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Owners balking at beach-project easements Connors says eminent domain will be used

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LONG BEACH ISLAND-Few island beachfront homeowners are signing easement agreements for the island beach-replenishment project and Surf City Mayor Leonard Connors said eminent domain will be used to get the project done.

Connors said Tuesday that of the 26 easement agreements mailed by Surf City to oceanfront homeowners, no more than 10 have been returned signed.

Connors went on to say he didn't think the lack of cooperation from homeowners would derail the project.

"I think that when the municipalities move to take the property ... people will fall into line," he said. "I don't think (using eminent domain) is a possibility - it will occur. I know it.

"This project will not be stalled because of reluctant oceanfront property owners. The alternatives aren't very pretty but the municipalities will move ahead.

"I've spoken to appraisers to start the appraisals of (the land)" Connors added. "I would hope that (homeowners) would sign off on it, because if they don't sign on off on it, they would wind up having us take the property through eminent domain."

Long Beach Township attorney Richard Shackleton said that of the 600 easement agreements sent to homeowners there, fewer than 40 have come back completed.

Nine homeowners who signed the agreement have since demanded them back from the municipality, Shackleton said.

The easements are needed to allow state and federal authorities the right to conduct the beach replenishment project on the beaches.

Essentially, they are like a permission slip or waiver from homeowner to the government agency, allowing the latter to work on the property.

Other Long Beach Island municipalities are not faring better. Ship Bottom sent out 52 agreements. Only five have been returned signed, according to municipal Clerk Kathleen Wells.

Beach Haven mailed out 155, according to Administrator Richard Crane. The borough has received no more than 42 back from homeowners, he said.

Harvey Cedars sent out 83, borough Clerk Diana Dale said. The borough has received 21 back from homeowners, she said.

State officials have called the agreements a prerequisite for beginning the Long Beach Island Project.

The project will create a 17-mile-long berm, or mound, 125-feet wide and as high as 30 feet at the crest, along the beach. Upon completion, periodic renewal work would be required. Initial construction will require 7.5 million cubic yards of sand, a half-million feet of sand fencing and 350 acres of dune grasses.

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