

Compromise reached on sea walls in Solana Beach

Citizens panel sends report to City Council

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SOLANA BEACH – A decade of feuding over sea walls and the resulting beach erosion has come to an end – at least for now.

A five-member citizens committee, made up of representatives from environmental organizations and bluff-top home-owners, has reached a compromise.

The group submitted a report to the City Council this week. The council was expected to discuss the report at a later meeting, but no date has been set.

Environmental organizations oppose sea walls, which they say stop the natural bluffs erosion that provides sand to replenish beaches.

Bluff-top homeowners want sea walls to protect their properties from bluff failures.

The report struck what some say is middle ground by acknowledging that sea walls contribute to beach erosion and that homeowners need to protect their properties.

According to the report, the city would demolish all sea walls by 2080 except for those that meet certain criteria – for instance, sea walls that must stay because there are no alternative stabilizing measures.

Before 2080, bluff-top homeowners would still be able to build sea walls or repair existing ones if they meet aesthetic guidelines, such as minimizing the size of the structures, adding landscaping, using colors and textures that blend in with the coastline, and maintaining the walls.

City leaders hoped the compromise would finally result in the restoration of Solana Beach's eroded beaches and contribute to the drafting of a development plan for its 1.7-mile coastline.

Solana Beach is the only coastal city in the county that doesn't have such a plan, California Coastal Commission planner Gary Cannon said.

The report also suggested sand replenishment and construction of underwater reefs to

break up the erosive action of waves.

Additionally, the report recommended that the city purchase bluff-top homes by reaching agreements with owners and without using the power of eminent domain to facilitate the demolition of sea walls.

To finance the recommended measures, the report suggested:

Continued collection of fees from homeowners who wish to build sea walls or repair existing ones.

Creation of a redevelopment agency and the formation of assessment districts that could target beachfront homeowners and/or the entire city.

Formation of a joint powers authority with neighboring Encinitas and Del Mar for coordination and cost-sharing.

"I would say there is a cautious truce, if not a full truce. There is potential for a truce," said Dwight Worden, one of the five members of the committee.

Worden also is a former Coastal Commissioner and a member of CalBeach Advocates, which, along with the Surfrider Foundation, sued the city. Their lawsuit, which is pending, alleges that Solana Beach did not conduct proper studies before allowing sea walls to be built and failed to collect proper compensation from homeowners who constructed them.

The other committee members include a representative from the Surfrider Foundation; bluff-top homeowners Jon Corn and David Winkler; and Doug Sheres, a former Solana Beach mayor.

"For 10 years, there's been pretty much open warfare between some who live on the bluff and own property and want sea walls and environmental people who don't want sea walls. While we're fighting, the beaches are eroding," Worden said.

Sheres said the compromise might finally allow the city to take action and replenish the beaches.

"It's a compromise. Both sides have things in it they don't like," he said.

Bill Glockner, chairman of the Condominium Organization of South Sierra Avenue, an area that borders the ocean, said his association generally supports the report.

"The committee really worked on it, trying to represent both sides of the spectrum," Glockner said. "Right now, things are not getting done. There is litigation. We've got to move forward."

In a letter to the city, Todd Cardiff, chairman of the Surfrider Foundation's San Diego


chapter, commended the committee for reaching a "reasonable compromise."

However, the foundation objected to some suggestions, one of which involves the filling in of eroded bluffs. Cardiff said such a measure would stop the bluffs from eroding naturally, preventing sand from reaching the beaches and limiting the public's ability to use them.

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