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Beach Replenishment in Beach Haven to Begin in January

By Daniel Nee



Beach replenishment at 75th Street in Long Beach Township continued this week. (Photo by Daniel Nee)

LONG BEACH ISLAND – State and federal officials announced during a stand-room-only meeting in Beach Haven that a beach replenishment project in the borough would begin in January. At the same meeting, they announced the results of a large-scale study conducted in Long Beach Island communities that have already received replenishment sand that largely debunks one of the arguments opponents of replenishment have put forth.

Work on the replenishment project in Beach Haven will begin approximately Jan. 1, 2016 and last 100 days, said Bill Dixon, manager of the Bureau of Coastal Engineering within the state Department of Environmental Protection.

Pedestrian crossovers will be completed about two weeks after each street receives its dune and beach berm, with vehicle and handicap crossings taking a bit longer to construct.

Though there have not been any significant legal challenges to replenishment in Beach – as there have been in towns such as Bay Head, Point Pleasant Beach and Margate – residents have spoken at borough council meetings in recent months to express their uneasiness with the project, fearful that the replenished sand will not be of the same quality as the sand currently on the beachfront, and that the slope into the ocean will be steeper than the current slope angle, leading to a more dangerous swimming environment.

In the case of the sand, “Nature is going to evolve the beach profile the way it wants to,” said Dr. Harry Friebel, an engineer with the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

The natural currents, wave action and sunlight will restore the beach sand to its traditional state, as has been the case in other island communities that have received replenishment, such as Surf City.

Replenishment sand comes from one of several approved “donor” sites in the ocean, and is then piped in from dredge boats through a network of pipes onto the beach. The sand, “is fairly consistent throughout the entire project in terms of grain size and quality,” said Keith Watson, project manager for the Army Corps’ Philadelphia district, which is overseeing the project on Long Beach Island. “As far as our area goes, this is the finest [sand] we’ve found. Overall, it’s medium to fine grained sand.”

Some Beach Haven residents have called for a “backpassing” operation to take place, where some of the top layer of beach sand currently in the borough is pushed to the dune line with bulldozers before the project, then spread back over the surface of the replenished sand after the beach has been expanded. Officials said the operation would be too costly, and there would not be enough sand to spread over top of the enlarged beach.

In some cases, residents have expressed a safety concern over the slope of the replenished beach topography – specifically, the slope in the ocean itself where swimmers bathe.

The allegation has centered around the question as to whether the slope increases after replenishment, making the environment more hazardous. A study of areas on Long Beach Island which have already received replenishment sand show the opposite result, however, and that the slope has lessened or stayed about the same.

Friebel said that Surf City’s beach was replenished with a design for 10:1 slope ratio in 2006, meaning each ten feet increased ocean depth by one foot from the beach berm. Within a year, the slope had actually decreased to a 12.5 foot ratio.

“It’s actually flattened, which was surprising to me,” said Friebel.

In Harvey Cedars, the slope went from 11.4 feet per foot of depth to 13.9 feet, likewise flattening out the angle at which depth increases. Friebel theorizes that the island, starved of sand for many years, was reverting to its natural slope.



Photo by Daniel Nee

“Long Beach Island was in a very sand-starved state,” he said. “Finally, we’re getting some sand into the system and it’s starting to flatten out.”

Some Beach Haven residents have been calling on the Army Corps to perform a “modified” slope project, which would include the construction of a 20:1 slope in the borough. But in other areas where that has been tried on the island, Mother Nature evened out the slope after the government spent a significantly larger amount of money, officials said. In one portion of Harvey Cedars, the 20 foot slope degraded to just 6.9 feet within a year, data showed.

“If we could build it one-on-twenty and it would stay there, it would be worth pursuing,” said Friebel. “But these beaches are going to evolve to the state of equilibrium.”

Other concerns from residents have included the potential burial of existing dune vegetation underneath the larger dunes that will come with replenishment and a call from the local boating community to dredge sand out of the treacherous Little Egg Inlet to both improve the safety of the channel and gain sand at the same time.

“Some vegetation is going to be buried,” said Chris Constantino, another project manager. “Unfortunately, it has to be because there are multiple sections of beach dune that don’t meet our criteria. Where the beach and the dune meets the design criteria, we’ve been successful in working with the contractor to limit the disturbance. In some areas, we’ve eliminated any disturbance.”

Regarding the inlet – which is not normally dredged by the Army Corps since it is not considered a “commercial” inlet – the site has been tentatively approved as a donor site and will be considered for renourishments after several years or any large storms that eat away at the dunes.

The project includes 22 foot-high dunes that are often between 150 and 175 feet in width. The Army Corps initially builds close to a 400 foot beach berm in front of the dune, which equalizes to about half that level as a protective sand bar builds offshore in the winter to protect the island from nor’easters, then re-deposits the sand during the summer months.

“The dune is the meat and potatoes of what we’re putting out there,” said Friebel. “The berm, I hate to use the word sacrificial, but it is there to protect the dune. Mother Nature is the best at doing what she wants to do. Nature is going to evolve the beach profile the way it wants to.”

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