

[More North County news](#)

## Coastal Commission gives city officials more time to fine-tune shoreline plan

**By Tanya Mannes**  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

November 14, 2008

SOLANA BEACH – In a victory for Solana Beach, the California Coastal Commission yesterday granted the city more time to finish a land-use plan that will ensure more local control over shoreline development, including sea walls.

The plan has broad community support.

After hearing testimony from city leaders, residents and environmentalists supporting the plan, the commission voted unanimously to postpone a decision rather than denying approval, as was recommended by commission staff members.

Several commissioners praised the plan's goal of removing sea walls by 2081 but agreed with the staff that more details were needed, including the proposed fees for sea-wall permits and how the money would be used.

Commissioner Larry Clark said at the meeting, held in Long Beach, that the plan is “a work in progress” but that it seems to be on the right track.

“It's clear from what we heard today that there has been earnest, good work on trying to bring about a Solana Beach land-use plan,” Clark said. “It's heartening to see the city, the homeowners and the environmental interests working together.”

Solana Beach will have until September to finish the plan, called a Local Coastal Program.

Solana Beach Mayor David Roberts said, “I am pleased that it was not an outright denial.

“We have a tight deadline to get this all accomplished,” Roberts said, “and I am trying to stay optimistic that they can have their staff work with our staff and get this completed.”

Roberts said the city presented a united front yesterday, with representatives of the Sierra Club, Surfrider Foundation and CalBeach Advocates, and community leader David Winkler, a bluff-top homeowner. Solana Beach is the only coastal city in the county without an approved Local Coastal Program, so the Coastal Commission approves its development projects on a case-by-case basis and allows sea walls only in emergency situations.



CHARLIE NEUMAN / Union-Tribune  
A sign warns visitors to Tide Beach Park of unstable cliffs. Many homeowners have built sea walls.

The city has been trying to establish its plan for more than a decade but has been held up by debate over sea walls. Environmentalists oppose them because they alter the natural terrain to protect private property.

But property owners say they have a right to prevent their homes from collapsing. About 1,300 people – 10 percent of the city's population – live in houses and condominiums within 20 feet of the edge of a rapidly crumbling sandstone bluff, Roberts said.

About half the city's 1.4-mile coastline already has sea walls, although some will need to be upgraded or replaced.

In his remarks to the commission, Winkler said that homeowners agreed to the plan, even though it limits their rights, "to give us some certainty, which we don't have now."

After years of public outreach, Solana Beach submitted to the Coastal Commission a policy that represents a hard-won compromise between environmentalists and bluff-top property owners over sea walls.

City officials were alarmed by a negative review from the Coastal Commission staff in an Oct. 30 report because it put the fragile consensus in jeopardy.

Solana Beach's plan would allow sea walls for properties on the bluffs, but property owners must agree to several conditions, including paying fees for sand replenishment and fees so the city could buy some bluff-top property for the purpose of demolishing sea walls. Solana Beach would have the first right to purchase any bluff-top property for sale. The policy would require sea walls to be removed by 2081.

Coastal Commission staff members said that setting a date for removing sea walls was a "commendable goal," but they contended that the policy doesn't do enough to discourage construction on unsafe bluff tops. Another concern was the potential for "loopholes" that would allow sea walls to stay up beyond 2081, such as a lack of money to remove them.

The report also criticized a lack of information on subjects, including public parking and low-cost recreational facilities, fire protection, invasive-species removal and wildlife-habitat protection.

Todd Cardiff of Surfrider said while his organization opposes sea walls, the structures are viewed as "inevitable" in built-out Solana Beach and the city's plan provides a framework to ultimately remove them.

Solana Beach agreed last year to pay \$100,000 to the Surfrider Foundation so that it would drop a lawsuit against the city over sea walls and endorse the Local Coastal Program, which the organization had helped develop.

Commissioner Sara Wan complimented Solana Beach on the compromise but said she needs "to be assured" that the city's sea-wall fees are adequate to accomplish its goal of ultimately removing bluff-protection structures.

Clark agreed, saying the financing plan "must be realistic in terms of buying homes" and said the funding should not be used solely for sand replenishment.

---

■Tanya Mannes: (619) 498-6639; [tanya.mannes@uniontrib.com](mailto:tanya.mannes@uniontrib.com)

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/northcounty/20081114-9999-1mc14solana.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2007 Union-Tribune Publishing Co. ? A Copley Newspaper Site