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The Coastal Commission 'tax' all Pacificans pay

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The California Coastal Commission has it out for Pacifica. The Coastal Commission supports a bureaucratic solution to sea level rise known as "managed retreat" whereby the ocean is allowed unrestricted erosion east. Give up. This is bad news for long and narrow towns like Pacifica where even 10 feet of erosion can hit extremely expensive infrastructure or a house, hotel or affordable apartments.

Pacifica has about 35 percent of its current shoreline protected by structures like the golf course berm built in 1944 and the seawall at the pier built in 1984. They need maintenance and upgrades just like your roof needs attention every 20 years or so. The pier seawall has reached the end of its service life after 40 years and is scheduled for modernization.

The Coastal Commission doesn't support shoreline protections that keep our homes, businesses and infrastructure intact. That mindset is going to cost every homeowner in Pacifica a fortune.

Enter the RV Resort at 700 Palmetto Ave., opposite the southbound Palmetto onramp to south Highway 1. The resort has a 2016 rock revetment on the west-side shore to keep the property intact. The revetment needs work and minor improvement.

The Coastal Commission ruled the resort can't improve the rock revetment, and it must pull up all the rock by the end of 2024, demolish the entrance station, pull up all the paving and utilities. The city sewer line crossing the property must be moved east.

Managed retreat is coming and it will destroy the four-acre resort and bring erosion up to Palmetto Avenue and Highway 1 by the end of 2025. That is 23 months; the clock is ticking.

Here is the Coastal Commission reasoning: Staff has reviewed the proposal for this site and has concluded that there are no “existing structures” located there as that term is understood in a Coastal Act armoring sense, including because the site was originally developed in the 1980s (and the city sewer line replaced) after passage of the Coastal Act in 1976. Therefore, the RV Park and the sewer line do not qualify for shoreline armoring under Coastal Act Section 30235 tests, and for other coastal resource impact reasons the Coastal Act directs denial of the proposed project.

In other words, since all structures on the property were built after the Coastal Act was enacted in 1976, they don't deserve protection.

Here's where all Pacifica homeowners get gouged by this order — moving the sewer line from current location inside the park to points east along Palmetto Avenue will cost Pacifica taxpayers more than \$4 million, subject to delay, inflation, etc. City Council approved this budget item in 2021.

What will this town will look like when the Coastal Commission starts punching holes in our neighborhoods?

The policy considerations are clear. We are deeply involved in setting a new coastal plan to guide neighborhoods west of Highway 1 and what type of protection they will enjoy. Of parallel concern is east side Pacifica needs all its sewer and Highway 1 infrastructure protected so we have a community that functions.

Do you live in Fairmont or Park Pacifica and think sea level rise won't affect you? Think again! One line is just the start. Pacifica has hundreds of millions of dollars of pump stations, main sewer plant and water lines we all will pay to move. This one small part of a citywide system costs \$4 million or more to move and that equals about \$350 per household citywide.

Moreover, if the commission decides we cannot have rock protection at the west edge of the resort, when will the it allow (or City Council demand) we have protection when erosion hits Palmetto Avenue and Highway 1? Who pays?

A solution is in front of us: We need a city-wide homeowner and infrastructure protection plan to keep the Coastal Commission honest. The RV resort needs to be saved and we then all save sewer line moving costs. We also save Highway 1.

We need a focused City Council to push the back. We need the involvement of the state Legislature. The Coastal Commission may be fine with “managed retreat” rolling up on Highway 1. Pacifica homeowners cannot afford it.

Mark Stechbart is a Pacifica homeowner.

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