
Permitting Process Underway for Ship Bottom Living Shoreline Project

By Gina G. Scala | Aug 14, 2019



Photo by: Ryan Morrill

SHIP BOTTOM — Restoring the bayfront at Shore Avenue Park in Ship Bottom came closer to fruition this week when local, state and federal officials met to discuss a project to prevent further erosion that borough officials have been working toward for years.

On Monday, Mayor William Huelsenbeck and Councilman Joe Valyo, who spearheaded the living shoreline project, met onsite with representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Habitat Conservation Division as well as the state Department of Environmental Protection’s Bureau of Marine Fisheries. Members of the borough’s engineering firm, Owen Little & Associates of Beachwood, were also on hand for the 90-minute meeting.

“I think it went pretty well,” Huelsenbeck said afterward, noting he expects the project to move forward. “It’s a small project with easy access for it to be studied.”

The area in question is the western side of Ninth through 12th streets and south of the East Thorofare Bridge, part of the Causeway.

“I think it’s encouraging,” Valyo added. “We’re not trying to reinvent the wheel here. It’s little steps.”

A natural, or living, shoreline uses sand fill, indigenous wetland plants and stone to preserve the shoreline and save the habitat from further destruction. Fixing the erosion problem there would help minimize flooding and runoff in the area and along Shore Avenue, according to the councilman.

Huelsenbeck said at least 50 feet of bayfront has been lost to erosion since the 1960s. The dominant cause for the erosion is high tide and the currents, though the area is marked as a no-wake zone and wave velocity is minimal due to shallow waters in the Intracoastal Waterway.

“Forty-four percent of our bayfront is accessible to the public,” the mayor said, adding that doesn’t happen anywhere else on the Island.

Last fall, the state chapter of the Nature Conservancy awarded the borough \$35,000 for the engineering design and permitting of the project. The permitting process is twofold, with one coming from the Army Corps of Engineers and the other from the state DEP’s Division of Land Use Regulation.

A living shoreline absorbs wave energy, negating its ability to erode the coastline. It also reduces nutrient runoff while maintaining the natural ecology of an area. Bulkheads perform in the exact opposite way of a natural shoreline, reflecting wave energy and increasing attrition. They are expensive to sustain and aren’t a long-lasting answer.

The area in question is eroding into the bay and causing harm on shore, Valyo said.

In announcing Ship Bottom's grant, the Nature Conservancy noted, "The Shore Avenue Park living shoreline will be a great demonstration project for coastal communities interested in designing and building living shorelines in the Barnegat Bay watershed."

In June 2018, the Ship Bottom Borough Council unanimously approved the purchase of a parcel of land to the south of the boat ramp to enhance the borough's chances of getting funding for a living shoreline there. At that time, Huelsenbeck noted the privately owned lot was underwater. The borough paid \$40,000 for the parcel and now owns the bayfront from the northernmost section of the boat ramp to the south side.

A living shoreline, while still a relatively new concept in New Jersey, has been used nationwide for years. Earlier this summer, the DEP, the Barnegat Bay Partnership and Partnership for the Delaware Estuary recently completed installation of a living shoreline near the caretaker's house at the Sedge Island Natural Resource Education Center, a renovated duck hunting lodge on an island in Barnegat Bay. The project's goal is to slow post-Superstorm Sandy erosion and promote natural accretion of the coastal wetland.

Also, in the Long Beach Island region, Little Egg Harbor Township, acting as the lead agency for neighboring Tuckerton, last year awarded a contract for two separate living shoreline projects. The Iowa Court project in Little Egg Harbor includes shoring up an eroded cul-de-sac and creating a hybrid living shoreline, called so because it contains a hard structure.

In Tuckerton, the South Green Street living shoreline project contains two separate sections. The first is located along the cove that has eroded within feet of the roadway. The second section would continue from a point of land jutting out into the cove to the bulkhead at South Green Street Park. It was a beach in the 1960s.

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