

Surf City to require upkeep of dunes

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SURF CITY — Saying the borough's shores are in need of protection as the battle to replenish Long Beach Island's beaches drags on, the Borough Council has introduced an ordinance that would require owners to maintain dunes on private property or be billed for borough-made repairs.

"The federal government is willing to give us \$71 million (for the entire project), and these people can't get together and believe it's a great deal," Mayor Leonard T. Connors Jr. said Tuesday. "Some of them are looking to make money; some are concerned with property values. I have been here for 52 years and witnessed the 1962 storm. If they saw the devastation I saw, they would sign those easements in a minute to get that sand in front of their homes."

Easements are needed from owners of 25 beachfront properties in Surf City — as well as from hundreds more on the island — in order for beach replenishment to be undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Connors cited laws at both the municipal and state levels that he believes give the borough the right to bill property owners who fail to maintain oceanfront dunes. Connors said the town will not use condemnation to purchase private property for the beach replenishment project that is scheduled to begin this summer.

"We've had an ordinance on the books about maintaining low-lying areas since the 1960s," Connors said. "The estimated cost for condemnation is \$1 million and it's years in court. Not only are we within our rights, we need to do something."

Details of ordinance

Under the ordinance, Connors said, the municipal engineer will create a blueprint of the dunes and beachfront. In the event of storm damage, the beach and dunes will have to be repaired to the previous specifications.

"That includes sand, fencing, plantings, geotubes, whatever is needed," Connors said.

The borough will notify the property owner of damages on their property and will issue a \$25 permit to get the work done.

If the repairs to the dunes are not completed in a timely manner, the borough will make repairs and place a lien against the property.

"We will only bill property owners if we have to do work on private property. We'll take care of anything else," Connors said. "All we need to know (is) how the work will be done and in what time period. They can bring it in buckets for all I care."

"If it pertains to the health and safety of the town, we can do it. The dunes are the front line of defense against ocean flooding."

Katharine Christy, who owns a home two lots from the beach on 16th Street, likes the ordinance.

"If there were not any dunes, then this is a lake," Christy said of the island. "If there were no dunes those oceanfront homes would be houseboats."

Sharing the cost

Mark Grasso, also of 16th Street, said the cost should be shared by all residents.

"Because the dunes protect more than the oceanfront homes there is some justification for cost-

sharing," he said.

Connors said the amount of private property on the beachfront is "very little."

"But the property owner will have the responsibility of restoring the dune on their property to its base profile.

"I'm sure this will be challenged in court," Connors said. "I look forward to it."

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