

Resistance swells over Manasota Key beaches

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STAFF WRITER

ENGLEWOOD — Peter Ravello's Texas-based consulting team is still determining a palatable funding strategy that could sustain a beach restoration program on Manasota Key.

The consulting team faced a tsunami of resistance Thursday evening from West County residents, particularly those from South Gulf Cove and Rotonda West. Charlotte County commissioners, however, may be responsible for triggering the resistance.

"We appreciate the value of our beaches," South Gulf Cove resident Sandy Slater said at the workshop, held at the Tringali Recreation Center Thursday that saw a turnout of 170 or more residents.

"I have no problem

with a fair and equitable assessment," she said. "I do have a problem with only West County being tapped to fund this initiative. These beaches are enjoyed by everyone in Charlotte County."

Last month, commissioners modified what had been an existing taxing unit that West County property owners pay to help offset the costs for Stump Pass dredging and maintenance. Renamed as the "Integrated Shoreline Management Municipal Service Taxing Unit," commissioners added a component that would allow a portion of the funding to be dedicated to beach renourishment.

The change was to reflect the "recreational availability" mainlanders enjoy from Manasota Key's Gulf beaches. Commissioners did not set any assessment for the modified taxing

A Manasota Key beach funding workshop will be 1 p.m. today at the Tringali Recreation Center, 3460 N. Access Road (State Road 776), Englewood East. For more information, call Tyler Buckingham at 805-340-9469 or email tyler@parccoastal.com. Visit Manasota Key North Beach Erosion Project under "Project Status Updates" on www.charlottecountyfl.gov.

unit.

Representing the South Gulf Cove Homeowners Association, first vice president Peter Watson read a board resolution objecting to the change of the taxing unit that could increase the Stump Pass assessment for Manasota sand.

Hank Killion, a Rotonda West Association director, said his board passed a similar resolution.

What also bothered Slater and other West County mainlanders is that property owners in the rest of the county aren't being called upon to help sustain the county's Gulf beaches — even though the beaches

can be viewed as an asset for the entire county. Slater noted how the county's tourist and other advertising prominently features Gulf beaches as an attraction and asset.

Stemming the tide

Tyler Buckingham, the consulting team's research coordinator, tried to assure the audience. "We are in no way thinking that the West County (taxing unit) should be burdened with paying for all three projects," he said.

The Stump Pass taxing unit will continue to pay for the inlet's management.

However, the consultants

are taking an "integrated" view of three Gulf coast projects: the existing taxing unit for the renourishment of Gulf shoreline on Knight/Don Pedro islands, the Stump Pass management project and the proposed Manasota Key renourishment. Combining those projects under one umbrella could garner Charlotte more than the 39 percent in cost sharing now expected from the state, both Buckingham and Ravello suggested.

Looking at the 30-year projections of the costs can be staggering. However, the consultants estimate the county is facing a potential annual \$2.06 million shortfall to sustain beach renourishment on Manasota Key.

Their goal is to develop a specific taxing unit for Manasota and Sandpiper Key property owners

— properties west of the Tom Adam Bridge, south from the Sarasota-Charlotte county line on Manasota Key to the Stump Pass Beach State Park.

According to the presentations, factors to determine who pays and how much will depend upon a property's length of beachfront, the size of the lot and the number of units on the property. Off-beach parcels would contribute a proportional share into the taxing unit.

South of Stump Pass, only Gulf-front property owners on Knight and Don Pedro pay into a benefit taxing unit for beach nourishment. Those property owners now pay an assessment of \$15.71 per linear foot fronting on the Gulf with the average 80-foot-wide property assessed at \$1,256.80 annually.

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