

## Hearing On Erosion Plan Packs Quogue Village Hall *Erosion District Debated At Saturday Hearing*

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By Valerie Gordon



There wasn't a seat to be found at Quogue Village Hall on Saturday during Memorial Day weekend. Rather than cooking hot dogs with their families, community members chose to attend the village's final public hearing on a proposal to establish an erosion control taxing district to restore the eastern portion of the village's public beach.

Since its resurgence, the \$9.9 million project—an iteration of a larger project, proposed back in 2007—has sparked controversy among the 44 homeowners on Dune Road who would be required to pay for it over a 10-year period.

Quogue Village Mayor Peter Sartorius explained that the erosion control district, which would levy the special tax to pay for the project, would be formed by the Town of Southampton; however, under state law, the consent of the Village Board is required.

If approved, the project would piggyback on a larger U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project to reconstruct 4.5 miles of beach between Hampton Bays and East Quogue. The village proposal recommends dumping roughly 536,000 cubic yards of sand along a 1.1-mile stretch of beach spanning from the Quogue Beach Club to the village's eastern boundary.

The previous village proposal called for the restoration of a 2.7-mile stretch—requiring 1.1 million cubic yards of sand and was estimated to cost close to \$15 million, according to village officials.

Following a thorough analysis by the State Department of Environmental Conservation, which issued a permit for the work back in 2016, Mr. Sartorius said that the larger plan “was not in the cards.”

He explained that upon further review by the Army Corps, as well as by members of the village's Beach Advisory Committee, which consists of two proponents, two opponents and three neutral residents, the project was determined to be “not needed at that time.”

The written decision read, “a majority of the committee feels at the present time that the financial burden of undertaking a publicly funded beach nourishment program is not presently warranted.”

Now, members of the Save the Dunes and Beaches Foundation—a group of Dune Road homeowners who covered the application costs for the DEC permit back in 2013—are calling for a scaled-down version of the project.

In a letter, President Marjorie Kuhn explained that district residents can take advantage of reduced costs by piggybacking on an Army Corps project in East Quogue and Hampton Bays, which is slated to begin in 2020.

“The beach won’t get better by itself,” Ms. Kuhn said. “It’s imprudent to allow the opportunity to slip by.”

At Saturday’s public meeting, Mr. Sartorius estimated that the revised proposal’s tax impact would land close to \$10 per \$1 million of a property’s assessed value annually. “My calculation is de minimis,” he said.

He added that, according to a publicly distributed survey, 24 Dune Road homeowners are in favor of the project, nine are opposed, 10 have not responded, and one is undecided.

According to aerial measurements taken in April by First Coastal Corporation, the beach, from the toe of the dune to the wave line, ranges from 47 to 104 feet. However, official measurements, completed by Coastal Science and Engineering, a South Carolina firm, date back to 2017.

Aram Terchunian of First Coastal, who serves as the village’s representative for the proposed nourishment project, said that the project would widen the beach by roughly 50 to 127 feet. However, Mr. Terchunian’s expertise has recently come under fire by several members of the community, who have pointed to his involvement with the Save the Dunes Foundation.

The coastal geologist was hired by the group in 2013 to help prepare the permit application, and, over the years, has argued that the entire village—and not just those living on Dune Road—are at risk if there is an eventual breach in the dunes.

“A breach would erode the tax base, public services and property values throughout the village, and the quality of life,” Mr. Terchunian wrote in his 25-page response to the DEC.

Still, Dune Road homeowner Andrew Cirincione has argued that Mr. Terchunian’s involvement constitutes a conflict of interest and urged the Village Board on Saturday to hire a second consulting firm to complete an additional measurement of the beach. “I’d like to see some fresh information,” he said.

His wife, Karen Cirincione, explained that her husband measured the beach on Saturday morning at 95 yards, or 295 feet. “I walk the beach almost daily and I have for 40 years. I noticed right now, and for the last three weeks, that the beach has been wider than when we first moved here 30 years ago,” she said.

However, similar beachfront homeowners strongly disagree. Paul Napoli, a second-generation Dune Road homeowner and environmental lawyer, argued that he has seen the erosion firsthand over the course of 42 years.

“From my steps to the water is no more than 20 feet,” he said. “What baffles me is, why are there any opponents to this whatsoever? The beach is sick the erosion is a cancer.”

He pointed to the DEC’s permit, noting that both the state and federal governments support the efficiency of beach nourishment projects.

In fact, Bob Freedman, a member of Save the Dunes, noted that the Town of Southampton was just recently awarded the Best Restored Beach in America by the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association for the restoration of the Bridgehampton and Sagaponack beaches.

However, Steven Holley, who has owned his Dune Road home since 2012 according to public records, argued that the beach nourishment project is not necessary, as the sand being planted as part of the Army Corps's projects in Hampton Bays and East Quogue will move west.

"The Army Corps of Engineers is about to pour huge quantities of sand to the east of us," he said. "Sand migrates east to west. That's why we have the problem we have."

Additionally, others were just as concerned that, if approved, the replenished sand would be wiped away within a few years.

However, according to the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, the \$26 million project to restore the Sagaponack and Bridgehampton beaches in 2014 so far has statistically seen zero loss of the 2.5 million cubic yards of sand pumped ashore.

In the case of a disaster—such as Superstorm Sandy, which made landfall in 2012—the proposed nourishment project would qualify as an "engineered beach" under the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Ms. Kuhn added. Thus, it would be eligible for 87.5 percent reimbursement in the event it is damaged during a storm.

However, Kevin McAllister, founding president of Defend H2O—a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring the quality of Long Island's water—called the proposed nourishment project "premature."

During a phone interview on Tuesday, he explained that the Army Corps recently revised its Fire Island to Montauk Point draft reformation plan to include a sand bypassing system along the Shinnecock Inlet.

The system would essentially "vacuum" the sand caught mid drift by the Shinnecock Inlet which prevents the sand from migrating east to west—and deposit it on the beaches west of the inlet.

The reformation plan, which was created to help fortify the South Shore of Long Island after Superstorm Sandy, was submitted to Washington for approval last week, according to Mr. Sartorius.

"Ultimately, let's wait and see if those components get deployed," Mr. McAllister said. "I believe there's going to be a pretty positive impact on Quogue. Tagging on to the larger project is premature until we see how the sand distribution works after the Army Corps does their work. The district may not be necessary."