

CHARLESTON REGION COMMUNITY LEADERS FORUM ON SHORELINE CHANGE

Meeting Notes

July 13, 2009 – 2:00pm-5:00pm

This document is not intended to be a meeting transcript, *per se*. It is a summary of key themes and some (though not all) of the background dialogue. The meeting summary's structure roughly parallels that of the meeting agenda but is not necessarily true to the temporal order of discussion.

In Attendance:

1) Forum attendees:

Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester COG	Alec Brebner
Charleston County	Sally Brooks Joel Evans Dickie Schweers
Charleston Metro Chamber	Graham Drayton
City of Charleston	Fowler Del Porto Philip Overcash
City of Folly Beach	Carl Beckmann La Juan Kennedy Eric Lutz Aaron Pope
City of Isle of Palms	Dick Cronin Linda Tucker
City of North Charleston	Ed Astle
Coastal Planning & Engineering - NC	Ken Willson
Kiawah Island Community Association, Inc.	Joe Bunting Ian Freeman
Kiawah Island "Talk"	Barbara Winslow
S.C. Lowcountry Refuge Complex	Raye Nilius
S.C. House District 115 Representative	Anne Peterson-Hutto
S.C. House District 119 Representative	Leon Stavrinakis
S.C. Sea Grant Consortium	April Turner Jessica Whitehead
Seabrook Island POA	John Turner Scott Wallinger John Wells
The Nature Conservancy	Christie McGregor
Town of Mount Pleasant	Mac Burdette
Town of Kiawah Island	Jim Jordan Steve Orban
Town of Seabrook Island	Randy Pierce

Town of Sullivans Island	Michael Perkis
	Carl Smith
University of South Carolina	Nate Kettle
Wild Dunes Community Association, Inc.	Dave Kynoski

2) *Shoreline Change Advisory Committee members:*

Sara Brown,	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Mary Conley,	The Nature Conservancy
Toni Connor-Rooks,	City of Folly Beach
Rick DeVoe,	S.C. Sea Grant Consortium
Scott Harris,	College of Charleston

3) *S.C. Department of Health & Environmental Control:*

Braxton Davis,	OCRM Policy & Planning Director
Marvin Pontiff,	OCRM Assistant Deputy Commissioner
Bill Eiser,	OCRM Wetland Section Project Manager
Marian Page,	OCRM Federal Grants Coordinator
Will Salters,	OCRM Coastal Planner
Elizabeth Von Kolnitz,	OCRM Policy & Planning Program Coordinator
Matt Slagel,	NOAA Coastal Management Fellow

Welcome / Overview of Shoreline Change Advisory Committee:

Braxton Davis, Director of DHEC-OCRM’s Policy & Planning Division, provided a brief overview of the Shoreline Change Initiative and the purpose of the Advisory Committee. To date, there have been two orientation meetings focused on OCRM authorities and activities, the Committee work plan and process, and shoreline management in other states. The Committee has also examined research and information needs, and South Carolina’s policies concerning retreat, beach renourishment, beachfront erosion control, and local beach planning.

Essentially, we've held a series of meetings to "brainstorm" ideas and issues related to beachfront and estuarine shoreline research and management, and we've asked volunteer subcommittees of the full committee to draft "policy options" that explore different ideas that have been generated thus far. These initial ideas and subcommittee lists can be found in the approved meeting minutes on the SCAC website at the following link: (http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/ocrm/science/shoreline_comm.htm)

The purpose of this initiative is to explore, in-depth, South Carolina's past experiences and continuing needs related to shoreline management in the coastal zone. To do so, we'll need significant public participation, and we're trying to provide a number of opportunities. In addition to the public comment periods at each Committee meeting, and general public hearings, we'll accept written comments at any time, and the draft report will be circulated

widely for public comment. We'll also include all public comments on the draft report in an appendix of the final report.

At this stage, the Committee has been exploring different policy options, but the policy options have not been finalized and any of them may be dropped, changed, or added at any time in the coming months. Completion of the Committee's Draft Report is anticipated in late September 2009, with a tentative Final Report release of Fall 2009.

Dr. Davis' presentation can be found at the following link:

(http://www.scdhec.gov/environment/ocrm/science/shoreline_comm_071309.htm)

Break-Out Session Results:

We have attempted to identify areas of apparent consensus among participants (underlined), but in most cases simply relay the suggestions of one or more individuals or break-out groups. Since no votes were taken, each suggestion described below could be a minority OR majority opinion.

Question 1:

Are South Carolina's beach and dune systems healthier today than in 1987? Are beachfront communities more or less threatened by shoreline changes today than they were two decades ago?

Some attendees suggested that:

- The beach and dune systems are healthier today than in 1987 due to:
 - Enhanced public awareness and focus on beaches
 - Better information on beach functions and values
 - More local protection for beach/dune system
 - Active beach management approaches
- The beach and dune systems are less healthy today than in 1987 due to:
 - Continued development too close to the beach/dune system, which restricts natural migration of the shoreline
 - The accelerated loss of beaches and marshfront shorelines in some areas, especially undeveloped beaches
 - More human impacts (treading) on dunes with not enough dune planting and building
 - Funding for dune walkovers and handicap access points could help mitigate these impacts.
- It is difficult to define what constitutes a "healthy" beach.
 - Is a healthy beach stable or is a healthy beach mobile?
 - Many issues play out differently in different regions of the coast, and these issues must be understood, planned for, and managed differently.

- Beachfront communities are less threatened by shoreline changes *in the immediate future* because:
 - Renourishment projects have helped to stabilize beaches somewhat.
 - Community based setbacks and other beach management approaches have reduced vulnerabilities.
 - Increased local investments in beach erosion monitoring programs provide earlier warnings of pending problems.
 - Beachfront communities are more threatened by shoreline changes *in the near- and long-term* because:
 - There are more people living along the coast and more money invested in buildings and infrastructure than 20 years ago, and these communities are continuing to grow.
 - Storm surge and sea level rise could flood/inundate low lying areas more frequently or dramatically.
 - Active beach management will prevent smaller storms from inflicting as much damage as they would have 20 years ago, but the SC coast is more vulnerable now to larger-scale storms.
 - The insurance industry will drive the nature of future development and redevelopment along beaches and barrier islands.
 - Will insurance reflect actual risks?
 - What requirements will there be to receive coverage?
 - How much will insurance cost?
 - There should be more education and outreach on the risks of building in hazardous areas, the importance of dunes, and the purpose of beachfront management.
 - 20 more years of increasing development and 20 more years of increasing erosion are big concerns.
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Question 2:

Is renourishment sustainable as a long-term solution to beach erosion/shoreline migration in South Carolina?

- a) What are your concerns about sediment supplies, financial support, accelerated sea level rise, and/or the severity and frequency of storms and erosion events?***
- b) What temporary erosion control measures (e.g. sand bags) should be allowed to provide time for renourishment projects (or natural accretion), under what circumstances, and for how long?***
- c) Some erosion control solutions that involve alterations to nearshore features (e.g. nearshore borrow sites, inlet relocations, groin fields, breakwaters) can cause negative impacts on adjacent or “downstream” beaches. How should***

the state manage these potential impacts, and what is the relative role of local and state government?

Some attendees suggested that:

- Pre-planning for renourishment projects should be considered to help identify potential borrow sources ahead of time.
- Nearshore shoals should not be outright prohibited as a borrow source for beach renourishment projects, but they should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- It would be useful to have the ability to manipulate and/or accelerate shoal bypassing events to move the sand to the beach faster.
- The beneficial re-use of dredged materials should be examined and encouraged.
- There are sufficient sand resources, both nearshore and offshore, to continue renourishing the state's beaches in the future.
- State and federal funds should pay for renourishment projects on beaches with sufficient public access, and private funds should pay for projects on private beaches.
- It is economically viable to continue renourishment at the present rate.
- The state should directly manage a renourishment program with dedicated and predictable state funding from year to year.
- The line of development should be held at the current extent, and development should not be allowed on accreted land. Some attendees believe development on accreted land should be allowed in certain circumstances.
 - In North Carolina, development on accreted land may be allowed if the community demonstrates a 30-year plan and financial commitment for renourishment.
- Beachfront management should be performed in a regional context rather than one island at a time.
 - Need to understand sediment budgets
 - Regional planning and coordination for all nearshore alteration projects
 - Regional beachfront and inlet management zones/plans
- The state should determine how it would manage and respond to conflicts over specific sand resources.
- Statewide zoning for the beachfront should be investigated. The retreat policy could then be tailored to specific zones.

- Current real estate disclosure requirements need to be expanded to fully inform potential buyers of the risks of owning coastal property.
- Sea level rise is a contributor to beach erosion, but it is not an immediate threat and therefore should not be planned around. Beach management and planning should be done for those threats and impacts that are known, rather than those that are uncertain.
 - The planning horizon needs to be considered – are we planning for 20 years, 50 years, 100 years?
- As it relates to emergency orders, a single definition of “emergency” needs to be established and shared by all relevant agencies.
 - Emergency orders need to be coordinated across DHEC-OCRM, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, local governments, and others.
- Local communities should be allowed more time and fewer restrictions to issue and implement emergency orders.
 - By the time erosion is within 10 feet from a structure, it is already too late.
- The state should decide what constitutes an “emergency” erosion situation along the beachfront while coordinating with local governments.
 - Local governments are too close to the situation and could experience strong political pressure to issue emergency orders more frequently than is necessary.
- Sandscraping should be allowed from accreted areas to eroding areas, not just within extended property lines.
- The size limitation of sandbags should be reevaluated to ensure that the bags are large enough to withstand waves, tides, and currents, but small enough to still be considered “temporary”.
- There should be a specific timeframe for removal of sandbags following an emergency, and this could be enforced with a substantial bond for removal before the bags are installed.
- The current ban on new erosion control structures within the DHEC-OCRM setback area is a good policy in general, but the state should consider exemptions to allow “gaps” in seawalls and revetments to be filled when some adjacent properties are protected and others are not.
- Existing erosion control structures should always be allowed to be maintained, even if established dunes and vegetation would be disturbed during the process.
- The Charleston Harbor jetties need to be more fully studied and understood.

- Sand bypassing
- Regional sediment budgets, including riverine inputs
- Downdrift impacts of the “dynamite hole” in the southern jetty.

Question 3:

Is the state’s policy of “retreat” from eroding beaches well understood by local communities?

- a) ***Has the policy of retreat been implemented over the past two decades?***
- b) ***What are the challenges to retreat, and how might they be overcome?***
- c) ***Are the state’s beachfront “baselines” and “setback areas” effective means of:***
 - ***Encouraging retreat***
 - ***Reducing reliance on erosion control structures***
 - ***Reducing risks to coastal communities, and/or***
 - ***Maintaining the health of the beach/dune system***

Some attendees suggested that:

- **The forum attendees generally agreed** that the state’s policy of retreat is *not* well understood by local communities. The key uncertainty surrounds the long-term goal of retreat.
- Some potential goals of the Beachfront Management Act are to:
 - Preserve public access
 - Protect shorelines, citizens, and property
 - Increase public awareness
- It should be emphasized that over 40% of the state’s ocean shorelines are in protected areas.
- Post-storm redevelopment planning is needed prior to a major storm to limit the redevelopment of especially hazardous areas.
 - Some principles of retreat could be implemented in post-storm redevelopment plans.
 - After a major storm, insurance money could be used to begin the retreat process.
- There are many challenges to retreat, including:
 - Political will
 - Property rights
 - Shallow beachfront lots with little room left to move landward
 - Local zoning regulations (street setbacks, etc.)
 - Availability of land to relocate structures to
 - Billions of dollars invested in beachfront statewide

- There are currently no funding mechanisms or incentives to motivate retreat.
 - Active relocation programs prior to an erosion event would require significant funding, which is not available during these lean economic times.
 - Funding for land acquisition programs is typically much less than funding for renourishment projects.
 - Passive retreat is inevitable in the future due to sea level rise, hurricanes, and the prohibition on new erosion control devices. There was some disagreement on this topic.
 - Retreat has occurred in very few locations along the SC coast.
 - Since public roads can be protected by erosion control structures, how can the state tell private property owners that they cannot armor their shorelines and that they must retreat?
 - Moving a house landward on an oceanfront lot will eventually reach a road, at which point the house can no longer be built on the same parcel. Could this eventually lead to the loss of the first row of houses along the beach?
 - As a beach migrates inland due to sea level rise or other factors, the beach itself will not be lost until it reaches a public road, which can be armored.
 - The environmental impacts of beachfront structure abandonment should be emphasized.
 - Demolition, jurisdiction for removal of materials.
 - The state may be reluctant to expand enforcement or modify beachfront development rules due to “takings” concerns.
 - State implementation of the retreat policy and beachfront management in general should rely upon coordination and involvement with the local governments since they are very familiar with their own beaches.
 - The state’s beachfront baseline and setback line are good for protecting the beach, but they don’t encourage retreat, and they don’t reduce risks to coastal communities.
 - Outreach and education (including real estate disclosure) would help local communities and property owners to understand the various permitting authorities, jurisdictions, and regulations in the coastal zone.
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Question 4:

Are estuarine or “sheltered” coastlines facing similar threats from migrating shorelines, rising sea levels, coastal storms, and encroaching development?

- a) If so, are present management authorities and planning activities sufficient in comparison with beachfront areas?***
- b) Do bulkheads along these shorelines present similar issues to those associated with beachfront seawalls? Are there better alternatives?***

Some attendees suggested that:

- The forum attendees generally agreed that *yes*, estuarine coastlines are facing similar threats from migrating shorelines, rising sea levels, coastal storms, and encroaching development.
 - Some attendees believe that estuarine coastlines are more threatened by sea level rise than ocean coastlines.
- Current state regulations are better now than in 1987 at protecting the marsh, but the state’s jurisdiction is still too limited.
- A statewide estuarine shoreline buffer and setback area should be considered.
 - Many cities and counties already have estuarine shoreline buffers, but state regulations should set a minimum standard.
- Local governments have limited planning resources, so they would benefit from more state support and assistance.
- More information is needed pertaining to the causes and drivers of estuarine shoreline erosion and migration.
 - More monitoring
- The siting, costs, and benefits of mitigation banking need to be more fully understood.
- DHEC-OCRM should invest more resources in setting Critical Area lines, and property owners should be required to update the lines.
- Like the ocean shorelines in the state, estuarine shorelines do not have enough public access to support the growing coastal population.
 - State funds should pay for increased public access along estuarine shorelines.
- The state should explore a “retreat” policy for estuarine shorelines.
- Undeveloped estuarine shorelines could be regulated differently than developed estuarine shorelines to limit the amount and rate of armoring.

- The state should consider only allowing bulkheads and revetments to protect existing development.
 - “Living Shorelines” and other alternatives to hard erosion control structures should be encouraged along eroding estuarine shorelines.
 - The unique issues governing estuarine shoreline dynamics need to be considered.
 - Inundation (water covering normally dry areas) vs. erosion (loss of upland property)
 - Since it is difficult to balance public and private interests, any discussion about increased regulation of estuarine shorelines must include economics and property rights considerations.
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Public Comment Period:

There were no oral public comments.