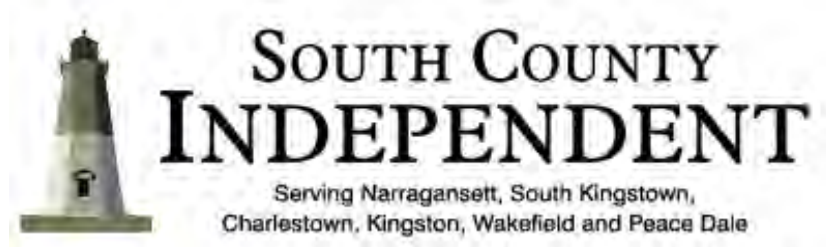


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Narragansett Headlines

Five firms compete to study sand replenishment options

By Iain Wilson/Independent Staff Writer

NARRAGANSETT - The crescent-shaped beach that each year brings flocks of tourists and millions of dollars in revenue to Narragansett is shrinking. Five engineering firms have submitted proposals to determine the cause of the shrinking and identify ways to return the sandy swath to its ideal size.

"Some of the proposals are a little more technical than others, but we've got five really good proposals," said Town Engineer Jeffry Ceasrine.

The town solicited proposals last month to study replenishment options for the town beach, which has lost 60 feet of shoreline since 1939.

"It's been such a long time coming," said Town Councilman Christopher Wilkens, who drafted a beach erosion report last year. "I'm just looking forward to going over these and awarding the contract and going forward with the project."

Four engineering firms in Rhode Island and one from Massachusetts submitted proposals. East-Falmouth, Mass.-based Woods Hole Group estimated the work would cost approximately \$39,540.

A low bid of \$25,880 came from Harbor Engineering LCC of Barrington. Providence-based GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. bid \$104,500 to complete the work. An \$86,278 bid from Applied Science Associates of Wakefield included retired University of Rhode Island professor Dr. Jon Boothroyd as a subcontractor.

Middletown's Northeast Engineers & Consultants Inc. returned a bid of \$29,250.

"I think the numbers reflect how much time the firms want to put into the research phase," said Ceasrine. He said he plans to meet with Town Manager Grady Miller and Director of Parks and Recreation Barry Fontaine to discuss the proposals and hopes to have a decision in the next several weeks. Their recommendation will then be forwarded to the Town Council for approval.

Through the study of sand samples, hydrographic and topographic mapping and cross-shore modeling, the firms seek to answer one question: Where can the town get the most sand for its beach without seriously harming the surrounding environment?

The mouth of Narrow River, which sucks sand from the town beach into its flood tidal

delta, remains a viable candidate for dredging.

"At face value, without any studies, it seems like a natural because the source of the sand has probably been our beach," said Ceasrine. "Still, we'd like to see the quantity of sand that is available and get some opinion as to what a sustainable solution might be."

In 2008, the town learned that the Army Corps of Engineers would not dredge sand from Narrow River to the beach as part of a habitat restoration project along the Narrow River.

"We were disappointed," Wilkens said. "We wanted them to piggyback the beach replenishment on top of the river work that they had proposed."

Offshore options also exist, said Dr. John King, professor of oceanography at URI. "Areas where riptides go out, there's generally a delta-like deposit that goes some distance offshore," he said. "Generally speaking, if you go out and map it, it's pretty easy to identify these things."

Ceasrine added that the study should give the town a better idea about the involvement of state and federal agencies if the town goes forward with beach replenishment. The town secures a maintenance assent each year to add quarry sand to the beach, but Ceasrine said "anything beyond that will require a lot more concentration from a regulatory standpoint."

For the last few years, the town has purchased sand from George Sherman Sand and Gravel in Wakefield as a short-term solution. Between 2008 and 2010, the town spent \$32,250 for 1,690 cubic yards of sand.

The nor'easter that swept through southern Rhode Island in April 2007 battered the beach, cost the town about \$75,000 in sand and prompted talks about long-term options for beach replenishment.

"You could spend a lot of money, put all sorts of sand on the beach and have a couple of bad storms force you to say goodbye to it," said Ceasrine. "We're looking for a more sustainable solution."

Said King, "In a geological sense, it may be delaying the inevitable, but the beach is a vital part of the town, and you have to do what you can to keep it viable for as long as possible."

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