

Surfers Unite in Protest

Scores paddled at Ditch Plain to 'save' their beach

By Janis Hewitt | September 4, 2014 - 12:57pm



With a paddle out off Montauk's Ditch Plain Beach on Saturday, surfers banded together to protest a plan to turn the former East Deck Motel into a private club. Ed Patrowicz

Tykes on boogie boards and seasoned surfers on short and long boards — about 100 strong — paddled out on the west side of the jetty at Ditch Plain Beach in Montauk [on Saturday](#) in peaceful protest of plans to redevelop the East Deck Motel there as a private club.

A paddle out has become a way for the surfing community to memorialize someone who has died, but this time, surfers were mourning what they fear will be the loss of a favorite surfing beach to private interests.

“Montauk’s never been exclusive to anyone. It will be very sad if all of a sudden we’re not allowed on that beach,” Jay Fruin, a Montauk resident and member of the Surfrider Foundation, said, expressing widespread concern that the club would crowd out the public from the beach in front of it. Tony Caramanico, a Montauk resident and surfer, also bemoaned “the possible loss of our beach.”

Speaking through a bullhorn, Claire Pertalion asked the protesters gathered on the sand to observe a moment of silence and think about how much that particular stretch of beach means to them.

“Everyone is talking about it, unless they have their heads in the sand,” Lili Adams, the owner of the popular Ditch Witch, a food wagon that has been outside East Deck for a generation, said Saturday. “I’m seeing people talking who you would never see together before.”

Banners were hung from beach fencing with pictures of J. Darius Bikoff, [named by The New York Times as a principal owner of ED40](#), the corporation that [bought the East Deck for \\$15 million last fall](#) and filed an application with East Hampton Town for the approvals necessary to [develop a private club for up to 179 members](#) and their guests. Another banner read “Not a 1-percent beach, a 100-percent beach.” Mr. Bikoff is one of the founders of Glaceau, the company that introduced the Vitamin Water brand. In public meetings, representatives and the owners’ attorney, Richard A. Hammer, had declined to disclose the names of the principals in ED40, a limited liability corporation registered in Delaware.

The mood on the beach Saturday was exuberant as a large crowd formed to watch the surfers paddle out. Surfers waxed their boards and some added stickers protesting ED40’s plans. Members of the Ditch Plains Association were on hand [gathering signatures on a petition](#) urging the East Hampton Town Planning Board and the state’s Department of Environmental Conservation to turn down the application. As of Wednesday, the petition, which is also online at [ditchplainsassoication.com](#), had collect ed over 3,600 signatures.

The group, formed last fall to focus on erosion and parking issues at the Ditch Plain Beach, boasts about 350 members.

ED40’s plan calls for extensive renovations of the East Deck building, adding a second floor and a restaurant, spa, game room, Olympic-size pool, and below-grade parking, among other amenities. Estimating the number of people who might be at the club on a given day, plans call for a septic system that could accommodate the waste of up to 537 daily, with 3,661 cubic yards of fill brought in to elevate the site.

Other groups in Montauk have also protested the plans, with the Concerned Citizens of Montauk urging town officials to require a full environmental impact statement on the application.

The planning board expects to discuss ED40’s application at its Sept. 17 meeting, which begins at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall. The board had originally aimed to discuss the plan on Wednesday, but a board member had asked the Planning Department to complete its memo on the project at least seven days before the meeting. The document is not expected to be finished until Wednesday, Eric Schantz, a town planner, said Friday.

With Reporting by T.E. McMorrow