

# Urgent dredging at Moriches Inlet

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The Army Corps of Engineers will perform emergency dredging of Moriches Inlet to remove heavy sand buildup from four recent nor'easters that has created dangerous boating conditions, Rep. Lee Zeldin said Tuesday.

Zeldin made the request last month for an emergency declaration to expedite dredging of the inlet, which feeds Moriches Bay and sits between Smith Point County Park and Cupsogue Beach County Park in Brookhaven and Southampton towns.

Four powerful winter storms created a buildup of roughly 300,000 cubic yards of sand clogging the inlet, which provides critical access to the Atlantic Ocean and serves as a key economic driver for marine-related businesses in the region.

"This emergency declaration is needed for boaters, for businesses, for public safety and for the environment," Zeldin (R-Shirley) said in an interview. "There are tens of thousands of people who need this work done for one reason or another."

Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said the project is expected to cost \$18 million, but

there is not enough money available in the Army Corps of Engineers' work plan budget for the entire project.

"Now that we have successfully made the case as to the need of this critical dredge, the next step is working aggressively to secure federal dollars that will allow the Army Corps to actually get it done," he said.

The order allows the Army Corps to begin coordinating funding and permits with other federal and state agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Coast Guard and the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

It also is needed to comply with federal and state laws in order to determine a permanent location to dispose of the sand, officials said.

The Army Corps is expected to issue a request for proposals in coming weeks for a dredging vessel to perform the work. Agency officials Tuesday declined to speculate on a price tag for the federally funded project or a time frame for completing the work.

"We look forward to performing the work to restore Moriches Inlet to its federally authorized depth in the near future, which will make it safe

and usable for the residents of Long Island," Col. Thomas Asbery, commander of the Army Corps of Engineers New York District, said in a statement.

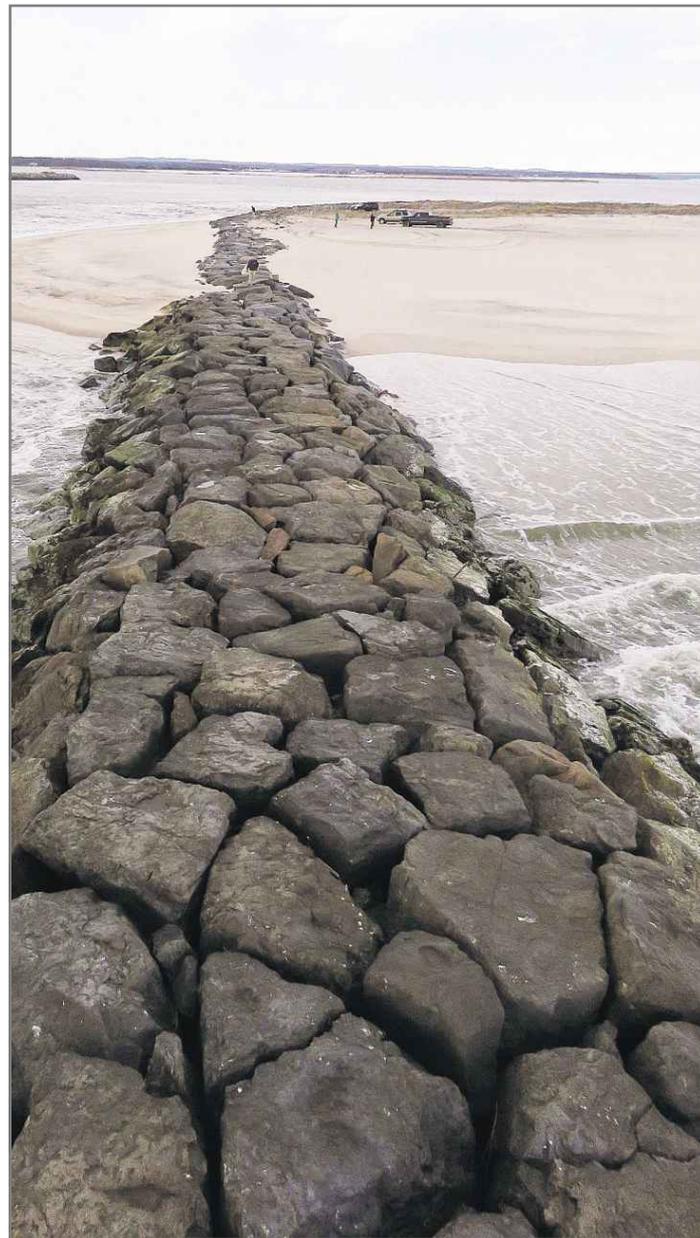
Zeldin also called last month on the Army Corps to perform emergency dredging of Moriches Bay and the Long Island Intracoastal Waterway. Those requests remain under review, said Army Corps spokesman Hector Mosley.

The Coast Guard has advised against boat travel through Moriches Inlet since mid-March because of significant shoaling, with mariners encouraged to seek alternate navigable routes. Buoys in the inlet are not being maintained, and navigation aides have become unreliable because of shoaling, the agency said.

Joe Tangel, owner of King Cod Fishing in Center Moriches, has been transiting Moriches Inlet for 20 years and said it's in the worst condition he can remember.

"It is a great relief for boaters and fishermen in the area to know that something will finally be done to ensure our safety and economic viability," Tangel said.

Moriches Inlet last had an emergency dredging after superstorm Sandy in 2012.



The buildup of sand on the jetty at Moriches Inlet on March 15.

NEWSDAY / MARK HARRINGTON

## Seeking revenue to cut property taxes

BY RICK BRAND  
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The Long Island Regional Planning Council detailed \$500 million in revenue options on Tuesday that local governments could use to reduce property taxes for Nassau and Suffolk homeowners, who pay among the highest taxes in the nation.

John Cameron, council chairman, said the report concentrates on revenue, but emphasized the options are aimed at reducing property taxes, not enabling extra spending.

"These are the alternatives," said Cameron. "This is to pro-

vide a road map for policymakers going forward."

The state's 2012 property tax cap has slowed the growth of property taxes, according to the \$120,000 study by PFM Consulting, which partnered with Hofstra University's Center for Suburban Studies.

But the cap has not changed Long Island's standing as a high-property tax region or reduced taxation's negative impact on the economy, the report said.

The consultants cited a 2017 study that showed Nassau was one of only nine U.S. counties where homeowners on average paid more than \$10,000 in

property taxes. The average homeowner paid \$11,232 in Nassau, and \$9,333 in Suffolk.

The report also questioned whether the tax cap can continue to limit tax increases, given issues such as depletion of government and school reserve funds and changes in student enrollment and pension costs.

The consultants made no specific recommendations about options Nassau and Suffolk should pursue. They warned that many probably would require state decisions that may be politically difficult, creating opposition from some groups while pleasing others.

"There is no magic bullet,"

said John Cape, PFM's managing director.

The half-dozen alternative revenue streams include raising the 4.25 percent local sales tax to New York City's 4.50 percent level. That could raise a total of \$157 million, which could reduce reliance on local property taxes by 1.4 percent, the report said.

Raising the local sales tax to 5.25 percent would generate \$629 million and could cut property taxes by 5.5 percent, the report said.

Imposing a sales tax on internet sales would bring in \$92 million, the report said. The suggestion came as the U.S.

Supreme Court on Tuesday heard a challenge to a similar South Dakota law.

Francesca Carlow, president of the Nassau Council of Chambers of Commerce, said "the brick and mortar retailers are hit particularly hard. A fair system to internet sales taxes would level the playing field."

But Paul Llobell, legislative chair of the Long Island Board of Realtors, expressed concern that the report could lead to new taxes without cuts in property taxes or expenditures.

"We need to control out expenses we have now, not look for additional revenues," Llobell said.