

LONG ISLANDSUFFOLK

Officials consider creating tax district to help offset cost of beach erosion in Montauk

Members of a hamlet committee would first need to spend tens of thousands of dollars on feasibility and engineering studies on how best to bolster 83 miles of shoreline.



East Hampton Town has spent just under \$1 million in 2018 to replenish the beaches in downtown Montauk. Photo Credit: Gordon M. Grant

By Vera Chinese August 16, 2018 12:15 AM

East Hampton Town is exploring the creation of a Montauk erosion control tax district, a plan where those who benefit most from costly sand replenishment at the hamlet's vulnerable oceanfront beach would pay for it.

The town has spent just under \$1 million in 2018 to replenish the beaches after a March nor'easter battered an artificial dune, exposing sandbags placed there by the Army Corps of Engineers for erosion control. The town is contractually obligated to maintain the artificial dune and will probably have to fund similar replenishments in the future as the number of severe storms increases.

"This is our new reality," Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc said Tuesday during a town board work session in Montauk. "We have erosion that is going to continue, and it's going to get worse with more and more storms."



East Hampton Town is contractually obligated to the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain an artificial dune along the oceanfront in Montauk. Photo Credit: Gordon M. Grant

Members of the town's Montauk Beach Preservation Committee are mulling a potential \$15 million to \$17 million plan funded through erosion control district taxes to bridge the gap between an Army Corps project to significantly widen the beach and the total of what advocates say is needed to stabilize it.

The Army Corps work, part of a broader \$1.2 billion plan to bolster the 83 miles of shoreline between Fire Island and Montauk Point, has been delayed several years and is now expected to begin in 2022. It includes about 450,000 cubic yards of sand for Montauk, although the town had originally asked for 650,000 to 675,000.

"It's not going to be as much as we asked for or hoped for," Concerned Citizens of Montauk president Laura Tooman said of the Army Corps plan during the work session. "That leaves us at a standstill."

Van Scoyoc said last month that he asked the Army Corps to reconsider the amount. It is not clear whether the agency has responded to the town's request.

The first step in creating an erosion control district would be a \$50,000 beach funding feasibility study to examine cost distribution and district boundaries, said Tooman, who is also chairwoman of the beach preservation committee. Possibilities include tiered tax rates dictated by how close a property is to the water and a bed tax levied on nightly rates at hotels.

Step two would be an engineering analysis and feasibility study estimated to cost between \$100,000 and \$150,000, Tooman said. Van Scoyoc, who voiced strong support for the proposition, said the town would seek grants to fund the studies.

The first study would investigate "how equitable would it [taxes] be and how much money would different people have to pay and would they be willing to pay that," Tooman said. "If they aren't [willing to pay], then it doesn't make sense to move forward with all this engineering analysis which also needs to be done."



Workers used heavy machinery in May to complete an East Hampton Town sand replenishment project in Montauk.
Photo Credit: Gordon M. Grant

There are no other erosion districts in East Hampton Town, though the committee is working with officials in Southampton Town — which has four erosion control districts — advising that town on setting up the districts. Consultants working with East Hampton Town earlier this year touted a long-range plan to relocate some Montauk businesses inland as a strategy to combat sea level rise.