

BEACH PROTECTION POLICY IN THE SOUTHEASTERN COASTAL ZONE

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With the increasing pressures on our coastlines, from development as well as increased storm intensity and rising sea levels, island communities are faced with big decisions. In the absence of any proactive retreat policy the Town of Hilton Head Island has chosen to move ahead with a comprehensive approach for beach and dune protection. In December of 2006, in response to an immediate development concern, the Town Council requested staff to craft a protection plan for an isolated portion of the beachfront, encompassing both commercial and single family land uses. A team comprised of GIS analysts, planners and natural resource personnel devised a method for beachfront protection resulting in the adoption of the Critical Storm Protection and Dune Accretion Area and Transition Area (CSPDAA & TA), Town of Hilton Head Island Municipal Code, Title 8, Chapter 1 located online at www.municode.com. Since the adopted ordinance in 2006 Town Council has directed staff to devise a similar protection area for the entire active beachfront.

Over the years our coasts have suffered from encroaching development which greatly hampers the possibilities for efficient disaster planning. The intention of creating this protection area for the approximately 13 miles of active beach is to prevent the existing line of construction from advancing further into a velocity flood zone, while at the same time ensuring our dune ecosystem is maintained. Hilton Head Island prides itself on the preservation of a mature dune ecosystem. This dune area serves to protect life and property by serving as a storm barrier; provides an important basis for a tourism industry that generates annual tourism industry revenue; provides habitat for numerous species of plants and animals which are threatened or endangered; provides beach and dune system vegetation that is unique and extremely important to the vitality and preservation of the barrier island environment.

Hilton Head Island has elected to move forward with a practical approach to beachfront protection. Both the methods used to create the ordinance as well as the policies that laid the groundwork will be detailed. In a time when development pressures are mounting, coastal communities need to look forward and explore options for protecting the natural environment, in this case a dune system that acts as a first defense against human induced changes.

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