

VILLAGE OF WEST HAMPTON DUNES
SPECIAL MEETING WITH ARMY CORPS, DEC and others
BEACH REPLENISHMENT

906 Dune Road, West Hampton Dunes, NY
Tuesday September 24, 2024 at 10:00 A.M.

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Present: Mayor Krasnow, Village Trustees Gary Trimarchi, Regina Mulhearn, Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) Robert Smith, USACOE Karen Baumert, USACOE Elisheva Greenblatt, USACOE Steve Couch, Coastal Geologist Rob Young, U.S Fish & Wildlife Service Steve Poppi, Council for Mayor & Resident Robin Laveman, Resident Catherine Woolfson, Village Clerk Robin Santora.

Via Zoom: Cornell Cooperative Extension Dr. Matt Sclafani, Attorney Harris Beach Gene Kelly, NYSDEC Matthew Chelbus

The Mayor opened the meeting thanking everyone for joining us and asked Steve Couch from the Army Corps to start the meeting.

The FIMP (Fire Island to Montauk Program) originated back in the 1950's. There were several storms that impacted the east coast which led to looking at ocean surface projects up and down the Coast. The original FIMP project was finished in 1958 which recommended beach renourishment and allowed for the construction of fifty groins. Back then Westhampton was considered vulnerable, and so the decision was to build eleven groins in Westhampton Beach.

It was acknowledged that there was a mistake in deciding to build the eleven groins in Westhampton, without adding sand. The groins were effective in trapping sand, but ultimately caused the beaches to the west to be starved of sand. Within a few years they believed they corrected the problem by adding four more groins with beach renourishment.

At that time, they planned to continue beach renourishment, but the State of New York and Suffolk County had financial funding issues and withdrew all capital funding. The FIMP project was suspended.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – focus was to continue the previous beach renourishment project. The agreement was to reformulate. There was agreement at that time, that Westhampton was in critical condition and could not wait for the full project to start, so an interim project should begin for the Westhampton area.

Conditions were getting worse and in 1980 there was the first breach in this area East of Moriches Inlet. This breach was open for about a year, until it was reclosed.

In 1984 the next level of bureaucracy that occurred for the Westhampton area, is when the Army Corp was responsible for 6% of the costs for the project and the State was on the hook for 94% of the cost. This caused the State to withdraw their support, and the project came to a halt.

Congress fixed this in 1986. In 1992 around the time of litigation, property owners were concerned with all the big storms coming through and that something needed to be done to address the area. In December of 1992, there was an intense storm that resulted in two breaches of the barrier island. The first breach was called "big pikes." Since the Army Corp was already dredging in the area, they were able to fill in the breach quite quickly. The thought on the other breach, "little pikes," was that it would naturally fill in and close on its own. However, that did not happen, and it grew and was open for over a year.

During this time, in 1993, the Village of West Hampton Dunes was formed.

Around the years 1995/1996 the litigation suit was settled.

Technical support document for the Westhampton interim project: The Army Corps report that produced the feasibility recommendations of the environmental compliance of the project, which is what is constructed today. The recommendation included thirty (30) years of beach renourishment estimated every four (4) years.

Project Partnership Agreements: Lays out the original terms of the contract between the Army Corps, the State, and the County.

A negotiating point at the time of the breach and in developing the contract, was the balance between the needs of the storm damage construction and the habitat (plover) needs.

Coastal Geologist Rob Young mentioned concern that we have lost more sand/ beach during the recent storm of Ernesto. Rob wanted to be sure that the Army Corps would resurvey the area and take this into account.

Steve Couch said they had originally surveyed last October and after the winter storms in December and January, they went and resurveyed to account for further storm damage. Steven explained that the dredgers will do a dredge survey before they start, and then construct a design of how to lay out the sand replenishment.

Robin Laveman wanted it clarified that the contractors would provide enough sand or as much that is needed, to get to the template.

The Mayor asked the question, what happens between the replenishment we receive this fall and then if we need more sand, how do we get that protection under the original agreement.

Steve Couch explained that every year there are profile surveys and lidar surveys done, to help understand the current beach conditions.

It was asked if the current replenishment is under contract four (4), does that mean it takes precedence over the previous agreement, including FIMP's 30-year timeline.

If an emergency arises, such as a need for flood control, the Army Corps of Engineers can intervene regardless of the regular schedule. Since the next planned renourishment might be after 2027, under the Federal government, the Army Corps has the authority to act sooner if necessary.

If there are any issues, the Mayor can reach out to the Army Corp, but should also be in contact with the NY Department of State.

Matt Chelbus from NYSDES who was on zoom, explained that formally it would have to go through the proper chains, meaning first to the county, then to the State department and then the Army Corps.

Also on Zoom:

Eric Star -NYSDEC from Stony Brook deals with water quality certificate and permits.

Christine Zampa – DEC - Coastal section in the central office.

Matthew Sclafani – Cornell Cooperative Extensions Marine Program

Mayor Krasnow stated how our Village's current problems stem from the impact of human interventions, like the groin project that was never completed. Since it was not a natural disaster that caused the Villages problems, he wanted to know if this is taken into consideration.

Attorney, Gene Kelly asked if funding would continue beyond 2027 either through the inflation reduction act, or the bipartisan infrastructure legislature bill that was passed. He believes there is billions of dollars set aside for coastal projects and is hopeful that the Army Corps could access these funds for the Village.

Steve Couch says they must budget for future operations. Typically, they are usually about two years out.

Standard formula for renourishment:

Initial construction – 65% Federal; 35% State

Renourishment – 50% Federal; 50% State (15% of which goes to the local government Suffolk County, Southampton Town, Village of West Hampton Dunes).

Steve Couch says that for the work that is done in Southampton, the Village of West Hampton Dunes represents about ½ the sand cost. It is estimated that every 4 years about 600,000 cubic yards of sand is used, and half of that sand goes to Westhampton Dunes.

The Mayor stated again, that the Village has extra costs, because we need extra sand, because we don't have groins to catch the sand. This put our Village at an economic disadvantage because of how the groins were laid out, but not finished.

Robin Laveman asked if we could get a replenishment in less than 4 years, before the original agreement is finished. Steve explained that it takes a tremendous amount of money to mobilize the operation. It would have to meet the cost ratio to set up the operation.

Over a 4-year period, based on 2020 numbers, the replenishment for the Town of Southampton, for the work within the Village boundaries, would be around 2.2 million dollars. The Village would be responsible for the non-state share broken down by County, Town, and then Village.

The Mayor is advocating for a careful, measured approach to understanding the complexities of the reformulation agreement and the associated responsibilities. We need to understand the ownerships and the divisions between parties, before jumping to conclusions about costs. Our beaches are publicly owned, the access is public to everyone, and it is maintained by the State. In the meantime, the Mayor believes it is important to reserve money for our beach replenishment, which we already do, to help protect us in the future.

The Mayor also wanted to take the time to discuss the Bayside properties of the Village. The Bayside has two different problems:

1. Erosion – where they are losing property
2. Flooding

Mayor Krasnow is aware that the Bayside is considered private ownership and therefore they do not qualify for Federal funds. However, while he has the experts here at the meeting, he was wondering if they had any solutions, grants to apply for, or suggestions for our Bayside residents.

Trustee Mulhearn asked Matthew Sclafani, Ph.D. from Cornell Cooperative Extension, to give a presentation on Horseshoe and Pikes Beach, Moriches Bay.

Matthew explained the benefits of horseshoe crabs to humans:

1. Horseshoe crabs help with understanding human vision and eye disease
2. Horseshoe chitin helps with healing burn wounds.

3. They are more known for their blood which gets distracted and synthesized down to a substance called Limulus Amoebocyte Lysate (LAL). This substance is used by the FDA for detecting the presence of gram-negative bacteria in injectables, vaccines and other medical devices.

Matthew outlined the history of the horseshoe crabs and shared the importance of the crabs to our environment.

Horseshoe crabs play an important role in the migratory shore birds. The abundance of horseshoe crab eggs are an important food and energy source for migratory shorebirds. He showed how they are monitored, tracked and studied.

It was explained how with climate change, our sea levels are rising, the intensity of storms are stronger, and it is leading to rapid erosion. The loss of shorelines gives way to the loss of horseshoe crab spawning habitats.

Horseshoe crabs and migratory shorebirds depend upon maintaining high quality beach and intertidal habitats.

Preserving coastal areas and implementing sustainable management practices is crucial to mitigate these impacts.

Steve Couch had some added information for the erosion on the Bayside.

- Breaching and over-wash helps to move sand into the bayside.
- Part of the FIMP agreement: they acknowledge in a project that is being constructed, that it will help stop the movement of sand over the barrier island for over the life of the project.

As part of this project and to compensate for loss of sand over fifty (50) years, they will place 4.2 million yards of sand in the bay, in different locations throughout the barrier beach locations.

- Coastal process features – to help with habitat objectives and erosion.

Mayor Krasnow thanked everyone for joining the meeting and appreciated all the information and everyone's time.