



MIAMI BEACH

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

NO. LTC #

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LETTER TO COMMISSION

TO: Mayor David Dermer and Members of the City Commission

FROM: Jorge M. Gonzalez, City Manager

DATE: July 2, 2007

SUBJECT: **BEACH RENOURISHMENT MEETING WITH THE ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

The purpose of this LTC is to provide the Mayor and City Commission with a report on a beach renourishment meeting that I attended in Washington D.C. on June 27, 2007.

As described in LTC No. 145-2007, Congresswomen Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Debbie Wasserman-Schultz requested a meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regarding the status of the alternative sources of sand study for the Miami-Dade County Beach Erosion Control project.

The meeting took place on June 27th in the office of Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen with representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers, including Assistant Secretary of the Army John Paul Woodley, USACE Director of Civil Works Major General Don T. Riley, USACE Jacksonville District Commander Colonel Paul Grosskruger, and Jerry Scarborough of the USACE's Jacksonville Programs and Project Management Division. In addition to Congresswomen Ros-Lehtinen and Wasserman Schultz, staff from the offices of Representatives Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Mario Diaz-Balart, Alcee Hastings, and Senators Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez were also in attendance. In addition to myself and Kevin Crowder, County Commission Chairman Bruno Barreiro attended on behalf of the County.

A number of issues were discussed during the meeting, including timing of the letter report dealing with the availability of domestic sand sources, the timing to acquire foreign sand (if available), backup plans in case sand acquisition from a foreign source is not feasible, and the breakwaters at 29th-32nd Street.

LETTER REPORT ON DOMESTIC SAND SOURCES

Secretary Woodley and the USACE indicated that the study was undergoing concurrent review, and that it would most likely arrive to the Secretary's office in late October for his review and signature. Upon approval, the letter would then be submitted to the Congressional appropriations committees to notify them that a domestic source of sand does not exist.

TIMING OF ACQUIRING FOREIGN SOURCE SAND

Following notification of the Appropriations Committees, the USACE may begin exploring alternative sources of sand, and will also begin the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The USACE would then award a bid pursuant to this report in late 2009. The USACE indicated that they consider this an expedited timeline, therefore, there is a real possibility that a bid would not be awarded until later in 2010.

BACKUP PLANS

During the meeting I specifically inquired if the USACE had any backup plans for renourishment of our beaches, in case, 1) a willing seller cannot be identified, 2) environmentally compatible foreign sand cannot be found, 3) foreign source sand is available but too expensive. The USACE indicated that preliminary estimates are that foreign source sand would cost approximately \$45-50 per cubic yard, but that until the letter report is complete and forwarded to Congress, they are prohibited from searching for, studying, and negotiating prices for sand from a foreign source.

The Secretary also indicated that there wasn't really a 'Plan B', but that the USACE may have to re-explore returning to the State of Florida, to extract sand from offshore borrow pits elsewhere in the State. This effort has caused significant political problems in the past, which prompted the Secretary to indicate that perhaps the beaches in Miami-Dade County no longer be renourished. USACE officials did acknowledge that resolution of this foreign source sand issue is not a long term solution to the City's beach erosion problems.

BREAKWATER PROJECT

The Secretary and representatives of the USACE were presented with aerial photos of the breakwater project, and discussed the problems that are occurring to the south of it. The USACE indicated that the project is being monitored from the USACE office in Vicksburg, and that they would investigate to see if they can 1) determine the cause and 2) identify potential solutions, including possible removal.

In addition to the meeting described above, we also met with staff in Senator Nelson's office to discuss concerns raised by the Surfrider Foundation regarding the Reef Ball project that is proposed at 63rd Street. The Senator's staff expressed the Senator's continued support of efforts to control erosion in Miami Beach, and I expressed the City's commitment to continue to work with the Surfrider Foundation to ensure that their concerns and questions are considered by Miami-Dade County and the Army Corps of Engineers.

CONCLUSION

In summary, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to ask questions directly to the leadership of the Army Corps of Engineers, and I am grateful for their honest responses to our many questions. However, the Administration is disappointed that there does not seem to be a sense of urgency among the USACE officials for resolving this issue, that the time frame for finalization of the report and for acquiring foreign sand could be as long as three years (if a suitable foreign source is identified), and that neither a backup plan nor a long-term solution to the erosion problems exists.

Beach erosion will continue to be an area of focus during the coming months, including during the Congressional recess in August. The Administration has discussed inviting leadership of the USACE down to view the erosional hot spots, and the breakwater project firsthand, in order for them to better understand the magnitude and serious nature of the problem.

I will continue to update you as this issue progresses. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

JMG/RCM/kc