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Select Board votes to withdraw geotube expansion proposal from ConCom

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By Jamie Cushman

(Jan. 11, 2023) The Select Board voted unanimously Wednesday to withdraw its notice of intent to the Conservation Commission to expand the erosion-control project on the Sconset Bluff and meet with the ConCom to discuss the next steps regarding its removal.

The decision avoids a possible denial by the ConCom, which would prevent future applications, following the uncertainty surrounding the project after the Sconset Beach Preservation Fund, which submitted the joint proposal with the Select Board, announced that it would be ending its efforts to protect the bluff.

Town counsel George Pucci said during Wednesday's board meeting that the SBPF would still be required to comply with any removal order issued by the ConCom.

"They have contractual obligations with the town so they don't get to just walk away. You have a license agreement with them with indemnification provisions, you have provisions with them that they're obligated to comply with any removal order validly issued by the commission," Pucci said.

Select Board vice-chair Dawn Holdgate Hill said she hoped the ConCom would provide some direction on the removal process at its Thursday meeting and how the town can employ some level of protection from erosion on the island's east end.

"My grandparents' first house here was out in Cisco on Osprey Way and I remember when all of the houses at the end went away slowly one by one," Holdgate said. "I think it's going to be really shocking to a lot of residents and tourists when some of those iconic houses are gone, when the lighthouse is threatened again. I hope the ConCom will actually give us a little direction on if there is any kind of a path to at least have some level of protection so that doesn't happen so quickly."

In a separate agenda item, the board took no action on three proposals related to the relocation of Baxter Road. Holdgate stressed the need for additional public input from residents and the question of funding the project before a decision is made regarding which alternative access route should be selected.

“I think we need to further identify where the money is coming from. Are we going to Town Meeting? Are we doing betterments? Are we doing a combination thereof? I think we do need to talk about these things at some point because regardless of what option we pick, implementation requires the dollars that go with it”

Town manager Libby Gibson said the road-relocation project will likely be funded by a combination of taxpayer money and betterments and that any available grants would only offer a minimal offset of the cost.

The need for the project is heightened by the recent developments with the geotube project.

“What we’ve been hearing off and on from the Conservation Commission is why don’t you get alternative access into place for Baxter Road and then we don’t need to worry about erosion-control measures,” Gibson said. “So we’re kind of being battered by all sides here. We need to get an alternative access underway, in place, funded, agreed upon, all of that. And it’s not a simple project. Like (Select Board member) Matt (Fee) said, it’s not just installing these roadways. There’s utilities and other things that have to be installed, relocated.”

The board also unanimously approved a memorandum of agreement with the Federal Highway Administration to advance design work on the proposed Wauwinet bike path that would eventually stretch more than two miles from Polpis Road to the end of Wauwinet Road.
