

Three options for accreted land

STAFF REPORT

On August 4, approximately 150 Sullivan's Island residents had a chance to look at the draft plan that has been in development since last year for the Town's accreted land. Representatives from Coastal Science & Engineering, Dewberry and Sabine & Waters presented information on the various options for managing the 90-190 acres of land, as well as the expected results.

The consultants pointed out that the land would evolve into a healthy maritime forest if it were allowed to grow uninhibited. The ground shrubs would give way to mature trees, creating a more open area sheltered by a forest canopy. This option would cost nothing. Furthermore, a healthy maritime forest would create a natural balance that would alleviate the pest problems about which many residents complain. According to Bart Sabine, one of the consultants, the pest problems are exacerbated by the pruning practices which the Town currently allows.

One issue which was discussed is that beach front home owners are allowed to prune the vegetation in the accreted land that is adjacent to their home to five feet in order to preserve their view of the beach. This action prevents the maturation of the trees into a maritime forest while encouraging shrubs and vines so thick that it is nearly impossible to even crawl through. However, it is perfect for rats, which is part of the reason they have become so numerous. Snakes, which feed on the rats, are also very numerous for the same reason. Furthermore, puddles of water which breed mosquitoes do not evaporate because the ground is blocked from sun and wind by the dense shrubbery. A mature maritime, which is estimated to take an additional 50 years to

grow in some areas, would open up the land so that it could breathe, reducing the amount of mosquito breeding grounds. The forest would introduce new predators such as hawks. The hawks would be able to hunt the rats and the snakes simultaneously. Snake populations could also decrease because of the competition for food.

One solution that the consultants suggested was the planned creation of several ecosystems in the accreted land which would allow beach front residents to maintain a view of the ocean while also helping to alleviate the pest problems. Forests would be allowed to grow in the majority of the land. Properties adjacent to the accreted land could be mitigated so that vistas could be maintained without encouraging pest problems, and open areas with man-made ponds were also possibilities. However, this was an expensive option that would require regular maintenance for as long as the Town wanted to prevent a forest from growing in the manipulated areas.

The consultants also suggested several other "accessories" that the Town could look in to with their management plan. For example, they suggested widening the beach paths for safety. It would provide a more open area for people to walk while also creating a fire break if the land was ever to catch fire. They also suggested building a series of dunes.

The consultants' final suggestion was building dunes. An expensive idea, creating dunes would require the hauling of a line of sand throughout the area in order to build a wall of dunes that could significantly increase the island's ability to withstand storm surges from a hurricane. Tim Kana, of Coastal Science & Engineering, stressed that the dune idea does not

involve clear-cutting the accreted land and replacing it with a huge pile of sand. According to the presentation, a line of dunes would be cut into the accreted land while the ecosystem which was previously occurring would continue around it. The dunes would need to be built as opposed to letting them build naturally on the beach front because the land is accreting so rapidly that shrubbery and forest takes over before the dunes can reach a significant height.

If no other options are presented, the Town has three choices for accreted land management. The first is to do nothing and let the land mature into a maritime forest. The second is to continue its current practice which permits independent pruning of areas adjacent to properties. Third is to actively manage the area into several different ecosystems that also preserve vistas.

Residents can expect a second presentation before any decisions are made and will have another opportunity to provide opinions and insights. The date of that hearing has not yet been released.

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