

Charlotte, Sarasota team for sand

By STEVE REILLY

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ENGLEWOOD — Sarasota and Charlotte counties may be ready for a joint effort to fight beach erosion on Manasota Key. "That's very good news," said Joan Dunham-Card, president of the South Manasota/Sandpiper Key Association.

"The Gulf has no clue where the county line is," Dunham-Card said.

Charlotte County commissioners will be asked Tuesday to approve a joint agreement allowing Sarasota to join its beach renourishment effort. Last month, Sarasota commissioners approved \$70,000 for an engineering study, design and permitting for a beach project! .

The agreement also calls for Sarasota County to hire Coastal Engineering Consultants, the firm that's been overseeing Charlotte's beach renourishment project.

In the South Manasota/ Sandpiper Key Association's December newsletter, Dunham-Card wrote, "Manasota Key shoreline is seriously eroded, and it is clear that the beach will not restore itself. The need for restoration has been clearly established."

Funding

Charlotte County is still working on a multiyear funding strategy to pay what could be a \$28-million initial beach renourishment project.

The project includes a one time, \$7 million cost to re-create the habitat of more than 4.25 acres of hard bottom that's been scoured out by erosion.

In November, Peter Ravella and his consulting team shelved a proposed funding strategy where property owners on the Charlotte portion of Manasota Key and Sandpiper Key would pay 30.5 percent of the costs annually through a property taxing unit.

The county would contribute another 30.5 percent, \$1.65 million, annually. The plan also anticipated 39 percent of the funding from the State of Florida, based upon public access and other factors on Manasota Key.

"I think we are down to a couple of issues," Ravella said Friday, describing discussions on the methodology with county attorneys and staff.

"I think it's going to look familiar to people," he said of the components in the revised funding methodology.

Ideally, his team may be ready to present a proposed methodology to county commissioners and the public later this month.

Sarasota County commissioners will have to decide upon their long-term funding strategy. But to get started, they committed nearly \$70,000 of Tourist Development Tax funds that will eventually have to be reimbursed.

Like Dunham-Card, Ravella welcomed a joint effort. They believe the state might increase its contribution into a more regional project — as well as reducing mobilization and other costs for beach renourishment.

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