day training session during July 2010 to train surveyors in the following techniques: use of the handheld computers; delineation of beach features and transects; use of maps, measuring wheels, survey forms, and standards manuals; and procedures for documenting features with digital cameras. The training session included a step-by-step review of beach surveying, collection of data according to defined standards, proper photo documentation, safety procedures, and procedures for storing data in the *Report Card* database upon survey completion.

In the field, surveyors used handheld computers to complete a feature form for each pathway and shoreline feature that was included in the selected transect. In addition, every drinking fountain and bathroom located on the beach or boardwalk was evaluated. For example, for every drinking fountain on a beach, a Drinking Fountain form was completed so that on a beach with 10 drinking fountains, a surveyor would complete 10 Drinking Fountain feature forms. If five transects were randomly selected for a given beach, five Shoreline forms were completed for those transects.

In addition to the completion of the survey forms, surveyors took extensive digital photographs to support and complement survey results. All survey findings and feature forms receive an identification number and are correlated to a series of photographs documenting conditions for each beach in the survey. Survey results and photo documentation are stored in a central database. When photo documentation did not correlate with results or did not adequately illustrate beach conditions, the beach was re-visited and re-evaluated by surveyors.

Survey methodology was consistent for the 2007, 2009, and 2011 reports. In 2011, language within two items in the survey instrument was refined to improve the clarity of the measures.

Other Inspections of NYC Beaches

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) evaluates its properties using the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). While PIP rates sites from a park management perspective, the survey used in the *Report Card* was designed from the park user's perspective. By listing ratings and feature performance by beach, New Yorkers for Parks' *Report Card* is intended to provide a comparative analysis of beach conditions as an easy-to-use tool for communities and beach-goers.

In addition, the two inspection programs evaluate park properties in different ways. For example, *The Report Card* evaluates and scores Bathrooms and Drinking Fountains. Although the Parks Department tracks these features through PIP, they do not influence a beach's inspection rating.

New Yorkers can also access beach data through the NYC Department of Health's website. Every summer the Health Department inspects public beach facilities to ensure that they comply with the health code. They evaluate whether the appropriate number of lifeguards is present and liquid soap and paper towels are available in beach bathrooms. New Yorkers for Parks incorporated several of these standards into our inspection of beaches. The results of Health Department inspections are posted on its website throughout the summer, as well as in an annual report in the fall. The agency also monitors water quality and provides this data online, ensuring that community members are educated about public safety.

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New Yorkers for Parks is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.

Parks are essential to the health of residents, the livability of neighborhoods, and the economic development of the city. Through our integrated approach of research, advocacy and strategic partnerships, we are driving immediate actions and long-term policies that protect and enhance the city's vast network of parks, ensure equitable access to quality open spaces for all neighborhoods, and inform and empower communities throughout New York City. Information on New Yorkers for Parks' research and projects is available at www.ny4p.org.

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