

Seek to Ease Beach-Work Permit

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The East Hampton Town Trustees are considering a change in their permit process to accommodate oceanfront and bay-front residents whose properties are threatened by chronic erosion.

Approximately 12,000 cubic yards of sand excavated from a shoal in Georgica Pond sit on a Wainscott beach waiting to be formed into protective dunes in front of beachfront homes, at least one of which could be claimed by the next big storm, according to Laurie Wiltshire of Land Planning Services, a Wainscott consulting company.

On Tuesday night, Ms. Wiltshire came before the trustees on behalf of Marci Klein, one of four residents with applications for dune-restoration permits before the trustees. "Right now, it's a sheer drop, eroded back farther than before the last sand was put in place," Ms. Wiltshire told the Trustees in describing the plight of the Klein house.

Earlier in a phone interview, Irving Paler, whose house is not far from the Klein house, said, "We pushed up sand twice last year. Both times it was knocked out. I've had this house 27 years, and also owned next door. I've had it done probably 15 or 18 times. I put a lot of people through college."

He too is awaiting a permit to have a protective dune installed where so many others have come and gone. He blames the beach scouring on rock groins that were constructed at Georgica Beach just east of his house in the 1960s.

Winter storms have also exposed the foundation of Ronald Lauder's house. Mr. Lauder, Ms. Klein, and Mr. Paler live west of Beach Lane and the Georgica jetties in Wainscott. Katherine Raynor, also waiting for a Trustee permit, lives to the east.

Keith Grimes, a contractor who excavated and stockpiled the sand near Georgica Pond, has actually placed sand in front of the Raynor property in expectation of the needed permit, but the work has not been completed because Ms. Raynor has not provided trustees with an "as-built" survey — that is, a survey of the previously completed dune reconstruction.

Speaking of the Klein property, Ms. Wiltshire said, "We were dealing with a moving target. We had a start date of last October 14. Sand was installed, snow fencing, then a storm came and took the fence and the toe [of the dune that had been reconstructed]. So, then it was too late to plant dune vegetation. We couldn't show it on a survey. It's gone," the consultant said of the work, as well as the possibility of the as-built survey required by the Trustees before a new permit can be issued.

As it turned out, Ms. Klein's permit was approved during the Tuesday night meeting on an emergency basis because the house appears to be in imminent danger.

Billy Mack of First Coastal, a coastal engineering company in Westhampton Beach, attended the meeting to say that the reason he had been unable to supply the Trustees with the required as-built surveys as part of First Coastal's applications was because his clients had balked at the repetition and cost of the surveys.

John Courtney, an attorney for the Trustees, said he understood Ms. Wiltshire's problem. "The purpose of the survey is to show what it looks like when the work is complete, but it's not complete, so why bother?"

Ms. Wiltshire said that both the State Department of Environmental Conservation and East Hampton Town issued emergency permits that allowed homeowners to continue to place sand as needed within a certain time frame. Those still waiting for the Trustees have emergency permits or extensions of existing permits from the town, as well as 10-year maintenance permits for beach reconstruction from the D.E.C.

"But, not every owner is as conscientious as your clients," Diane McNally, the Trustees' presiding officer, said. "We need to guard against people encroaching on public beach" by extending a sand dune and planting it. In Wainscott, the Trustees (who own most of the town's beaches and bottomlands on behalf of the public) claim the beach from the toe of the dune.

"In that case the ocean's on your side, because the opposite is happening," Ms. Wiltshire said, referring to the fact that dunes were disappearing as opposed to growing seaward.

Larry Penny, the town's director of natural resources, was on hand to recommend that the trustees allow what he called "multiple sandings. We're losing more and more sand, 30 to 40 feet in the last 50 years. By the time the next permit is issued, dune and house could be gone."

Francis Bock, a trustee, asked his fellow Trustees if they would consider creating special zones for beaches in a chronic state of erosion. Property owners within the zone could have their permits expedited in some way. "Every resident down there is wasting their time and ours," he said.

Mr. Courtney suggested that such a designation could be added to individual permits.

He also said, however, that it would be dangerous to eliminate the as-built survey entirely. He suggested that one survey done during the summer months, when the beach tends to grow and projects can be completed, could be kept on file as a "baseline" to guide future reconstruction work.

The Trustees agreed to come up with a way to streamline the permit process in areas subjected to severe erosion.