

Quick fix for LBI an important task

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Last week's storm, practically unnoticed in northern Ocean County, was not so kind to Long Beach Township.

A combination of high winds and high tide swirled a huge pile of sand from beneath a home on Ocean Boulevard in Long Beach Township and washed away enough beachfront to carve out a cliff and create a 15-foot drop at the public beach ramp in North Beach, said Township Commissioner Robert Palmer.

The township ordered 300 tons of sand to fill in the beachfront where erosion did the worst damage and asked for a \$150,000 emergency appropriation to pay for shoring up the sands.

The frightening implication is that, if a minor storm can cause such serious damage, a severe storm could be catastrophic.

Rep. Jim Saxton, R-3rd, knows how critical a planned federal beach replenishment project is to protect lives and property on Long Beach Island from future storms.

Saxton, who worked with Gov. Jon S. Corzine when he was in the Senate to push the federal project through in Congress, is concerned that strict state Department of Environmental Protection requirements could block work by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The DEP, rightly concerned about public access to some beaches on Long Beach Island, is demanding quarter-mile access sites — more than twice the federal requirements — and meeting the DEP's demands would be expensive.

The cost of obtaining easements and buying or condemning land and building parking lots and rest rooms would be "astronomical," Saxton said in a letter to DEP acting-Commissioner Lisa P. Jackson, pleading with her to be more flexible about state requirements.

"Astronomical" also describes the price of real estate on the island, where multimillion-dollar homes are viewed as teardowns, so pleading poverty seems disingenuous.

But time and erosion travel hand in hand along the coastline and delays in obtaining property could cause delays in replenishment.

It is crucial that the replenishment remain on track and on time.

It is equally crucial for the public to have clear access to the beaches, even in the more prosperous parts of LBI.

Since Saxton and the governor worked in a bipartisan fashion to get the project this far, we urge Corzine and Jackson to come up with a common sense compromise — possibly on the quarter mile access sites that are twice the federal limit — that would offer necessary public access without delaying urgent beach work.

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