

Some St. Lucie residents will be asked to pay a fee to help beach restoration project

By Laurie K. Blandford

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — Residents who live east of State Road A1A in the southern part of the county could see an extra fee on their next year's property tax bill to help pay for a beach restoration project.

County officials plan to ask residents if they would pay a portion of a proposed \$11.6 million project through a special assessment district to restore and maintain less than 4 miles of beaches and dunes at the end of next year.

More than 3,000 condominium owners would be affected in the project area stretching from Dune Walk to Sand Dollar Shores and from Normandy Beach to the Martin County line.

Without the residents on board, the project wouldn't happen, said Jim David, the county's director of mosquito control and coastal management.

County officials scheduled a public meeting for feedback on Nov. 30 at 6 p.m. in the County Commission Chambers.

If residents agree to help, the average condominium owner's upfront payment on next year's property tax bill would be less than \$3,600, according to county calculations.

The average condominium owner also could choose a 10-year payment plan at 7 percent interest and annually pay more than \$500.

Besides the usual problem of beaches south of inlets losing sand, David said hurricanes damaged the beaches and dunes south of the nuclear power plant.

The proposed project would restore recreational beaches, habitats for marina turtle nesting, beach mice and shore birds, and storm protection for properties.

Because county officials don't know when a federal beach restoration project would happen, David said this one-time project would last 10 years.

Condominium owners in the project area could pay fees ranging from about \$2,500 to \$6,000 upfront or about \$400 to less than \$1,000 annually.

Although the project area mostly consists of condominiums, David said it also includes vacant lots, single-family homes, private beach parks and two county beach parks, Dollman Park and Waveland Beach.

David said the county erosion control district would draw from its \$6 million in reserves to pay for the county beach parks' special assessment of about \$780,000. He said it also would use more than \$2.8 million in reserves to pay a portion of the project.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection already awarded the county \$3.2 million for design and permitting.

As the county's Coastal Engineer, Richard Bouchard said he applied this week for more money but won't know until next year if any additional funds will be awarded.

If the department approves Bouchard's requested \$9 million, the special assessment for the nearly \$11.6 million project would drop drastically.

South County Beach Project Special Assessments

St. Lucie County officials and consultants created a formula to determine how much residents in the project area would pay for special assessments.

They factored in property characteristics that would benefit from the project, including acreage, frontage and number of units.

They assigned one point per 0.1 acres of land, one point per 10 linear feet of frontage and one point per dwelling unit.

Special assessments to residents are in proportion to their property's total number of points.

For example, the Sand Dollar North condominium has 544 feet of project frontage, or 54 points, 10.1 acres, or 101 points, and 109 units, or 109 points. The 264 total points equates to the condominium paying more than 3.5 percent of the special assessments.



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