

February 14, 2012

To the Editor:

We, the undersigned writers, are all owners of homes on the bluff along Baxter Road adjacent to the proposed lots where the bank stabilization and beach preservation project currently proposed by the Siasconset Beach Preservation Fund (SBPF) would be initially installed. After reading the recent news articles, editorials, and commentary in the Inquirer and Mirror, we want to express our views on a number of issues.

First, there were statements in recent commentary (“Goodman’s Gam” 2/9/12) that SBPF has a “neighbors be damned” approach to this project. In fact, SBPF has been reviewing this proposal with us, and we have determined that appropriate design measures and mitigation have been included in the project to protect our properties from adverse impacts. As a result we are strong supporters. The same commentary included a suggestion that this project would result in “possible destruction of a piece of our natural resource.” This indicates that the writer misunderstands the erosion that is occurring at Sconset and how this project is designed to stabilize the coastal bank and preserve the coastal beach with a substantial, scientifically derived sacrificial sand supply.

Second, the I&M’s editorial (“Too many uncertainties to approve SBPF plan,” 2/9/12) suggested that the proposed project “has its flaws.” But, without identifying any flaws, the editorial merely expresses the view that the “biggest fear is of the unknown.” “Fear” on the part of observers who are not fully informed is not a “flaw” of the proposal. SBPF presented the Conservation Commission with a great quantity of detailed engineering and scientific analysis in support of their proposal and has answered every question and issue raised. Ignoring this fact, the I&M editorial “poses the question of what the effect of partial armoring will have on the other properties on the bluff” and claims that “experience has shown that those properties which are not protected and lie down-drift of armored coasts, often end up with scouring on their beaches, and wherever this armoring is put, that result is likely to occur.” It is odd that the “question” being posed is paired with an assertion that “experience has shown.” In fact, experience with coastal “armoring” is widely variable, since mitigation is rarely as comprehensive as is incorporated here. The most relevant example – the existing terraces project at this same Sconset location has not caused scouring of down-drift unprotected properties (if anything, there actually seems to be some stabilization of adjacent lots).

Last, the editorial asks the question of the Town’s potential liability for any claims by nearby property owners. We can offer two answers. SBPF has agreed to provide the same indemnification and escrow arrangements that are in place for the terraces project. And we, the very people who are supposedly potentially harmed by the project, are actually strong supporters. If we can find an environmentally sustainable way of protecting the Sankaty bluff, at private expense, where is the harm? As the editorial notes, this is an erosion control experiment. But, it is well-designed and studied, and it comes with SBPF’s commitment, backed by an escrow fund, to remove the project if any adverse conditions arise. Given the I&M’s recognition of this area as “the edge of nirvana,” the importance of preserving the public footpath and Baxter Road itself, and the quality of the design and proposal presented by SBPF, this should not be “too close to call” for the Conservation Commission. State and local regulations allow this kind of project to stabilize an eroding coastal bank and provide mitigation for beach preservation. That is

exactly what is happening here, and our neighbors and SBPF should be given the opportunity to demonstrate that this careful design will work.

Sincerely,

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Josh Posner and Eileen Rudden, 77 Baxter Road

John and Debbie Osborn, 75 Baxter Road

Doug and Pam Hendrickson, 73 Baxter Road

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