

Letters from SBPF

Disagrees that current bluff fix is only temporary 1/30/2014

To the Editor: I write on behalf of Siasconset Beach Preservation Fund in response to the recent editorial "Living on Borrowed Time" (Jan. 16, 2014). The piece does a nice job of capturing the loss many of us feel on Baxter Road and we certainly appreciate the expressions of sympathy and the hope that our current effort will be successful.

However, we must disagree with the final conclusion that nothing can work and it's only a matter of time.

The beauty of Baxter Road is not all lost and the situation is certainly not hopeless. Most of the oceanside homes and the bluff walk are still in their original condition. The road to Sankaty Lighthouse is still open for all Nantucketers and all of the homes on the landward side of the street are still there. Certainly it is sad to look over the 12 vacant lots at the northern end of the road and think back to the happier days when families spent summers enjoying this incredible setting. Of course, if nothing is done we can expect over time that Baxter Road will be closed off piece by piece and the southern movement of erosion will continue to take away one or two homes every few years until there are no more left. The threat to Sconset village itself is not over the next decade but it is certainly less than 50 years. We know there are many who fatalistically subscribe to the idea that we are condemned to watch our island wash away and that the only moral or realistic or "well-adjusted" response is to retreat. No doubt we will need to adapt, but even if rising sea levels do turn us into a shoal in 600 years that is a long time away. We all know that in the end each of us will die but we still seek the best health available in the meantime. Scientists continue to discover ways for us to manage or even overcome diseases only recently considered hopeless. Why is protecting the historic Sconset community from erosion something that we are uniquely unable to do anything about?

It is true that our efforts are extraordinary and expensive. But doing nothing is even more expensive. Valuable property and our island's tax base are being destroyed, to say nothing of so many personal memories. There are no guarantees of success, but there is an absolute guarantee that we will fail if we don't try.

People seem to be pre-wired into different preconceived "belief" categories when confronting the reality of Baxter Road. One group believes that any effort to address the forces of erosion represents the arrogance of man foolishly resisting nature and that the attempt almost by definition will end up harming others. The other group believes optimistically that we can use engineering lessons from similar undertakings elsewhere and come up with an effective solution that does no harm. SBPF is solidly in this second group. We hope to bring the same can-do spirit that lies behind much of human progress. Unless we are willing to try to do something that has not been done before, progress does not happen, and sometimes it comes in the face of long odds.

At the SBPF we know something about trying and failing. But it's evident that we are on to something positive this time. The current effort does involve large-scale construction equipment on the beach during installation and for now at least it requires many dump trucks delivering sand to offset what would wash to some other beach or off-shore shoal. But the truck traffic can be limited to compact time periods in the [winter](#). At 100 or more loads per day the appropriate amount of annual sacrificial sand can be delivered in five to 10 days for the current project area. If the system is extended to the length needed for full protection it would be about three times that. And we are exploring other methods of sand delivery that hold promise to further reduce the impact.

So, is this crazy? We can all wish the problem would just go away, but that does little good. To us an annual program of sand maintenance is a lot less crazy than just throwing up our hands and letting one of the island's most beautiful communities wash away.

We would like to thank our public officials at the state and town levels as well as the residents of Nantucket for allowing this project to proceed. We are appreciative of the police officers who directed traffic and helped make sure that no one was hurt during the installation. We were able to keep the roadway open to the public throughout the construction process but apparently there were a few situations during the busiest times, sometimes based on misunderstandings, when some people were kept away for safety reasons.

We regret any inconveniences this caused. We are incredibly appreciative of construction workers and managers who braved frigid temperatures and a serious storm event and got the job done with skill during the toughest part of the year. Finally, we are especially grateful to the winter residents of Sconset who have put up with a lot of truck traffic this January.

Even though public opinion is far from united on this subject, we appreciate that most islanders do indeed sincerely hope our project will succeed even if they are not necessarily convinced that it will. Our hope is that over time we will show that this approach can work with, not in opposition to, natural forces and that we can preserve our community in a sustainable way that maintains the beach and does not harm others.

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