

Alliance urges ‘collaborative’ dune-grading approach

Breakers Point homeowners to ‘regroup’ in new year By Dani Palmer

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Cannon Beach has decided not to address foredune grading for the moment, but the battle over whether it should be permitted or not continues.

In November, Frank and Janet Patrick, along with multiple other Breakers Point homeowners, filed an application to grade 75,000 cubic yards of sand from the northwestern and southern land boundaries of the property. In their application, they stated landowners and their guests “cannot access the beach adjacent to the property due to impassable slopes created by drifting dunes artificially created through the planting of invasive European dune grass.”

City Planner Mark Barnes sent the homeowners a letter stating the application was incomplete due to a number of factors. These included the need to address foredune grading in the oceanfront management overlay zone standards, comprehensive plan polices and to receive permission from other homeowners if their request was the same as a previous Breakers Point Homeowners Association request.

Cameron La Follette, executive director of the Oregon Coast Alliance, said her organization was disappointed by the latest application.

“It’s important work. It should be collaborative,” she said. “The new application, that’s not working together.”

She and others in opposition have said the city should be allowed to complete more research and update its sand management plan before any further dune-grading projects are approved.

Cannon Beach’s last plan was completed in 1997 and expired in 2008. La Follette said it should be updated more often.

The city considered prohibiting foredune grading after the Planning Commission approved a 13,700-cubic-yard Breakers Point Homeowners Association dune grading project in August. Councilors expressed concern over effects to the littoral cell without a finished sand management plan on hand, but ultimately decided to table the topic until further notice.

Other developments

La Follette said homeowners should be more thoughtful about the foredune grading's impact on other properties. At Planning Commission meetings, Chapman Point homeowners stated the last dune-grading project completed at Breakers Point increased the amount of sand coming their way. "It should give pause," La Follette said. "It's necessary to work collaboratively. What you do affects your neighbors."

She called foredunes the "first line of defense in storm surges." If the dunes are flattened, the area could become a safety concern in case of a surge or tsunami, she added.

When the Breakers Point Homeowners Association proposal to grade was approved, Property Manager Bruce Francis said the tsunami of 1964 showed the dunes provided little protection.

La Follette said the dunes are based on ocean cycles. In the 1990s, residents worried about dune erosion about rather than an abundance of sand.

With El Niño this year, there is a chance the sand will move on its own, she added. Littorial (or sediment) cells constantly move.

Patrick and other homeowners say the European dune grass has accumulated over 2 million cubic yards of sand over the last 15 years and needs to be removed along with the European dune grass.

La Follette countered that the Breakers Point Homeowners Association revegetation plan approved by the Planning Commission raises its own concerns.

"It's generally a good thing to eliminate invasive species, but American dune grass doesn't hold as well as European grass. The dunes move much more without it," she said. "The grass stabilizes it. European grass is in a category of its own."

Much of the area homeowners want to grade doesn't even belong to them or the city, she added. La Follette said the land belongs to the state.

The views homeowners are fighting for are for everyone, she said, adding many like the dunes. They're characteristic of Cannon Beach to some.

But homeowners say changes in dune patterns have made beach access a nightmare in some locations, especially for those with disabilities. La Follette said she is not aware of any major public access issues, and added there is no guarantee to views or access for beachfront property owners.

Frank Patrick said the Breakers Point homeowners will likely regroup at the beginning of the year to plan their next step.