

No Decisions Reached As Sunset Parking Problem Discussed

BY BILL MCGOWAN

The beaches draw tourists. The tourists bring cars. And the cars cause problems.

The inevitability of such a scenario is painfully evident to Sunset Beach Town Council members. What may hurt even worse is the fact the problems continue in the face of possible solutions.

Two such solutions were discussed Monday night, but no decisions have yet been made.

Gore Offers Land Again

One proposal, rejected by a special parking committee last year, was offered once again Monday night. Mayor Pro Tem Ed Gore said his offer still stands to lease or deed to the town property for parking on an undeveloped section of west end beach strand.

Council took no action on the proposal.

In his original offer, Gore proposed to build an access to the dune area southwest of 40th Street, which would be used for an estimated 200 parking spaces.

The parking committee, appointed by former Mayor Francis Kanoy, turned down the proposal last June because it "would not be cost effective per parking space and at best would only be a temporary solution."

In the interim, however, at least one funding opportunity for a public beach accessway and parking spaces on the island has been lost because of council's inability to reach a decision on the matter.

According to Town Manager Wallace Martin, the town was awarded a \$17,000 grant through the Beach Access Program of the state Department of Natural Resources. The money was never utilized.

"We never used it because we couldn't decide what to do," Martin explained. He added that the \$17,000 "was not enough to do the things we wanted to do."

Immediately preceding Gore's offer, Martin requested that council go on record to reinforce a 1972 ordinance prohibiting parking on Main Street.

"I realize we have parking problems," he said, "but we have safety problems that need to be addressed."

Martin said the 1972 ordinance covers Main Street down through 12th Street. It does not cover the extension of Main Street, which could bring up a legal question if the ordinance were enforced on the extension as well. The town manager suggested that the ordinance be amended to include the extension.

The request did not receive action. Councilwoman Hill said she "could not in good faith endorse" Martin's request until further parking arrangements on the island are made.

Martin asked if a special parking area for Sunset Beach residents could be designated. Gore responded that "something could be worked out."

The acting mayor then made his offer. He said a parking lot on the west end could be controlled by the town and that users would be charged as they are for any other service. He spoke about getting non-resident beachgoers "away from the property owners and nestle them down in the dunes." The area would include parking pads, as well as boardwalks over the dunes, he said.

Gore also addressed his concern

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—Mayor Pro Tem Ed Gore

that when he first made the proposal he, "for whatever reason, had come under the attack of the Sunset Beach Property Owners Association." He said the group has a "misconception of the reality of the facts as they were and are. Instead of getting their facts straight," he said of the group, "it seems the expedient thing to do was stop (the proposal)."

When asked about the possibility of receiving further state grant money for a project, Gore said a number of Sunset property owners object to accepting state money "because they view it as opening the community up to the public. If we do accept state grant money, it will open it up," he said.

Is there a need to do that when there is paid parking available? Gore questioned back. "I would think the property owners would object to public parking." He explained that beachgoers have been seen walking up from the strand and using the showers of occupied cottages as both showers and bathrooms.

"Realistically, the alternative is to foot the bill ourselves and control it solely for the property owners in town," Gore said. "That's one possibility. You can't live in a country club atmosphere when taxpayers' money is being spent and keep it exclusive to members. That's the syndrome we're in."

"I still don't know why council has no discussion on (the proposal)," Gore said. "What's wrong with that proposal?"

"I think we should explore every possibility," Hill said. "This is a first step."

In ending the discussion, Gore noted the seriousness of the town's dilemma. "It's a problem that will not go away. It will only get worse."

Parking Spaces Possible?

While Martin received no action on his request to enforce the 1972 ordinance prohibiting parking on Main Street, he was instructed to investigate a way cars could be parked elsewhere.

Council directed him to investigate the possibility of parking cars on the unused portion of Sunset Boulevard, which serves as a causeway for the island.

According to Martin, the boulevard has a right of way of 100 feet. Of that, 40 feet is taken up by the road. Some 60 feet on the left hand side of the road upon entrance to the island is unused.

Council asked Martin to contact the state for assistance in determining if the excess right of way can be used for parking.

Access Coordinator Present

While much of Monday night's meeting was spent talking about public parking and access, council members did not have many comments or questions for Julia Shambough, shorefront access coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources.

Shambough presented a slide show which illustrated many ways of deal-

ing with public access to the beaches. She also handed out handbooks from a state workshop on how to go about providing for beach access.

Those involved in the state workshop "overwhelmingly felt (beach access) is something good towns and good county's do." It is almost a civic responsibility, she said.

Several of the slides showed public accessways at Ocean Isle Beach. Each accessway had signs, clearly marking it as public.

On an ironic note, Shambough said the most important component in constructing public accessways to the beach is to provide parking.

She said the cost of an accessway complex complete with parking, septic tank and water would run between \$80,000 and \$100,000, assuming the purchase of land is necessary.

While her office has committed all funds from \$1 million appropriated by the state legislature in 1981 for the accessway program, Shambough said refunding of the program could come at any time.

"We would certainly look favorably on an application from Sunset Beach. You have a beautiful shoreline and a beautiful estuarine system, and it's hard to get to."

She added that grants are available on a 25 percent local match basis, but that the 25 percent requirement is not set in stone.

In thanking Shambough for appearing before council, Gore said Sunset Beach will continue to work towards a beach access program. While admitting that all parties involved have not been able to agree on a course of action, the acting mayor said council "will reexamine" the issue, "and determine a way to accommodate our citizens here."



Drive-In Banking

Employees at the United Carolina Bank south branch in Shallotte heard a loud thump from inside the building last Thursday, and discovered a car resting on its hedges. The driver of the car, David Delbert Babson, 59, of Freeland, was attempting to use the bank's drive-

in services when he almost deposited his Chevrolet. Babson was charged by Shallotte Police Sgt. Rodney Gause with driving while impaired and driving with no operator's license. Damage was minimal, Gause said, as several hedges were destroyed.

Forecast Calls For More Rain

Temperatures during the coming week should average near-normal, Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said Tuesday, with the possibility of about one-half inch of rainfall.

Temperatures should range from

around 60 degrees at night to around 80 degrees during the daytime.

For the period April 30 through May 6, the area received .64 inch of rain.

Canady recorded a maximum high reading of 90 degrees on the 6th, and

a minimum low of 40 degrees on the 4th. An average daily high of 84 degrees and an average nightly low of 49 degrees combined for a daily average temperature of 67 degrees, which he said was "just about normal."

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