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Talking points on erosion

To the Editor: I submitted the following as a public comment to the State DEP in response to the Draft Report and Recommendations of the Massachusetts Coastal Erosion Commission. I attended a public hearing on this report in Hyannis on March 25 and then sent this letter to the Commission:

Gentlemen,

I attended the meeting in Hyannis on March 25, 2015 as the sole representative from Nantucket, specifically one of your named 'hot spots,' Siasconset. I made some brief comments at that time but would like to expand upon them a bit. But first I'd like to thank the commission again for presenting such a thorough and thoughtful report, and hope that the strategies put forth can be implemented in a timely fashion.

The coastline in Siasconset at its northern-most end is made up of beach and bluff, and perched on that bluff are many homes, most of which predate that magic 1978 year. Exposed to the harsh nor'easters, the toe of the bluff has been eroding to the point where most homes have been moved back from the bluff at least once, others moved off entirely, and one has been lost. Although my family's home is on the 'safe' side of the street, Baxter Road, which runs parallel to the coastline and ends at the historic Sankaty lighthouse, is threatened as well. In December 2013, to protect the toe from further erosion, a system of sand filled geotubes was installed for 900 feet at the most vulnerable area.

This project is designed to provide sacrificial sand to the littoral system in an amount that is 150 percent of the historic annual rate. The installation and the sand replenishment requirements are all 100 percent privately funded and an escrow account has been established with the town in an amount sufficient to dismantle the project should that sand commitment not be met or if the project is deemed to be environmentally harmful in any way.

Happily the system has worked exactly as designed and protected the toe of the bluff through the past two harsh winters. The approval process to install this system required years of negotiations, which are still ongoing through various appeals. So, the ability to study and evaluate such pilot projects for implementation elsewhere and the creation of an impartial review committee to do so, as outlined in your report, really resonated with me.

Additionally, your strategy to "improve the use of sediment resources for beach and dune nourishment and restoration" would be highly beneficial to us in Nantucket as well as along the entire eastern seaboard, as a recent New York Times editorial discussed the increasing demands for sand. We need to find better ways to meet our future demands. In summary, your report supports the fact that Mother Nature can be controlled in an environmentally responsible fashion. Retreat is not the only option, contrary to what our detractors would suggest. We continue to be vilified for wanting to save our homes, our (public) road, and our community.

And while the erosion in Siasconset is front and center now, with rising sea levels it will affect other parts of the island over time. We need time to study and evaluate the geotube project for possible application elsewhere. And, we need to address the issue of erosion with a coordinated approach. I'm hopeful that actions resulting from your commission's report will be helpful in that coordination."

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