

New Delays, Added Costs For Montauk Beach Defenses

By Joanne Pilgrim | December 18, 2014 - 10:05am



Considerable erosion on the downtown Montauk beach after a northeaster last week has the Army Corps of Engineers re-evaluating the timeframe and cost of a dune restoration project there.

After finding considerable erosion on the downtown Montauk beach from a northeaster last week whose high tides and heavy surf pummeled the shore, the Army Corps of Engineers is revamping its beach reconstruction project there and will add more sand than was planned to a berm to be placed in front of a sandbag-reinforced dune.

The changes, East Hampton Town officials learned during a conference call with the federal agency yesterday, will make it impossible to complete the project before Memorial Day and will add to its \$8.9 million price tag. The town had set Memorial Day as a drop-dead date so that the work would not interfere with the key tourist season.

Because of the changes to the project specifications, bidding will begin in February, rather than this month, as had been planned. The project will get under way this spring but be suspended for the season on Memorial Day and continued in the fall.

Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell and other town officials spoke with the Army Corps, along with regional elected officials including New York State Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele Jr. and representatives from the state's Department of Environmental Conservation and Representative Tim Bishop's office yesterday. The project calls for creation of a 16.5-foot tall dune along 3,100 feet of shoreline, with a core of 14,000 geotextile bags filled with sand trucked in from an upland quarry, and the berm, using a total of 71,000 cubic yards of sand.

The Army Corps has estimated now, Mr. Cantwell said, that up to an additional 100,000 cubic yards of sand could be needed.

Mr. Cantwell said construction of the controversial project had already been envisioned in phases.

Pieces of the dune and berm will be erected and finished along sections of the beach, rather than phases of construction taking place along the entire downtown stretch. That will allow for summertime use of the downtown beach without obstructions from a partially finished project.

“It’s really the only alternative other than delaying the project,” Mr. Cantwell said yesterday. Delaying the start of construction until the fall, in “storm season,” he said, is less desirable than beginning the project in spring, when fewer people use the beach.

Before the project can begin, the Army Corps will undertake a new beach survey and a new cost-benefit analysis based on the increased cost of using more sand for the berm. The original analysis had placed the project well within the Corps’s criteria, Mr. Cantwell said, so it is not expected that the increased cost will push the project past what the Army Corps deems economically feasible.

Before last week’s storm, the Army Corps had already pushed back the completion date for the project, which will be at 100 percent federal cost, from Memorial Day to mid-June.

Mr. Cantwell said Tuesday that the federal agency told the town last week that the timeline for completion of the project had been extended to “at least June 15, which I immediately objected to.” He said he had contacted other elected officials representing East Hampton, including Senator Charles Schumer, Mr. Bishop, Assemblyman Thiele, and County Legislator Jay Schneiderman to express his concern about the revised schedule from the Army Corps.

Town officials have said from the start that construction on the beach, a centerpiece of the tourist economy in Montauk during the summer season, must be completed by Memorial Day.

Preliminary steps that had to be undertaken by the town to survey properties in the project area and obtain easements, as needed, from private property owners, are on schedule, the supervisor said this week.

The project has engendered opposition from some residents, particularly members of the Eastern Long Island chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, which has said that the reinforced dune will act as a hard structure and accelerate beach erosion. The dune, they have said, contravenes the town’s Local Waterfront Revitalization Program criteria, which prohibits the use of hard structures on the ocean beach

In an analysis of options for the Montauk beach, the Army Corps had determined that a “soft solution,” or placing sand only on the beach, was not feasible under the agency’s cost-effectiveness formulas.