

## Homeowners on Sheep Pond Road face lack of access due to erosion

By Brian Bushard

[bbushard@inkym.com](mailto:bbushard@inkym.com) John Albrecht wants to know how and when the town plans to build a new road to the house he's living in, two weeks after part of it crumbled into the ocean during a winter storm.

"I have to park at a neighbor's house 300 yards away," said Albrecht, who lives on Sheep Pond Road. "We can't get propane because Island Gas won't cut across someone's yard, which is understandable, but back in October we asked the town what's your plan, and we heard nothing."

Albrecht's house, along with 12 other homes, is now cut off from the east side of Sheep Pond Road by a set of Jersey barriers, leaving no legal access. The only option has been to cut through a private driveway off Head of Plains Road, to the west.

The town is one step away from granting a temporary easement through those driveways, town real-estate specialist Ken Beaugrand said. The break in the road is about 1,500 feet to the east. A long-term plan for access from the other side of the road is something he said has been in the works for over a year.

"It is critical because they have absolutely no access other than to go over other people's properties. There is no legal access," he said.

"We have been working over the last year and a half trying to figure out how to solve the problem. We've looked at different options but it didn't move with as much urgency as it did until this month."

If the homeowners and the town agree to a temporary easement, he said the County Commission could approve it in an emergency meeting as soon as this week.

Department of Public Works director Rob McNeil hopes a new section of road over that easement can be laid next month.

Only once that road is complete would the town start putting together a longterm plan for a new road, that would provide access from the east side of the road, through Nantucket Conservation Foundation open-space property.

the side of the road and the edge of the bluff before the storm hit. Now, there are only a few feet of road left.

"Ultimately we'll need to pursue both angles so in the future we'll have a plan," Mc-Neil said.

Sea-level rise and coastal erosion are nothing new on Sheep Pond Road. Nineteen years ago, another winter storm left residents without legal access to their homes and no electrical service. Town water and sewer lines do not run along the road.

Several months later, Sheep Pond Road residents struck a deal with the Conservation Foundation to lay a new portion of the road through open space on the western end of the road, which residents paid for. They also agreed not to develop their homes in a way that would increase the habitable space on their properties.

In 2008, however, a Superior Court jury ordered the town to pay a group of residents \$145,832 in damages related to the loss of access to their homes from the storm six years earlier. They had asked for \$2.7 million.

The section of road that crumbled onto the beach below the bluff earlier this month cuts it in two once again, this time along the eastern side. Three houses still have access to the east, through Red Barn Road. The other 13 homeowners on the west have to cut through private property to drive home.

All but one of those houses is listed in the town assessor's map under an off-island address.

In addition to the road, the storm earlier this month left two houses – 21 and 29 Sheep Pond Road – precariously close to the eroding bluff.

In 2010, the late Gene Ratner lost a 15-year battle to protect his house at 19 Sheep Pond Road, when Hurricane Earl tore through the foundation of his beachfront home. Aerial maps of his property now show his entire property submerged in water below the low-tide mark.

"This is not a new issue, but I think that it does speak to the need for a coastal resiliency plan," Coastal Resilience Advisory Committee chair Mary Longacre said at its meeting last week.

Select Board chair Dawn Holdgate said she’s waiting to hear from Paul Santos, of Nantucket Surveyors, about a land survey to relocate the road.

“Erosion and flooding are not things that are going to happen in some far-off future. They are happening now.”

“That surveying has been in the works for a while,” Holdgate said. “We knew this was coming. It’s not like we’re saying, ‘Oh shoot, we have to do something now that the road fell in.’ There’s a sense of urgency in terms of making sure people have access to their homes.”



Conservation Foundation president and CEO Cormac Collier said the organization is in talks with the town for a new section of road through another part of its property.

Sheep Pond Road lost about 10 feet during a winter storm earlier this month. The road is now closed.

“It’s conservation land but we need to get to our houses,” Albrecht said.

Photo by Brian Bushard

There had been about 10 feet of shrubs between

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