

Making naysayers pay

Posted by the [Asbury Park Press](#) on 03/14/06

Beachfront property owners in Surf City may be required to repair storm damage to dunes in front of their homes. If not, they could be billed for repairs done by the borough. Mayor Leonard T. Connors Jr. and the Borough Council deserve credit for this no-nonsense response to the lack of cooperation from some residents of Long Beach Island in efforts to get beach restoration under way.

Showing some frustration about homeowners who refused to sign easements needed for the \$71 million federal project, Connors said if they had seen the devastation caused by the storm in 1962, "they would sign those easements in a minute to get that sand in front of their homes."

This is not the ideal solution. Signing the easements and allowing public access to the public's beaches is preferable. But the Surf City ordinance should force the homeowners' hand on the restoration vs. access issue.

Governing bodies of the other island towns should follow suit. The Surf City ordinance would require those homeowners to maintain the dunes or be billed for any borough repairs. That's a fair offer for homeowners who want to block the project and public access, yet expect their property to be protected from the ocean at taxpayer expense.

This would give beachfront residents the choice of restoring damaged dunes in a timely manner themselves or being billed, with liens placed on their properties if the borough does the work. "They can bring (sand) in buckets for all I care," said Connors, who is also a state senator.

By making them responsible for that repair work, Connors and the council are not letting the beachfront property owners put the financial burden on the rest of the citizens. Storms this winter showed just how close the ocean is, leaving some island homes perched on beams that ended in the air, above solid ground.

The replenishment project could eliminate the need for such an ordinance, by giving the dunes a beachwide buffer from the ocean. But if that's blocked by homeowners who block access, they should pay the bills for damage done.

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