

TOWN OF PALM BEACH

Information for Town Council Meeting on: September 13, 2022

TO: Mayor and Town Council

VIA: Kirk W. Blouin, Town Manager

FROM: H. Paul Brazil, P.E., Director of Public Works

RE: Short-Term and Long-Term Planning for Sargassum Removal from Beaches

DATE: August 31, 2022

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Town staff recommends Town Council authorize the Town Manager to approve a contract for short-term removal of sargassum from the north end of the Town and to provide direction for long-term plans for future sargassum impacts on the Town's shoreline.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sargassum, more commonly referred to as seaweed, has been washing in on the Town's shoreline with more frequency and higher volumes for several years. Likely due to several factors, such as continued pollution of the oceans and climate change, scientists and researchers have determined that the seaweed blooming trends will continue to rise. What used to be an infrequent issue has now become a persistent problem that occurs annually, especially at the north end of the Town from Angler Avenue to the inlet jetty. Earlier this month, Town staff reviewed the shoreline conditions south of each of the four inlets in Palm Beach County. The volume of seaweed was consistent in each of these areas.

For several months, the seaweed has been piling up throughout the limits of the Town. Since 2019, the Town has contracted with a mechanical beach cleaner to rake and bury seaweed within the public beaches at Mid-Town and Phipps Ocean Park. During certain times of the year, the public beaches are able to stay clean and mostly free of seaweed with just one day a week of cleaning. During other times of the year, two days of cleaning per week becomes necessary. As the annual blooms become larger, it is expected that at times each year the mechanical beach cleaner will not be able to keep up with the seaweed washing in on the public beaches.

The following addresses both short and long term potential solutions:

SHORT-TERM SOLUTION

Public Works staff has been working with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) to determine what immediate action could be authorized. In another demonstration of the state's continued support and

partnership of the Town's Coastal Management Program, these agencies expressed a willingness to consider a pilot project with two distinct elements. First, seaweed may be placed adjacent to the jetty and covered with a small layer of sand. This may deter hatchlings from heading toward the inlet and redirect them toward the ocean. Second, seaweed may be placed into large pits on the dry beach and covered with at least three feet of sand to continue to provide ample sea turtle nesting habitat. Both options would be performed and monitored during the next nesting season to determine if nesting is impacted.

As of the date of this memorandum, there are two remaining nests incubating on the beach within the possible pilot project area. Both of these nests are expected to have emergences before seaweed removal efforts could begin following the upcoming Town Council meeting. Therefore, the protection of sea turtles and hatchlings are not the reasons for moving forward with this pilot project. Residents at the north end have complained about air quality and have reported heavy odors emitting from the decaying seaweed. Any urgency to remove and bury the seaweed would be to address these concerns.

The Town does not currently have a vendor under contract to perform an extensive seaweed removal effort. The Town contacted two vendors familiar with working on the beach and neither of them had an existing government contract that could be utilized for procurement by the Town. In order to have a vendor ready to perform this work, a solicitation must be advertised. The solicitation will be advertised on September 6 and will be expedited to just 21 days rather than 30 days.

If Town Council want to move forward with this one-time clean up, Town staff recommends that Town Council authorize the Town Manager to approve a contract with the condition that a responsive and appropriate bid is received through the ongoing solicitation as deemed by Town staff.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION

Should nesting continue to be successful in these seaweed placement areas, these efforts may set a precedent as a long-term solution to address high volumes of seaweed. Another long-term solution to be considered is to have the mechanical beach cleaner perform work north of Angler Avenue once or twice a week, just as they currently do on the public beaches. Although the beach immediately south of the inlet is considered private property down to the mean high water line of the Atlantic Ocean, this beach is often used by North end residents.

The 5-year contract for mechanical beach cleaning is nearing expiration and a new solicitation is being prepared. The scope of work for this solicitation, which presently includes the Mid-Town beach (>1 mile) and Phipps Ocean Park beach (0.25 mile), can include cleaning below mean high tide from Angler Avenue to the inlet (0.75 miles).

Town staff recommends that Town Council provide direction regarding long-term plans for future seaweed impacts on the Town's entire 12.2-mile shoreline through both regular mechanical beach cleaning and periodic large-scale seaweed cleanups for both public and private properties. Note that nearly 3.5 miles of the beaches south of Sloan's Curve to the south Town limits (Reaches 7 and 8) are mechanically cleaned by the respective condominiums, mostly through the Citizens' Association. The majority of the Town's beaches are not cleaned.

FUNDING/FISCAL IMPACT

The mechanical beach cleaning of the public beaches at Mid-Town and Phipps Ocean Park has an annual cost of \$50,000. A likely result from the solicitation, to clean the northernmost 1,400 linear feet of beach, may include a lowest responsive bid that exceeds the Town's annual cost for beach cleaning. The Town's Coastal Fund has sufficient funds available to accommodate these unplanned costs. Given the increased frequency of seaweed blooms, Town staff will include an additional appropriation in future budgets to address seaweed removal following Town Council direction.

Attachment

cc: Shore Protection Board
Nick Caristo, Chief of Police
Will Rothrock, Police Captain
Patricia Strayer, P.E, Town Engineer
Dean Mealy, Procurement & Contracts Manager
Robert Weber, Coastal Program Manager
Lainie Edwards, FDEP
Jason Spanier, FDEP
Robbin Trindell, FWC