

SBPF not blind to shoreline science

To the Editor:

Summer on Nantucket is a time to enjoy the island's beauty and attractions, not to be enmeshed in controversy. But the Sconset erosion prevention issue remains a hot topic because much is at stake. Though opinions on this issue differ, we can move forward with a civil, fact-based dialogue that assures we make smart choices for the future of the Sconset community and beyond.

Those of us trying to save our community in Sconset want people to know the facts – not just as we see them, but as the science supports them. Unfortunately, those who disagree with our facts and position keep repeating a simple story line: The people who are trying to protect Sconset are a small group of ultra-rich property owners who don't care about the scientifically-proven negative impact they are having on others. They would sacrifice our island for personal gain. But that story doesn't hold up: This spring two national experts gave lectures on the island about the pitfalls of engineering efforts that try to protect against erosion. The two most important points they made were that a) if you build a coastal-engineering structure, it might protect the threatened area but it will have an impact elsewhere unless you add sand on a regular, long-term basis (something that is hardly ever done), and b) taxpayers in general are usually the ones who end up footing the bill even though a relative few benefit. The Sconset project meets both concerns and should be considered a positive model of environmentally- responsible adaptation.

1. The geotube project has been designed by professional coastal engineers and environmental scientists to avoid harm to other beaches and the broader Nantucket community. The use of significant additional sand in covering and buttressing the geotubes counteracts the impact on other beaches. Critics keep describing the impacts of our project as if no additional sand is being supplied.

2. We are adding more sand to offset erosion than any project of its kind that we are aware of.

3. And we back up that promise. We have given the town a cash escrow account sufficient to remove the system if it actually causes harm, or if we stop providing added sand.

4. The additional sand can be delivered off-season (typically April and late fall). This year's April delivery took about three days. There is enough sand compatible with our local beaches within the current island sand pits to serve this role for up to 20 years and far longer if other pits were opened.

5. This work has been funded with private dollars.

In addition to individual property owners' personal concerns, there is a larger impact on all of Nantucket. So far erosion in Sconset has destroyed about \$100 million in the island's tax base measured in lost homes and reduced property value. As a result, about \$300,000 once paid by Baxter Road homes are being picked up by everybody else. That amount will only continue to grow if erosion is not managed.

While it is expensive to protect our community, the cost of doing nothing is far higher. Erosion has been moving south at about 75-100 feet per year for the past few decades.

We have planned a series of educational events this summer. Stop by the observation area at 87 Baxter Road and decide for yourself based on the facts. Attend one of the open information sessions – July 25, 4:30 p.m., Sconset Casino; Aug. 13, 4 p.m., Sconset Chapel; Chamber of Commerce, upstairs at Zero Main St., for members only, Aug. 19, 5 p.m. Check our website (www.sconsetbeach.org) for FAQs and background information. Invite us to give a presentation to your neighborhood group. We have reached out to meet with some of the groups opposing our efforts in an honest effort to engage in a civil, respectful discussion.

JOSH POSNER
President SBPF