

anytime soon, the issue of planning for sea-level rise is unlikely to go away. This rule, in whatever form it eventually takes, will have important implications for the land-use plans of Carteret County and local governments. (Those interested in learning more on these issues should visit the Carteret County's Shore Protection Office web site at protectthebeach.com.)

Current State of Our Beach. Fortunately, the beach on Bogue Banks and in Pine Knoll Shores is relatively healthy now as a result of several major nourishment projects to repair the damage from our good friends Bertha, Fran, Bonnie, Dennis, Floyd, Isabelle, Ophelia and others. The county has been closely monitoring the volume of sand on the beach and movements in our shoreline at more than 120 fixed locations along Bogue Banks since 1999, and its latest annual report, "State of the Beach-2010," finds that we are in pretty good shape. Outside of the renourishment project underway at Ft. Macon, we haven't had any major nourishment activity on Bogue Banks since 2007 (knock on wood), but the good news is that all the towns' beaches on the island are still above the 225 cubic yards per linear foot (cy/ft) target sand volume threshold (established in 1999 to measure the health of our beaches). We are not currently in a crisis mode, and all the towns have entered into an Inter-Local Agreement and a Master Nourishment Plan that is an island-wide, economic approach that uses a single 30-year permit for future renourishment projects, state/county/local cost-sharing and a more scientific and planned approach to deciding future renourishment requirements.

We have learned a great deal in the past few decades, and we now have new setback requirements and building codes to help prevent some of the problems we have experienced in the past. Under today's rules, it is doubtful that a substantial amount of the private development and public infrastructure that exists today would ever have been built. I seriously doubt that Pine Knoll Shores could ever get the permits required today to dig the canals, drain the maritime forest or allow the construction of many private housing

developments as close to the water as they are today. Nevertheless, while we are in relatively good shape now and we haven't had a hurricane in five years, we all recognize that there is a need to plan now for future emergencies. We may be only one good storm away from losing our beach.

Where Do We Go From Here? In 2002, Pine Knoll Shores held a public referendum and decided to float a municipal bond to replenish its beach. Soon after, it established two separate tax districts (beach front and non-beach front) to raise so-called sand taxes, with the beach front tax district paying a higher sand tax rate. The town has recently repaid in full the \$9.2 million (in principal and interest) municipal bond taken out in 2002 to fund the emergency beach nourishment needed at that time. Paying off this bond in nine years was no small feat for a town this size, especially when you consider that the revenues collected from the special sand taxes levied actually exceeded the general tax revenues collected to run all other town functions (police, fire, etc.) in five out of the last nine years. The beach front tax district paid approximately 85% of the sand taxes used to retire the bond, with the non-beach front district paying 15%. Now that the bond is paid, the two tax districts and the special sand (beach) tax are set to expire this fiscal year unless the mayor and the Board of Commissioners take action.

Maintaining Our Beach in the Future. While our beaches are in good shape now, we still have annual costs associated with maintaining our 11 public beach accesses mandated by the Federal Government as a result of past beach renourishment projects. We also have financial responsibilities associated with participation in the County Master Beach Plan and the need to build an emergency fund for future beach renourishment projects. Pine Knoll Shores now has 11 public beach access sites with associated public parking for 180 cars (in addition to the PIKSCO, PKA, McGuinness Point and Beacon's Reach accesses).

Accordingly, Mayor Jones and the Board of Commissioners (BOC) have recently put forward a comprehensive proposal for managing our beaches in the coming years that includes:

1. A static line exemption (with some

caveats) for non-conforming properties that will allow the owners of these properties to rebuild after incurring major damage.

2. Participation in the County Master Plan (building a fund for future, planned and deliberate renourishment).

3. A Town-wide sand fence and beach vegetation program to preserve the beach and the sand we have.

4. The implementation of a new beach tax in the next fiscal year to pay for the above.

Mayor Jones, Town Manager Kramer, Commissioner Corsello (the lead within the BOC on this issue) and the rest of the commissioners have held open town hall type meetings in the last few months with the public, other interested groups and homeowners' associations to discuss their proposal and solicit public input on the plan. In many ways it's déjà vu all over again, since paying for our beach—renourishment, public accesses, maintenance—has always been one of the most contentious and polarizing issues in town. Even though nothing has been decided yet, I think the mayor and the BOC deserve our thanks for taking this difficult issue on in an open and transparent manner. The good news is that the total annual cost of the Mayor's beach plan going forward is far less than what we have been paying during the last nine years to retire the 2002 sand bond, so there is less pain to spread around.

The Devil in the Details. As with most things, the devil is in the details. For example, many issues arise when it comes to the question of building a fund for future renourishment projects. With global warming and sea-level rise, are we throwing good money after bad just to fight a losing battle? Are we better off planning a managed retreat from the sea or just abandoning the beach altogether? Why should current taxpayers, who just finished paying for past renourishment projects, pay into a fund now for future renourishment when they might not be around to reap the benefits? We don't know when or how severely we will be impacted by storms in the future. It could happen tomorrow, and all bets would be off. The best laid plans.

The same is true of the proposal for sand fence and beach vegetation, which gives rise to a classic "free-rider" problem in the short-term. Many neighbor-

hoods, homeowner associations and individuals have already constructed sand fencing and planted beach vegetation on our renourished beaches with positive results. If the town takes over this activity, the "free-riders" who did nothing will get fencing and vegetation at taxpayer expense, while those who have already incurred costs to build their own fences will get higher taxes. However, nothing is easy or how it appears at first glance. The whole town will benefit from a comprehensive sand fence/vegetation initiative, and the "free-rider" problem diminishes over time. Some residents have proposed that the town simply mandate that beachfront property owners construct and maintain sand fences as canal front owners must do with their bulkheads.

Parking and maintenance of the new public access sites is another issue. The new public accesses were built as a requirement for public funding of prior beach renourishment projects that gave beachfront owners a sigh of relief. However, beachfront owners are unlikely to ever use these accesses because they don't have to. So, who should pay? Parking is another Pandora's Box, especially if Emerald Isle and Atlantic Beach institute paid parking. This may push more visitors to Pine Knoll Shores' public accesses, along with a host of attendant issues like litter, illegal parking and other law enforcement issues.

The issue becomes even more complicated and contentious when it comes to paying for beach renourishment. The question of who benefits has a direct bearing on the question of who should pay. Unfortunately, the costs and benefits of beach renourishment are very arbitrary and subjective. They can't be measured with any degree of accuracy, which is probably why Pine Knoll Shores has never attempted to do it.

Most taxpayers would agree that a healthy beach is one of the town's best assets and an attraction that makes family and friends eager to visit. It is open to be used and enjoyed by everyone, beachfront and non-beachfront residents and visitors alike. Maintaining our beach supports everyone's property values, the town's tax base and regional economy. Without a healthy beach, property values, tax receipts, rental incomes and retail sales would probably drop.

Beachfront property owners, how-