

LBI mayors chide property owners, push for easements

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SHIP BOTTOM — The mayors of Surf City and Ship Bottom said Wednesday the massive federal and state beach replenishment project on Long Beach Island is not only about oceanfront property owners.

While many oceanfront property owners in all the towns on the 17-mile island have hedged on signing work and access easements, Surf City Mayor Leonard T. Connors Jr. and Ship Bottom Mayor William Huelsenbeck said the project is designed to improve storm protection for everyone.

On Wednesday, Connors and Huelsenbeck met with representatives of the state Department of Environmental Protection to discuss plans for sand replenishment. Surf City and Ship Bottom are expected to be the first two towns this summer to have sand pumped onto beaches.

"There comes a time when the beachfront owners must be reasonable, too," Huelsenbeck said. "The goal is to protect them and the people living behind them. There comes a point when they need to think about the rest of the town.

"People have been walking on the beaches for 80 years. The only difference is now there would be a piece of paper saying they can go on it."

Connors said some oceanfront homeowners are making mountains out of molehills.

"This project benefits everyone else behind the dune," he said. "The amount of money oceanfront property owners have tied up pales in comparison to the amount of money that is at stake on the other side of their 100-foot lot."

Connors said DEP officials have failed to take a leadership role, shoving everything off on the island's municipalities.

"They haven't taken one shred of responsibility," he said.

David Rosenblatt, the DEP project manager, said Tuesday the municipalities are responsible for obtaining all needed easements so replenishment can begin on schedule.

"I told the DEP if they fund the first condemnation, Surf City will do it and we can use it as a test case," Connors said. "We need to see how much condemnation will cost and where a judge stands on it.

"The DEP said they would look into it," he added.

As of Tuesday, Surf City had received only five of 24 needed easements. Ship Bottom had only five of the 52 needed easements.

"A good portion of the land we are asking easements for is dune and by law people can't go on the dunes, anyway," Huelsenbeck said. "We'd like to avoid condemnation and I think once we explain the issues, I think I can convince the majority to sign the easements."

Connors said he expected no problem in getting the needed easements in Surf City. He said he agreed to place four portable toilets — two at the north end of the borough and two at the south end — on borough beaches. Surf City would then meet the DEP mandate of a restroom within every quarter mile.

Connors said Surf City has no access issues or parking issues.

Huelsenbeck said Ship Bottom will use portable toilets and has no access or parking issues.

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