

Masons Island Fire District Special Informational Meeting

November 26, 2024 – 5:30 PM

Masons Island Yacht Club

Draft Meeting Minutes

Mason’s Island Fire District (“MIFD”) and Mason’s Island Property Owners’ Association (“MIPOA”) organized a public informational meeting to discuss an alternative project aimed at protecting a portion of Chippechaug Trail from coastal erosion. The presentation also included an update on the Living Shoreline Plan previously presented to the community.

1. Meeting Participants

MIFD President Scott Parry led the meeting with participation from Board members Thomas Giola and Kristin Foster. Also present were Board Members Ricardo Kleinbaum (MIFD Clerk), Jeff Miceli (Vice President), Bill Taylor (Tax Collector), Catherine Deichmann, Rufus Allyn (Roads Manager) and Audrey Brown. Board member Ethan Tower (Treasurer) was absent. Forty-five taxpayers were present, including Lou Allyn (Mason’s Island Company Co-Owner).

2. Rationale for Considering Project Alternatives

Scott discussed the impetus for developing an alternative design to improve the coastal resiliency along a portion of Chippechaug Trail, north of Allyn’s Alley and west of Map Block Lot 177-8-1, currently owned by the Mason’s Island Company (“MICO”).

Scott reviewed options the MIFD Board has considered to address the future effects of erosion on the road: 1) elevate a portion of Chippechaug, 2) relocate the main thruway to Old South Rd; and 3) create a shoreline barrier, known as the “Living Shoreline Project”).

Scott indicated that the Living Shoreline Project previously presented to taxpayers has required close collaboration with MICO, as they are owners of the lot site between the Chippechaug Cove's waters and the road where the erosion mitigation efforts are needed to protect the adjacent road.

Scott noted that MICO has expressed "legitimate concerns" about the impact of the Living Shoreline Project, notably the ultimate ownership of rocks and related liability issues. In addition, the uncertain timing of regulatory approvals and the absence of any guarantee for a construction grant award, have greatly complicated project execution, according to Scott.

3. Alternative Design Constraints

Scott stated that the Board formed a new project group ("group") including himself, Jeff Miceli, Tom Giola, Bob Domurat, Lou Allyn and Kevin Miller to identify a more cost effective and expeditious road protection barrier.

In searching for an alternative, Scott noted that the group's focus shifted from the shoreline to a project concept on or adjacent to the road. The work area would need to be far enough away from the Coastal Jurisdiction Line ("CJL") in order to not involve the Army Corps of Engineers and require more complex approvals from the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection ("DEEP"), according to Scott.

Scott also said that several decades ago, the placement of rocks at the water's edge by the Allyn family was highly effective in maintaining the shoreline. However, regulators now impose strict conditions on rock installations on the coast. Kristin added that on average, two feet of coastline is being eroded every year, and that within 15 years the waterline could well reach the road. In the interim, the CJL will move closer to the road, and thus reduce the area where MIFD could execute a project without Army Corps and regulatory hurdles, according to Scott.

Scott then explained how the group concluded that a sloped rock design (similar to the causeways to Mason’s and Enders’ islands and the breakwaters in Stonington) would be the most appropriate application.

Scott added that other construction design options included the use concrete blocks or metal sheets, however, the group decided to select the rock design as it offers the most longevity and is more aesthetically appealing than the other materials. The rock design would also not require environmental permits (only DEEP and Town review), and would be more palatable to MICO, according to Tom.

4. Sloped Rock Design Details

Scott described the construction process for the rock design plan, subject to MIPOA and MIFD Boards’ approval:

- 1) Digging a 150 foot long trench, approximately six to seven feet deep adjacent to the road.
- 2) Placement of rocks in a diagonal formation adjacent to the road on the MIPOA buffer (“right of way”) area.
- 3) Addition of soil between rocks followed by new grass seed to conceal the rock barrier.

The project could be modified to build a deeper trench and could also be extended North or South to prevent unexpected water flow, according to Scott. Marsh grasses donated by the community on MIPOA land would need to be removed but would be subsequently replaced as part of the project.

Scott noted that a key advantage of the rock design plan is that essentially all work would be carried out within the approximate 16 feet of buffer between the land owned by MIPOA and MICO, and thus would not require the involvement of DEEP, or a formal littoral rights agreement. Scott has been told by the design engineers that some of the digging would need to take place a few feet away into the MICO property line. As a result, MIPOA and MICO would likely need to sign an agreement to allow for excavation

within MICO's land boundary, for a \$5K payment to MICO, according to Scott.

Tom also described the committee's interaction with the Town to discuss the plans and restrictions on placement of the soil stockpile. Tom noted that prior to approval, DEEP would need to review the plans and make recommendations to the Town.

5. Living Shoreline Update

Kristin updated the community on the revised pilot project parameters and pending approvals. She stated that the project would involve the placement of rocks in two areas away from the shore: one close to the marsh and another further out within Chippechaug Cove.

Kristin noted that MICO sought modifications to the original project plan, and that Lou sought endorsement for them from DEEP. The regulator agreed to consider the project plan as a pilot since it met conditions to incorporate nature based elements, i.e. plant and fauna protection, according to Kristin.

Kristin also mentioned that the design and permitting phase of the project is funded with grant money, through permitting and final construction designs. She added that execution is now dependent on MICO, as the land owner, delivering a letter of permission to DEEP, to move forward.

6. Next Steps

Scott stated that MIPOA and MIFD Boards will meet to discuss the shoreline and road protection projects. He expects that at the next MIFD Board Meeting, the sloped rock design plan will be discussed with the aim of achieving a consensus on project selection as well as the continued commitment to the Living Shoreline efforts.

Scott noted that if the Board agrees to move forward with the Sloped Rock Design, construction could begin in early 2025 and very likely by the 2025/26 annual meeting, assuming the expected costs fall under amounts

approved by taxpayers at the May 2024 annual meeting. At that time, taxpayers approved a motion to allocate \$195K from the roads reserve to finance “the next phase of the Shoreline Protection Project to protect Chippechaug Trail from erosion”, according to the meeting minutes.

Scott believes that the MIPOA and MIFD Boards could decide to move forward with each of the projects separately, or in combination, or perhaps take no action at all. In the latter case, MIFD would rebuild the road, perhaps on multiple occasions, in the event of future erosion damage at much lower expense, according to Scott. However, the group believes the community would then be exposed to potentially recurrent road repairs with ongoing traffic and residential disruptions. In addition, the movement of the CJL toward the road due to ongoing erosion would complicate the construction if the project were to be delayed, according to Scott.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ricardo J. Kleinbaum – Clerk, Masons Island Fire District