

7-5-14

Dear Squibnocket Committee members;

I do not have a presentation to make as Jim suggested some of us might, just some hopes and thoughts about where your committee is going. The driving force here is that the owners of Squibnocket Farms are worried about their access and feel it is time to do something about it. I completely agree. This discussion is driven by the access issue; the questions of beach use and parking are very much side issues. Once the best solution to the long-term vehicle access to the point is settled (and hopefully implemented), the side issues can be sorted out several possible ways.

I do not believe that anyone in Chilmark is trying to deny adequate access to the homes at Squibnocket Farms. The question is, "is a bridge the best answer?" I believe that is the question you will ultimately have to answer. Knowing all the way through that your recommendations are strictly advisory makes it very hard, but it makes it all the more important that your recommendations are really good ones.

Larry Lasser explained to many of us at one of the earlier meetings that after realizing the danger the access road was in he asked his engineers what he (representing the owners at Squibnocket point) could do to guarantee access in a major storm. The answer was the plan for the bridge that the Farm and the Selectmen presented to the town meeting.

I believe that was the wrong question. When your property is at the end of a long barrier beach there is nothing you can do to guarantee access DURING a major storm event any more than living on an island we can guarantee access to the mainland during a major storm event. The relevant question is, "what can we do to regain access immediately after a major storm?"

A well constructed bridge such as the one that was proposed will still be standing long after it is impossible to access either end of it.

A well cared for barrier beach will continue to rebuild itself as it slowly migrates landward. This process can be speeded up with careful planting and reasonable maintenance.

The barrier beach (and the road on it) between Squibnocket point and the paved Squibnocket town road is in fine shape except for the small section where the parking lot and causeway are. The cause of the barrier beach failing there is the rock structures we have erected there over the last fifty or so years. The structures keeps failing and causing damage and being moved back and made bigger and stronger and doing more damage.

In the end the solution to the barrier beach is to remove all the impediments that we have put there and encourage the barrier beach to return to its natural state. The road seems to have little long term effect on the barrier beach as long as the road slowly migrates landward along with the beach and stays well back from the dune crest. That is in effect what has been going on for hundreds of years and it has worked just fine.

If you accept that the access to Squibnocket point is paramount, then consider breaking that into two parts: vehicle access and utility access. The quick and easy one to fix is the vehicle access. If there is a washout the island construction companies have a long history of fixing such problems. If a washout destroys the electrical and phone lines the fix is not so quick. Moving the utilities to a safer location should be the first order of business. Relocating the utilities has nothing directly to do with the beach, beach access, road, parking or any of the other issues and should happen as soon as possible. You could recommend that to all concerned right now.

When you have reviewed all the information you can, and made the best recommendations you can, what happens next will be very interesting. Removing coastal structures is almost unheard of, practically sacrilegious. The normal course of action is to make the structure bigger and stronger, not remove it. If such an innovative course of action ever takes place, people up and down the coast will be watching very closely because it is clear that what we all are doing right now up and down the coast is not working.

Sincerely yours, Chris Murphy