September 9, 2019

Dear Mr. Mayor and Councilors,

This is a note about unintended consequences. The sand north of Ecola Creek was planted with European beach grass to keep it from blowing away and undercutting beachfront homes. That has had at least two unintended consequences: The grass has continually captured sand, year after year, forming scenic dunes enjoyed by residents both full-time and part-time and by visitors. It is an amenity we all enjoy. Another unintended consequence is that, despite grading, year after year the homes behind the dunes have lost their view of the sea and the beach, much of the reason they were built there. So we are all benefitting at the unintended cost of the property owners.

Now a note about intended consequences: Those property owners want to have the dunes lowered so they can see the beach and the sea again, and can get to them easily. The benefit to them is obvious. The greatest cost seems to be that the process would replace the lovely dunes with something ugly. I do not think the Planning Commission (of which I was a member at the time) ever explored thoroughly whether this would be a necessary consequence. Could we ask the experts on Wednesday evening, and perhaps landscape designers, whether there is a way to lower the dunes, perhaps working over time from south to north, replacing the European grass with plantings that would hold a fairly consistent amount of sand in place without building it up again? Could the lower dunes be landscaped so as to look as attractive as the current ones? At best this would undoubtedly be expensive, but wouldn’t the property owners be willing and eager to bear the cost?

If the answer to these questions is yes, this still leaves some issues: Could the new plantings be native, returning habitat for native animals that the the European grass does not support? Is there a way to move the sand that does not endanger the clams? Probably some other questions. Not an issue, I believe, is the protective function of the dunes. No one is advocating lowering them below the FEMA-dictated height plus a margin of safety decided by the Council plus an allowance for sea level rise. Any water coming up higher than that will inundate the ground behind the dunes by coming around via the creek.

Regards,

Bob Lundy