



Resolution # 2025- 1207

**A RESOLUTION OF THE VILLAGE OF BALD HEAD ISLAND COUNCIL URGING
ROBUST MITIGATION, LONG-TERM MONITORING, AND ADAPTIVE
MANAGEMENT FOR
THE WILMINGTON HARBOR 403 PROJECT**

WHEREAS, Bald Head Island is located at the confluence of the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean, a uniquely sensitive estuarine environment that supports diverse wildlife, coastal communities, and natural systems; and

WHEREAS, the proposed Wilmington Harbor 403 Project seeks to deepen, widen, or otherwise modify the federal navigation channel; and

WHEREAS, earlier Harbor deepening projects have caused extensive damage to Bald head Island and its protective shoals, requiring the Village of Bald Head Island to expend millions of dollars of public funds to alleviate the harm; and

WHEREAS, after consultation with respected experts, it appears highly probable that the Wilmington Harbor 403 Project will continue to significantly alter hydrodynamic patterns, sediment transport, and shoreline stability in the Lower Cape Fear River region and the ocean front at Bald Head Island, to the continuing detriment of the Village and Island; and

WHEREAS, these Project impacts are likely to increase erosion risk to sensitive shoals, shorelines, marsh platforms, and riverfront areas, and increase the likelihood of subsidence of adjacent shoreline areas into the dredge prism, particularly along the ocean beaches at Bald Head where severe erosion has been experienced from the prior projects, threatening natural buffers that protect homes, public spaces, cultural resources, and community infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, experience since the last deepening project has shown that the periodic maintenance dredging of the Channel likewise has deleterious impacts to the adjacent shoals, shorelines, beaches and dunes, such that Project impacts can be expected to persist for the full fifty-year life of the Project; and

WHEREAS, the region's waters and barrier and estuarine islands play a critical ecological role in supporting threatened and endangered species of sea turtles, fisheries, marsh nurseries, colonial waterbirds, and migratory shorebirds; and

WHEREAS, those sensitive areas provide important habitat for numerous species, including sea turtles and approximately 30% of North Carolina's nesting coastal waterbird population, and are highly vulnerable to erosion, sea level rise, and habitat loss that may be exacerbated by channel deepening activities; and

WHEREAS, the ocean environment, beaches, and dunes at Bald Head are an essential part of the Island's core values, contributing to residents' quality of life, recreational enjoyment, cultural heritage, and longstanding community identity rooted in conservation and stewardship; and

WHEREAS, the economic resilience of the Village is directly connected to the integrity of its surrounding natural resources, with tourism, recreation, waterfront businesses, and property values all depending on a healthy, stable coastal environment; and

WHEREAS, any federal navigation project that increases environmental risk must include robust mitigation, long-term monitoring, and adaptive management measures proportionate to both the scale of the project and the sensitivity of the affected ecosystems and communities; and

WHEREAS, the billion-dollar Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP) spent approximately \$500 million on mitigation and included funding for post-construction monitoring and adaptive management, ensuring that resources would be available to modify or enhance mitigation if environmental conditions changed unexpectedly; and

WHEREAS, the non-federal sponsor for SHEP, acting through the Georgia Ports Authority, agreed to set aside, in advance, their cost-shared portion of the monitoring and adaptive management funds in an escrow account upon approval of the project, guaranteeing rapid response capability and honoring the principle that those benefiting from the project must share responsibility for preventing or repairing environmental harm; and

WHEREAS, projects such as the Wilmington Harbor 403 effort must match or exceed this level of commitment by establishing a dedicated and adequately funded adaptive management program that extends over the full period of environmental risk—i.e., the life of the Project—not only the construction phase or initial years of Project operation; and

WHEREAS, following the last deepening project, the Village learned the expensive lesson that unfunded assurances of remediation for project impacts may not be legally enforceable, leaving the Village with the financial burden of funding the needed remediation; and

WHEREAS, safeguarding Bald Head's environment, wildlife habitats, and economic well-being therefore requires that mitigation and monitoring measures be both enforceable and financially secure before any project authorization or construction proceeds.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Village of Bald Head Island urges state and federal decision-makers, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the North Carolina General Assembly, to require a **comprehensive, long-term, and fully funded environmental mitigation and adaptive management plan** for the Wilmington Harbor 403 Project, modeled on or exceeding the commitments made in the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project; and

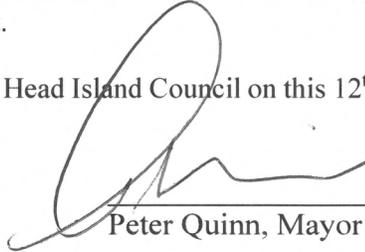
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Village of Bald Head Island calls for the establishment of a **dedicated adaptive management fund**, placed in escrow prior to construction and sized proportionally to the Project's potential impacts, ensuring that corrective actions, ecological restoration, and shoreline protections can be implemented promptly whenever monitoring indicates environmental degradation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Village of Bald Head Island urges all agencies and project sponsors to protect all Bald Head Island and Cape Fear River areas of environmental

concern as irreplaceable ecological assets, ensuring that mitigation measures fully safeguard those resources; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that copies of this Resolution be forwarded to the North Carolina General Assembly, the North Carolina Congressional Delegation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, the Brunswick County delegation, and other relevant agencies, urging their support in ensuring that environmental protection, community values, and economic resilience remain at the forefront of all decisions related to the Wilmington Harbor 403 Project.

Approved and adopted by the Village of Bald Head Island Council on this 12th of December 2025.



Peter Quinn, Mayor

ATTEST:



Darcy Sperry, Village Clerk

