

Sullivan's takes shaky approach to accreted land

BY ALI AKHYARI

There's an old saying which goes, "You can't please them all". Variations abound on this single cliché and it seems that the Sullivan's Island Town Council now has their own variation with the most recent developments on the accreted land issue. It goes something like this: "If you can't please them all, try anyway." But that's not fair. After all, in addition to the 220 official opinions they've received from residents, they have also received a letter from Governor Mark Sanford that reiterates the importance of being able to see the ocean from your deck and real estate values.

It should come as no surprise then, that at their regular meeting on September 15, the Town Council stated that they would not be going with any single accreted land plan, but instead would need to treat different areas differently. The Town has already received a request from several front beach homeowners to build a row of dunes in front of their homes. Another letter suggests that homeowners should be able to cut down all plants and trees completely for the sake of vistas. In his letter, Governor Sanford asks Mayor Carl Smith, "Is there

no way for [home] owners to do self pruning - so there isn't yet another invisible tax on ocean front homes?" Sanford mentions another letter from island resident Robert Hood which suggests property owners be allowed to completely remove all trees and vegetation so flowers can be planted, and says Hood has "very reasonable points" in regards to the huge decline in property values that will occur if ocean views are obstructed by trees. However, not all opinions suggest that real estate values are more important than our environment. Larry and Susan Middaugh, who religiously attend City Council meetings, regularly point out the importance and value of the maritime forest which is naturally growing in the accreted land. Of course, there is also the option of building a row of sand dunes.

While doing work for the State's Ocean and Coastal Resource Management division after Hurricane Hugo, Dr. Tim Kana of Coastal Science and Engineering noticed that properties which had dunes located seaward of their property received significantly less damage than those properties which did not and recommended that dune construction take

place for future protection. Kana's company was the chosen contractor for the accreted land plan.

"I would recommend dune construction today for the same reason in any of these rapidly accreting areas," Kana says. The dune that was suggested for Sullivan's Island at the public hearing is only a fraction of what Kana says should be done to protect the island from storm damage, but it would still provide better storm surge protection than any other option. The amount of sand needed to build the dunes is approximately 100,000 cubic yards and would cost the Town an estimated \$500,000.

I certainly don't claim to know what will make people happy on Sullivan's Island. But I do know that there is great room for improvement over the status quo if residents of the island chose to seize the opportunity," Kana says.

With residents already maintaining drastically opposing opinions and Governor Sanford stepping in on behalf of those who prefer clear-cutting to natural growth, does the City Council stand a chance of forming their own philosophy on how the

accreted land should be handled? It will take courage, that's for sure. But was there ever really another option besides one that will allow everyone to get a little of what they want?

While the Town considers the future of this property, there have not been any protests or demonstrations. So far, the Council has had the luxury of referring to the consultants proposals and waiting on the results of that work. However, Council member Buddy Howle correctly pointed out that eventually the consultants' work will be done and the Town will have to make a conscious decision on the future of the accreted land.

"It's up to us to decide what we want to do. We've got to do it," Howle said.

It comes down to values. The Council will have to make a public statement as to what values are most important under their leadership and their decision on this matter will determine what those values are. The Council needs a governing philosophy. That is the crux of the debate. There has not been an official philosophy with which the

Council members can use to make decisions. They have discussed the various considerations: conservation, money, vistas, and storm protection among many others. However, they have not yet compiled the results of those discussions into any meaningful doctrine. In other words, the Council has not stated in a united voice that environmental conservation is their greatest concern, or that maintaining vistas is number one, or that protecting real estate interests is what the Council is most interested in. As a result, the Council has revealed their support

for "pocket" applications, treating different areas differently.

However, Council member Howle reminds us of the writing on the wall and the giant elephant in the room: decisions have to be made and somebody is not going to be pleased.

The Town Council was scheduled to hold a meeting on September 29 at 6:30pm to develop some direction which they can give to the consultants for one final plan to be presented to the public. However, that meeting was cancelled so that the Council would have more time to go over the details. Another meeting had not been scheduled by our publication deadline.