

VENTING: During meeting with Army, DEP reps

ANGRY: Over lack of information about plans

Residents rip beach project

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP — Even after two hours of presentations and explanations Tuesday, residents, many clutching correspondence and site maps, descended upon federal and state officials with anger and confusion.

The afternoon meeting with members of the Army Corps of Engineers and the state Department of Environmental Protection, regarding the \$71 million storm protection replenishment project on Long Beach Island, raised more questions than it answered. A second meeting was held Tuesday night. About 300 residents attended the afternoon session township officials said.

Residents, many oceanfront property owners, called for smaller, more intimate meetings with the DEP and clarification on elements of two letters regarding easements and liability.

"I would say most of us here want the sand done," said Jane Sussman, from the Spray Beach section of Long Beach Township. "You don't need all the legal gobbledygook.

"We are not stupid people here. Give us something simple and most of us will welcome you with tea and cookies, lemonade and air conditioning."

When she read the letters they had been sent, she said, the only thing that came to mind was that residents would be given short shrift.

Sussman went on to call Dean Jablonski, from the at-torney general's office, "flip" for answers given to questions about legal rights of homeowners.

Dorothy Jedziniak, of Ship Bottom, called the 17-mile project "the best-kept secret on the island."

"You came here unprepared and gave vague answers," she said. "We went looking for plans and none could be found. You think we don't care . . . Well, you are wrong."

Residents were also informed that when the sand pumping begins in late spring in Ship Bottom and Surf City, the work will go on 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Sand will be pumped ashore and then moved and sculpted by heavy construction equipment, officials said. Beach work will be done approximately 1,000 feet at a time.

Keith Watson, the project manager for the Army Corps, said one block will be filled and manicured every 36 hours. The sections of beach being worked on will be closed to residents and tourists while work is under way.

Long Beach Township Mayor DiAnne C. Gove told the crowd she found out two hours before the meeting the DEP would not budge on its demand for beach access every quarter mile and that parking and restroom facilities will be required.

While DEP officials called the 24-hour work and periodic beach closures standard and routine, residents saw it as an infringement on the normalcy of their lives. There were also concerns of tax increases being imposed on residents after the beaches are extended to 200 feet from the toe of the dune to the waterline.

"The tax increase is an issue that has come up in other municipalities," Gove said. "It's something we all need to work together on."

The project calls for a 22-foot dune to be constructed across the island. The dune will be sloped seaward only according to Watson. There will then be approximately 150 feet of flat beach before another slope into the ocean.

Watson said the berm, or the flat beach, will be eight feet higher than the waterline and the dunes will rise 14 feet above the berm. The project will require 10 million cubic yards of sand to complete Watson said.

Coastal Engineer Benjamin Keiser said dune crossovers will be provided at all municipal beach access points. Keiser said a cookie-cutter design is being developed that would be available to individual homeowners — at their expense — for those wanting a dune crossover.

Property owners in the North Beach and Loveladies sections of Long Beach Township, where there is little or no public beach access, asked where beach entry points would be.

"The municipalities and the DEP are going to sit down and work all that out," Gove said.

Harris Vernick, of North Beach, said there has been no information made available as to what property owners might lose where public access points are built.

"The township has submitted a plan that is being reviewed," said David Rosenblatt, an administrator for the DEP. "There are concerns that access points are not close enough. The plan is not ready for public viewing yet."

Vernick reacted angrily: "You have a lot more explaining to do before we go anywhere."

Joe Barrett, of Ship Bottom, asked what property owners are liable for.

"Shark attacks? Volleyball?" Barrett said.

"You want us to sign our property over to you but you have no answers for us? Speak English, not legalese"

Jablonski told property owners they are immune to liability if an accident was no fault of their own. The easements give the state permission to construct and maintain the dunes. The easements are needed for public funds to be acquired for the replenishment project.

"After this I am a little uneasy about the easement," said Louise Sonnenberg of Ship Bottom. "I went over to town hall and signed the easement. How do I null and void it?"

Rosenblatt said the easement would be given back to her if requested.

Residents questioned whether signing the easement would be giving away ownership of their dunes.

"You still own it," Rosenblatt said.

Daniel Hughes, of Loveladies, raised questions about condemnation, which the state and municipalities could use for property owners who do not willingly sign the easements.

"What happens if I give my easement for free, but those who hold out are compensated?" Hughes asked.

Rosenblatt said the DEP is fighting that very issue in Ocean City now.

"It could happen," Rosenblatt said.