

Montauk Stabilization Plan To Be Done In Two Phases

Because of a nor'easter in early December, the Downtown Montauk Emergency Stabilization Project planned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers now will require 102,000 cubic yards of sand—31,000 cubic yards more than originally proposed—to make up for the 6 feet of shoreline lost in the storm.

And because of the delay caused by the storm's impact, and the subsequent resurveying of the beach, the federally funded \$8.9 million project now will be completed in two phases: the first will begin this spring and finish before Memorial Day weekend, and the second will begin in the fall and finish in early 2016.

According to Ken Wells, chief of the Army Corps public affairs office, the town will not be required to maintain the first phase over the summer, while the second phase is pending. "When the second phase is completed in early 2016, the first phase could be touched up if necessary prior to turning the project over to the local sponsor," he said.

Although Suffolk County has agreed to share the cost of the project's maintenance, East Hampton Town as the project's local sponsor will be responsible for maintenance once the project is completed. Maintenance is expected to cost about \$157,000 annually.

Before the nor'easter hit, the Army Corps project called for 14,171 geotextile bags—sandbags made of ultraviolet-resistant, sand-colored fabric—to be installed along 3,100 feet of the downtown Montauk shoreline, then covered with 3 feet of sand and planted vegetation. Crews would have trucked in 51,000 cubic yards and excavated another 20,000 cubic yards to build a berm on top of that. The plan was to have the entire project completed before Memorial Day weekend.

Now, the first phase, consisting of 38,250 cubic yards of sand, will start at the eastern end of the project area and move west. That phase will stop just before Memorial Day weekend, and a larger second phase, which will utilize 63,750 cubic yards of sand, will begin in the fall.

East Hampton Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell said the Army Corps hopes to complete the project within the same budget. "After conversing with our local partners," he said, "it was determined that we'd begin construction from the eastern tie-in, as it also provides the best

constructibility, as the eastern end will be the end of the overall project area, so the contractor would only need to work one temporary project end, rather than two.”

Early last week, the Army Corps requested the town’s input on where to begin and where to temporarily stop the project in time to clean up for Memorial Day weekend. Mr. Cantwell said this week that the Town Board was allowed only two days to give its recommendation, and did so despite not knowing all of the details of the project.

Town Board members, specifically Peter Van Scoyoc, said last Tuesday, January 13, that starting in the east would make more sense, since the shoreline drift moves sand east to west, so any sand that moves in the first phase would still be within the project area. The idea is also to minimize the impact on businesses, hotels and motels that sit on that 3,100-foot stretch of beach.

At the Town Board meeting that Tuesday, Councilwoman Sylvia Overby was seemingly distressed that board members had only about two days to give their recommendation on the project. But Mr. Wells said there was not a lot of room for discussion on the town’s part.

“This was not a decision that could linger if people want any construction to take place prior to Memorial Day weekend,” Mr. Wells said. “A quick decision on phasing was crucial, because the phasing decision was the last undecided project aspect that needed to be resolved prior to beginning the legally required contracting process.”

Mr. Cantwell said he would have preferred the project be completed all at once over the course of this winter and spring, but when the project was delayed again, it became clear that it would have to be done in phases. “The next alternative was to do nothing this spring and wait until next fall, when we’d be in hurricane season,” he said. “People would also still be using the beaches. Fall still has a lot of recreational activities and weather for people to enjoy. Delaying the project and doing the entire project in the fall also has risks in terms of seasonal storms.”

Mr. Cantwell said that in the spring, the beach naturally “heals” itself, as sand is replenished and widens the beach. He said the beach begins to recede in the fall and winter because of storms like the recent nor’easter. “Delaying all of it to the fall puts the project and Montauk more at risk than to get as much done as we can now,” he said.

Mike Bottini, president of the Eastern Long Island chapter of Surfrider, who has been adamantly against the project, said on Monday that he still believes the project is a “\$10 million waste” and that he is still concerned about the compatibility of the trucked-in sand with the sand on the Montauk beach. “This is sort of a bad Band-Aid,” he said.

Mr. Bottini said the organization will be sending their research, done by coastal geologist Dr. Robert Young, to the Suffolk County Legislature in an attempt to get them to reconsider sharing maintenance costs on the project. He said the research supports the group’s claim that the project would be a detriment to the shoreline, and he hopes to sway the County Legislature to question the project’s validity.

Surfrider is also working on a petition of signatures of residents who do not support the project.

“Word on the street in Montauk is that the average person thinks it’s a crazy notion,” Mr. Bottini said. “Some people that aren’t necessarily aligned with Surfrider or environmentalists are looking at the maintenance price tag and, if looked at carefully, it could be a disaster financially for the town.”

Jeremy Samuelson, the executive director of Concerned Citizens of Montauk, said he is happy that the town has hired an independent engineering firm to evaluate the project’s design and cost and how it will interact with the coastal system.

Mr. Samuelson and Mr. Bottini, who may not see eye to eye on the project, said they are hopeful about an upcoming coastal adaptation and resiliency plan for East Hampton. The town has received a \$250,000 state grant to fund a study that is expected to yield a method of protecting the local shoreline in the long term.

“It’s important for all of us to appreciate that the Army Corps project would be an interim step that won’t really solve problems here,” Mr. Samuelson said. “Our community desperately needs a coastal adaptation and resiliency plan. Fortunately, with grant funding in place to create this plan, it’s going to take two years, and we look forward to getting started on that process in the next month.”

The Army Corps project is still on the line, however. According to Mr. Cantwell, the town must secure one more easement from a property owner to move the project forward. There is a total of 12 property owners within the project area. If even one property owner decides not to sign an easement, the project could not be completed. The town has until February 11 to obtain permission from the last property owner.

Mr. Cantwell said he and Alex Walter, his executive assistant, have been working with the property owner on a daily and weekly basis for months.

“I’m hopeful but concerned,” he said.