

KeyOpinion



T-head Groins: Longboat's War with 'A Rock'

The Town's compulsion for T-head groins is similar to the way an infant clings to her blanket or a half-drunken man clings to an argument.

I feel for the residents of the Islander. The only thing washing away faster than the sand in front of their Gulf-front condominium is time — the critical time our Town leaders should take in coming up with a viable and sustainable solution to the vicious erosion gnawing at their beach. Basically, there are but a few options to solve the problem:

- Leave the condo vulnerable and make the erosion the property owner's problem for buying into such a seaward structure that sits at the jagged edge of the sea.
- Overfill the protruding area with extra sand and an emergency renourishment every other year or so at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars to taxpayers.
- Place a permanent structure or groin in front to capture sand with a design to minimally impact the neighbors.

Engineering Failure

But our citizens and shorelines are not being served well by their adamant and continual reliance on the T-head groin plan of the Town and its beach consultant, Coastal Planning and Engineering. In fact, the Town's compulsion for T-head groins is similar to the way an infant clings to her blanket or a half-drunken man clings to an argument in spite of the logic and the admonishment of the sober thinkers in the room.

Now, affected residents are a year down a road that

By Steve Reid
Editor & Publisher

is leading in circles and getting costlier as their beach washes away and fees are expended. And we are no closer to getting approval for the groins.

To be fair, the Town relied on the expertise of CP&E to tell them what was acceptable to the State permitting departments. We followed their advice in pursuing the T-heads. We spent thousands and thousands designing and testing the T-heads, then the State said "No."

Next, we are encouraged yet again by CP&E. They remained nonplussed and acted as if the State was acting aberrantly in its negative view of the T-heads. In reaction, we asked the State to send every shred of evidence it used in arriving at its conclusion to deny T-heads. After our intimidations, the State came back with a firmer "No."

A Strange Marriage

So we have gone to the altar of the DEP twice with CP&E asking for a blessing for T-head groins and yet we are staying married to the firm. And now the relationship is growing bizarre.

Now the Town is sending staffers to Tallahassee with CP&E to ask if the State would permit T-heads that are smaller, shorter, narrower — in essence T-heads Lite. And if the DEP says yes, guess who gets paid at the end of



this exercise? CP&E.

So months and a quarter of a million dollars later CP&E has recommended doing what it could have done for the cost of a plane ride and a night in a hotel in Tallahassee. They are encouraging a sit-down with the DEP to ask the agency what it would permit and how we should go about getting the permits.

We were against the Delft 3 study wherein the Town spent about \$57,000 to a Holland-based company to prove that the T-heads would not negatively impact the neighboring shoreline. It was to no avail. DEP was not impressed with Holland's science and in fact supported the exact ideas that Murf Klauber and his supporters have said all along — a semi-permeable structure is what is necessary.

Clarity, Anyone?

As a community and as a Town we have to be clear that CP&E failed us. Failed us in being arrogant in its certainty that the T-heads would be permitted. Arrogant in its attitude following DEP's first denial — not to mention the blunder the engineering firm made in the sand on the beach last year, costing a mere \$250,000. Frankly it is embarrassing. Someone should be held accountable.

This exercise to travel to Tallahassee is a "Stand By Me" swan song that amounts to a bailout to the firm with whom we should be furious. The most reasonable voices keep asking the Town to design and consider alternatives to the T-heads. We asked that the Town submit other designs to compare against the T-heads when it paid for the Delft 3 study.

The Town going back to Tallahassee is like a piggish boss in the courtroom telling the judge he doesn't understand what he did wrong regarding his sexual harassment conviction. The judge says, "What part of 'No' did you not understand?"

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for the T-groins Thursday at the Commission workshop — Webster finally said enough and asked the Commission to make a decision.

Brenner's letter expressed his frustration and dismay at the Commission's inactivity.

"Frankly in my opinion they (CP&E) don't get it," Brenner said. "We don't need a textbook solution in a real world."

He wondered how the Commission could know what to do after two informal meetings. What he did say is that the groins would be a permanent solution, which would save the Town \$700,000 a year.

This wooing back of CP&E by the Commission is the first step taken after the June 5 meeting when president of the engineering firm Tom Campbell held defeat in his hand after FDEP failed to approve their T-groin plan.

Campbell met with St. Denis after the "breakup," sending a letter to the Longboat Key Town Commission this week stating that their continued involvement in The Islander t-groin design process was sincere and they would like to move forward.

Campbell told the Commission that if the Commission decided to stay onboard with CP&E and their project was approved by FDEP, CP&E would want to be paid for their work. But, they would hold their billings for their efforts in design and in other areas where they may be needed, he said, until after that approval from the FDEP.

Newsworthy, from Page 2A

ing a contribution to the scholarship should contact Glenn Compton at 966-6256.

Death Ruled a Suicide

The fatal shooting of an Anna Maria Island woman on Monday is being classified as a suicide, according to the Manatee County Sheriff's Office.

Deputies responded to the residence in the 500 block of South Drive around 2 p.m. Monday in reference to a shooting. The woman's estranged husband returned home for lunch and found the woman with a gunshot wound in her head, according to reports.

Campbell recommended that Cliff Truitt would contact FDEP and request guidance on the types of design changes and studies needed to complete the process.

It was recommended to the Commission by Campbell at the meeting on June 5 that they limit the groin design standard to 100 feet, which would shorten the groins by 30 feet. He stated that was still his recommendation.

Another idea — which CP&E does not recommend — was reducing the number of groins.

A third suggestion by Campbell is to make the groin stems permeable.

It was also suggested by Campbell that a meeting be called with The Islander, Villa Di Lancia and the Benedict Estate representatives. He asks that Town representatives, CP&E and Truitt meet with those representatives.

A meeting with the Regional Planning Council would be necessary before they could approach FDEP again with groin design modifications, according to Campbell. He suggested a meeting in September.

Commission Robert Siekmann thought that if they did not get the Regional Planning Council's blessing it was a moot point to move forward with the engineers or the neighbors of The Islander, but he had to admit afterwards that it might be the only solution to get the recommendation of FDEP next.

"The hook is that if there isn't a solution that is acceptable to the neighbors, we're just blowing up stream," Commissioner George Spoll said. "I'm willing to give the engineers more rope."

Selby Wins Art Award

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens received the 2006 Frank G. Berlin, Arts Organization of the Year Award from the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. The award was presented for Selby Gardens' excellence in the arts industry.

"We strive to create a life-long connection between our community and the living world, through the arts, botanical beauty, science and education," said Roger Birkel, President and CEO of Selby Gardens.

The Gardens displays orchids, bromeliads and a wide range of tropical foliage with a focus on science and environmental education. For further information about Selby Gardens, call 941 366-5731.