

LIGHTHOUSE**NOW**

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Mahone Bay fights back against coastal erosion

by Evan Bower



EVAN BOWER PHOTO

CBCL Limited presented visuals for what the two options would look like. Those in attendance who spoke up favoured the living shoreline option presented on the bottom.

Coastal erosion and flooding threaten the future of Mahone Bay's waterfront and iconic three churches, according to an engineering report presented to residents at a meeting at the Legion on November 17.

"What can happen in the next 100 years, according to Environment Canada, is an increase in extreme rainfall events by up to 30 per cent," Alexander Wilson, Senior Water Resources Engineer at CBCL Ltd. told the audience.

"What we're trying to do is not just build great big walls to prevent the water from coming in, but to improve and add value, maintain the character [of the town] and bring use to the area," he added.

CBCL presented two options to the town. The first is a seawall that would extend from the churches to Kedy's Inlet, at an estimated cost of \$3.3 million.

The second option, a living shoreline estimated at \$2.5 million, would use a gradual slope of salt marsh and vegetation to minimize erosion, with rock breakwaters on either side to reduce the impact of the waves.

"The goal of this is to minimize erosion, while at the same time providing habitat for fish and aquatic species, and importantly to maintain a connection between the water and the land," said CBCL's Vincent Leys.

He said the living shoreline is the preferred option because it will allow residents access to the water, where a seawall would cut the town off from it. He suspects many parts of the road were built on previous salt marshes, smothering the slope and what natural protection the town would have had.

Rev. Ian Wissler of St. James' Anglican Church supported Leys' suggestion. Part of the affected shoreline comes up to the seaside church's parking lot.

"As a landowner, personally I would strongly push our church to opt for the living shoreline. For our part, it obviously enhances the sense of our being part of a created order, and it's much more beautiful than a simple wall," said Wissler, adding that he still needed input from the church's governing body.

Others in attendance spoke up in favour of the living shoreline option, but one man questioned whether the project needs to be done now.

"At the risk of sounding callous, I'm not going to be alive 30 years from now ... I'm all for it, but what happens if we don't do anything about this?" asked Chris Ouellette.

But resident Linda Pomeroy says the effects of the rising sea level are being felt now.

"Did you experience any flooding last December? No? Well you were one of the few," she said.

Councillor Kelly Wilson, who is chair of the Harbour Development Committee that has handled the project, adds that certain parts of Mahone Bay could be damaged if nothing is done.

"The short answer would be if you do nothing, then at the next big storm parts of Highway 3 will wash away on the Mader's Cove side, which would isolate the town," he said. "If the town was isolated even for a few weeks while road repairs were done, it would really damage the tourist industry. Some people wouldn't be able to afford to continue."

Wilson says he is comfortable moving forward with the living shoreline on Edgewater Street based on the feedback he's had from residents and the committee. But how to approach the Main Street side could take longer to figure out because there are many more property owners the town will need to consult along the way.

The committee is waiting on the details of what kind of federal and provincial funding will be offered. If the funding comes through, Wilson expects the construction can begin next summer.

The meeting also covered flood mitigation in the Ernst Brook area, an easier process of blending berms into the existing shoreline to protect the properties around the brook, at an estimated cost of around \$2 million.

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