



November 10th, 2015

RE: Army Corps of Engineers Downtown Montauk Beach Stabilization Project

Supervisor Cantwell and Members of the Board:

CCOM believes strongly that the only long-term solution to the challenges of erosion and sea level rise facing the Montauk community is the pumping of sand from offshore to widen the beach and, eventually, the relocation of built infrastructure back from the water.

Creating the funding streams and passing the laws necessary to fulfill these planning initiatives will require all of us, working together.

Since Hurricane Sandy, CCOM has been at the forefront of the public discussion and scientific analysis essential to protecting our beaches. Over the last 2 years CCOM has brought coastal experts to our community to shed new light on the best options available to ensure a long-term comprehensive solution to Montauk's erosion problem. We have fought for and secured grant funding for the Town to develop a long-term coastal plan; and we are a key member of the Town's coastal committee, which is developing that plan.

For nearly three years, CCOM has been on the record arguing that the current Army Corps of Engineers project is not environmentally sustainable, will be expensive to maintain, and can actually contribute to erosion. In February of this year, CCOM expressed our deep concern to the Town Board about the need and advisability of the proposed excavation of the native dune. Unfortunately, these concerns were borne out last week. The hole dug into the dune last week by the Army Corps' contractor, H & L, is too big and, likely, unnecessary. East Hampton Town has a responsibility to communicate clearly about this project and the longer term plans for managing our coastline.

We need a public forum where the Town, the Army Corps and the contractor can describe in very specific detail all aspects of this project. Information to be provided should include: the exact design of the project, the justification for that design, the construction schedule, information about public access, road and beach closures during construction, public access after the project, and the projected maintenance budget.

Most importantly, the Town Board needs to state very clearly their goal for how quickly a beach nourishment project will create a broad sandy beach using sand pumped from offshore.

While there is great disagreement about the Corps' geobag project, there is near unanimity in the community for pumping sand onto the beach. The Town Board needs to galvanize community support for the construction of a wide, sandy beach and spell out clearly how soon they think we can get there.

A beach nourishment projects can be paid for in two ways: federal funding through the Fire Island to Montauk Point Reformulation study (FIMP) or the establishment of a local tax district. After decades of delay FIMP has finally become a real possibility with more than \$700 million of federal funding appropriated by Congress following Hurricane Sandy. The General Reevaluation Report, a critical step in the funding process, is scheduled for delivery in March 2016. The town has been told that the recommendation of that report is to use Montauk's portion of the Hurricane Sandy FIMP money to pump sand from offshore to build a broad sandy beach as soon as 2018.

Imagine if 3,000 Montauk residents supported Congressman Lee Zeldin and U.S. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Charles Schumer in this effort. Everyone, regardless of their support or opposition to the current geobag construction, needs to unanimously and immediately join in calling on our congressional delegation to support pumping sand in downtown Montauk. Congressman Zeldin, who serves on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which oversees the annual Army Corps of Engineers budget, supports the sand-pumping project and would welcome an infusion of support. But we cannot leave Montauk's fate to FIMP. We must also immediately begin work to create a local tax district (erosion control district) to fund sand pumping. Now is the time for the town board to lead the way toward a sand-pumping project.

Geobags are nobody's preferred option. Perhaps, that can make them a catalyst for moving forward on the real solution -- funding beach nourishment. Downtown Montauk desperately needs a wide, sandy beach built ideally within the next three years, sooner if possible.

Community members opposing the geobags must also answer the question, "What happens next if Montauk walks away from the geobag project?" We know, the Army Corps will not pay for a sand-only option using these funds. With no other options, private property owners will have no choice but to apply for permits to build privately owned revetments. Whether through the courts, under emergency permits or general emergency permits (such as that issued following Hurricane Sandy) private property owners will eventually receive permission. Once in, these privately-owned structures will never be shrunk or removed. They will only grow.

Despite common belief to the contrary, the Town's Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) will ultimately do little to stop the installation of revetments. Were the LWRP able to do so, the Montauk Shores Condominiums (which nearly doubled the size of their seawall following Sandy) and the Royal Atlantic Hotel (which permanently installed a geotube after Sandy) would each have been prevented from doing so. The case law and the pattern are clear: The LWRP does not stop seriously imperiled properties from being reinforced with revetments.

All parties must realize they are not the only interest at the table. Yes, the beaches are Montauk. But so are the people and businesses that choose to be here. Geobags are not perfect, far from it. They are as close as we've got to a time-out while we get funding to build what comes next. As soon as we build an engineered beach, CCOM believes the geobags need to come out, completely.

Longer term, the community needs to acknowledge that not all of the oceanfront hotels will be in the same place or configuration they are today. How we get there together is part of the Coastal Adaptation and Resiliency Planning process which CCOM is proud to be part of with several key partners. This process will be a fully transparent public planning process involving all stakeholders in jointly determining over the next 24 months what our coastline will look like for generations to come. We invite the whole of the Montauk community to say “yes” to sand and to make their voices heard through the coastal planning process.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JDS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeremy Samuelson, Executive Director