

Orlando Sentinel - 11/26/86

City pushes alternative to lake walls

By Mark Andrews

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

WINTER PARK — When lakeside properties begin having shoreline erosion problems the first thought is usually to build a wooden or concrete lake wall.

But those conventional bulkhead-type walls are now frowned on by the city government as a solution and, in the last two years, two such requests have been denied.

As an alternative, the city is suggesting that lakeshore property owners consider aquatic landscaping.

"We are not being salesmen of it but, since most lakefront owners don't know of this style, we have been telling them about it when they come in and ask what they can do for the erosion problems," said city planner Jeff Briggs.

"It's a common technique in which rocks and sand are piled along a natural line and aquatic plants put in," said city commissioner Peter Gottfried, owner of an environmental consulting firm, Natural Systems Analysts Inc.

About two years ago, Carol Lotspeich — former owner of Gottfried's company — helped design one of those natural lake walls for Robert and Diane Schyberg, owners of a house on Lake Virginia.

"They [Schybergs] were losing up to 1½ feet of shoreline a year because of erosion. I initially thought the only option was to tie in the existing bulkhead along part of the property with the canal's bulkhead, but I received opposition from the city," said Lotspeich, who then owned Natural Systems Analysts.



Briggs

Please see WALLS, 12

WALLS

From 1

The property, next to a canal leading to Lake Mitchell, receives a lot of wash from power boats entering and leaving the canal. That kind of heavy wave action was the prime reason for the heavy erosion.

From the land or water, it is difficult to see there is a man-made barrier along the shoreline. Instead, all that is seen is a mass of plants such as pickerelweed, softstem bullrush, maidencane grass and royal ferns. A closer examination reveals a close formation of rocks beneath the plants.

Besides the erosion control, Lotspeich said, this kind of barrier has advantages a bulkhead does not. It provides a habitat for fish and other aquatic life as well as birds, and it can serve as an unusual garden.

It can be done several ways and at varying costs, Gottfried said, but usually costs less than it would to build a conventional lake wall.

After the shoreline is cut to create a gradual slope, a clean bed of sand is laid and a mesh fabric put down to stabilize the sand. The fabric allows water to flow through, but saves the sand. Large rocks are then put down and more sand is placed on top and between the rocks.

Plantings are not necessary but are advisable because it creates the image of an uninterrupted shoreline as well as an additional buffer. Plants also help to clean the lakes' water, Lotspeich said.

The city changed its regulations almost two years ago to make it harder for lake walls to be built. Previously, applicants could apply to the Board of Zoning Adjustment for a variance to build the walls if they could show an erosion problem. Now, they have to get their applications reviewed by the Lakes and Waterways and Environmental Review boards and then seek city commission approval. State permits are also needed.

"Judging from the recent actions of the city commission it appears that natural lake walls are the only type of permanent lake wall or shoreline stabilization that they will approve," Briggs said.

Briggs said the city likes that method because conventional lake walls are constructed at a 90-degree angle to the water and wave action tends to scoop out the lakeside vegetation.

"The advantage of that other style is that the rocks are placed at a 45-degree angle and, with vegetation growing from between the rocks, we maintain a lake-edge habitat and cure the erosion problem," Briggs said.

To date the Schyberg project is the only one of its type in the city. However, Lotspeich and Gottfried said lakeshore residents can accomplish some of the same goals without the expense or the governmental permits required, by simply planting aquatic vegetation along their shorelines.

"With aquatic landscaping people have to adjust their thinking so that yard maintenance does not end at the shoreline. They can pick up a neatly landscaped lawn and turn it into a flower garden extending into the lake," Lotspeich said.

Diane Schyberg said the erosion problem has been cured but there is more maintenance required of this lake wall to keep the vegetation in line.

"I, personally, like the wall look better. It's a nice clean line. But the [aquatic landscaping] is more natural looking . . . The only reason I recommend it is the city won't let you do walls," she said.