

Rebuilt Beach Is Holding Up Nicely

Nourishment project wins award

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT



Looking east on the beach in Bridgehampton near Surfside Drive. Houses whose foundations were undermined by the ocean during Hurricane Sandy now sit behind broad expanses of beach and rebuilt dunes. MICHAEL WRIGHT

A \$26 million beach nourishment project completed by Southampton Town and oceanfront residents of Water Mill, Bridgehampton and Sagaponack nearly five years ago was named one of the nation's best "restored beaches" by the



Property on Surfside Drive in Bridgehampton right after Hurricane Sandy. Houses whose foundations were undermined by the ocean during Sandy now sit behind broad expanses of beach and rebuilt dunes.

PRESS FILE



American Shore and Beach Preservation Association—the second such project on the South Fork to have been recognized by the group.

The project as a whole has statistically seen zero loss of the millions of tons of sand pumped ashore in the winter of 2013-14, although the restored beaches have held up better in some places than in others thus far. Halfway

through its forecast effective life, the project has been repeatedly heralded as a resounding success, well worth the hefty price tag for the homeowners and residents of the entire region. Southampton Town

contributed approximately \$2.5 million to the project cost, as the owner of four public beaches in the reach.

“The view from our standpoint is that this project has been one of the most successful nourishment projects that have been done, as far as the beaches retaining the sand,” said Jeff Lignelli, who spearheaded the organization of the Bridgehampton-Water Mill Erosion Control District. “What I’m proud of is how the residents of the town worked together to do the right thing. The beaches are dramatically wider for everyone who wants to use them.”

In the wake of severe erosion caused by Superstorm Sandy in areas that were already suffering from accelerated erosion, the town and the owners of 141 oceanfront properties cooperated to organize a massive restoration of some six miles of beaches between Flying Point in Water Mill and the East Hampton Town line in Sagaponack. The town agreed to borrow the millions it would cost to pump sand from offshore and pile it along the oceanfront in the dead of winter, and the oceanfront homeowners agreed to be taxed over the ensuing 10 years to cover about 90 percent of the costs.

The project has benefited from a relatively benign period of weather events since it was completed. There have been no tropical weather systems directly impacting Long Island—as there were in 2011 and 2012, after a 20-year lull—and only a smattering of strong nor’easters prior to this past March.

The series of strong storms in March did deal the most hobbling blow to the bolstered beaches, taking large bites out of the sand and dunes in front of three homes in western Water Mill, just east of Flying Point Beach.

But the designers of the project have celebrated the fact that, along much of the project’s reach, beaches remain in the neighborhood of 100 feet wide and have started to rebuild natural dunes between the flat beach and the artificial dunes shaped out of sand piled up by homeowners.

Aram Terchunian, whose Westhampton Beach-based firm First Coastal conceptualized and designed the project, said that resilience of the engineered beaches thus far is a testament to how a properly shaped beach holds up to storms. Having also been the architect of the beach nourishment in West Hampton Dunes, which was given an earlier ASBPA award as well, Mr. Terchunian said he’s most pleased with the natural form the engineered beach has taken on.

“They have their criteria: projects that are successfully engineered, have broad public acceptance and tangible environmental benefits,” Mr. Terchunian said. “I have a much simpler criteria: If you can walk on the beach and you can’t tell that it’s been restored, that’s a good beach.”

Mr. Lignelli said that other regions should be looking at undertaking similar projects, either privately funded by the adjacent homeowners or publicly funded by all residents who benefit economically and socially from having broad beaches.

“There needs to be a lot more money spent on the beaches in the Hamptons,” he said, spotlighting the erosion issues at Montauk’s popular beaches and the sandbag sea wall that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employed to protect private property to save on costs. He added, “What Montauk did was the wrong way to do it. They tried to use a Band-Aid approach, when what is needed is a serious construction project.”