

## OBJECTIONS RAISED TO TAX INCREASE

# County Asked To 'Live Within Its Means'

BY SUSAN USHER

Three developers from the county's fast-growing south end told Brunswick County commissioners Thursday night that increasing the property tax rate would "put a damper" on growth.

The developers were among 15 speakers at a county budget hearing attended by 40 to 50 people. Most of the speakers favored trimming the tax rate, but several defended their request for a share of the proposed \$22.6 million budget.

Ocean Isle Beach developer Odell Williamson said it must be a joke, that commissioners were "just kidding" or testing public reaction when they proposed increasing the tax rate from 59.5 cents to 63.5 cents for each \$100 worth of property.

"The people of this county are against any tax increase. I can tell you that right now," said Williamson, who pays more property taxes than any other individual in the county.

But when he polled the audience of 40 to 50 people, only about half of those present raised their hands in agreement, prompting Williamson to add, "I would assume you have a lot of county employees here."

About 10 of those present were county employees.

After the hearing, Chairman Chris Chappell said it was "hard to say" how much, if any of the tax increase would be cut from the proposed budget.

Of the five-member board, only Chairman Chris Chappell said he had received "numerous" calls about the proposed tax increase. He postulated that might be because growth is so



DEVELOPERS Paul Dennis, Mason Anderson, Odell Williamson and Harry Rickenbacker listen to an explanation during last Thursday's budget hearing of the county's new building inspections program, mandated by the state.

visible in his area, the southernmost tip of the county.

"It's hard to explain that growth also causes our problems" by increasing the demand for services, he said, as well as contributing to the tax base.

In past years the proposed budget taken to public hearing has been a product of the county manager, which was then adjusted by commissioners. But Thursday's budget was developed by the five commissioners and staff during numerous long work sessions.

Commissioner Herman Love said he had received more calls about the proposed building permit fees than the budget.

"The only feedback I've got on the budget is about parks and recreation, the extra money there," he added.

But about half of those speaking Thursday night objected to a tax increase, if for different reasons.

Sunset Beach attorney and developer Mason Anderson said that \$1.5 million increase in the county's tax base during the past year should be sufficient to provide the additional

money the county needs to operate and provide essential services during next year.

"We cannot justify this increase in rate by on the basis of inflation," he said.

A favorable tax rate and fiscal responsibility, he added, have helped draw new people and new businesses to the county, adding new jobs.

Asking commissioners to study the budget again, Anderson appealed, "Don't let's put a damper on this growth we're receiving."

While supporting a "desperately

needed" county water system, he criticized delays in completing its distribution system and the proposed allocation of \$880,000 from the general fund to the water fund (primarily general obligation bond revenues).

He said he couldn't propose cuts line-by-line, but suggested the parks and recreation budget "can be trimmed substantially".

Developer Harry Rickenbacker urged commissioners also to "think about the budget and live within our means."

The former school board member questioned the size of expenditures for animal control and parks and recreation and suggested that educational funding be "redirected toward scholastics" and away from extracurricular activities.

### Schools Seek More

Superintendent of Schools Gene Yarbrough disagreed with those who argued lower taxes were the key to attracting growth.

"I don't think low taxes can say it all in attracting someone to the county," he said, adding that amenities such as the school system's educational standing also count heavily.

Even after substantial trimming, he added, the school board is about \$100,000 short of the general operating budget proposed by the county.

He and Board of Education Chairman James Forstner also asked commissioners to reconsider their request for a long-term capital construction plan, with funds to rebuild Union and Lincoln primary schools and add a third building to South Brunswick High School.

While the schools will get approximately \$1 million for equipment purchases and small construction jobs, the amount of the county's contribution to the schools' capital reserve fund has not been set, but will include 40 percent of the county's half-cent sales tax revenues, as required by law.

Reworking one school during the coming year would deplete the system's reserves, Yarbrough said, unless additional monies are appropriated.

"I hate taxes as much as you do," Forstner said, but added that money is necessary to provide good schooling. The county will pay the price of an under-financed educational system, he said, through its jails and welfare services.

Sheriff John Carr Davis defended his department's request for 10 more employees, citing an increase in county population of 14,000 and complaints about response time and inability to reach the department by telephone. The department has two less employees than in 1979, when there was a reduction in force, he said. So far Davis' request is intact, though changes may be made before the budget is adopted.

"I'm not asking for any more than we need," he said.

Residents J.M. Caton of Bolivia, E.E. Medin of Northwest and Robert Sellers of Shalotte also spoke against any increase in the tax rate.

While the county must plan to meet the infrastructure needs of its residents, Sellers cautioned against (See OBJECTIONS, Page 2-A)

## Former DSS Head Asks Court To Make County Rehire Him

BY SUSAN USHER

A former Brunswick County social services director filed suit Friday seeking reinstatement to the job with back pay and benefits.

The suit, filed in Brunswick County Superior Court by James Orrock of Greenwood Acres, names the Brunswick County Board of Social Services and its members, and Brunswick County.

The county is named—and the commissioners involved—because the county would have to provide the funds for the back pay, benefits and

attorney's fees, County Manager Billy Carter told commissioners Monday night. County Attorney David Clegg was to discuss the suit with commissioners at a 7:30 p.m. board meeting called Thursday to discuss water system policies.

Orrock was fired Nov. 30, 1983, for alleged "conduct unbecoming a public officer." He was hired by the department May 26, 1981.

Orrock says in his complaint that he was fired "without just cause and without being made aware of the reasons for his termination." He

said the board did not allow a hearing for him to defend the charges that he had sexually harassed an employee, Donna Hinson Rivenbark of Sunset Harbor. He says his rights were violated both under the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and under state law.

In April, the State Personnel Commission has upheld the opinion of hearing officer Barbara Coward that Orrock should be rehired.

Ms. Coward had heard testimony in the case in an August 28-29 hearing in Brunswick County. During that hearing Ms. Rivenbark testified that Orrock had "stared and leered" at her and made suggestive remarks.

Ms. Coward recommended in October that Orrock be rehired, receiving net back pay and accrued sick leave and vacation leave, and that the board pay his attorney's fees. She said the social services department had failed to show that Orrock had sexually harassed Ms. Rivenbark.

The Commission's recommendation is not binding on the social services board. Citing its disagreement with the recommendation, the board has refused to rehire Orrock. Instead, last month it directed board attorney Mary Easley to discuss a settlement with Orrock's attorney, William Fairley. The settlement was to include a bar against further litigation against the social services board.

In his suit, Orrock said he has "exhausted all administrative remedies," thereby establishing the record necessary for the matter to be heard in Superior Court.

The suit asks the court to order the social services board to reinstate him, with back pay and accrued leave, and to direct the county to provide the funds for this, plus to pay reasonable attorney's fees and other costs.

Another former social services employee, Alinda Meares, also has gone to court in an effort to get back her job. She has asked the court to order the county to reinstatement her with back pay and benefits provided under a settlement she reached last year with the social services board. Among other things, the county contends the social services board did not have the authority to negotiate that settlement.



Crowned Little Miss N.C. Fourth Of July

Kelly Nichole White of Shalotte, Little Miss N.C. Fourth of July, is flanked by second runner-up Renee Rountree on her left and first runner-up Andrea LaFaye Nance on her right. The story and more pageant pictures are on page 7-A of this issue.

## Supply Man Killed; Suspect Being Held

BY TERRY POPE

A 33-year-old Supply man was shot and killed Tuesday evening at his home, according to the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, which has a suspect in the case.

Mark Tolliver, 33, of Route 2, Supply (Stone Chimney Road), was pronounced dead at the scene of the shooting by Brunswick County Assistant Coroner Larry Andrews.

The Brunswick County Sheriff's Department received a call around 7:30 p.m. that someone had been shot at the Tolliver residence, said Sheriff John Carr Davis in a prepared news release.

"We have a suspect in custody and he is being questioned at this time," Davis stated late Tuesday night. "No charges have been filed at this time."

The Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad was called to the scene, but Tolliver was dead when authorities arrived, said Sheriff's Detective Lindsey Walton.

"The cause, weapons and names cannot be released at this time," Walton said following the shooting. "We're waiting for the SBI crime investigators to arrive at the scene. Until they arrive, we can not determine what happened."

The suspect was taken into custody at the Tolliver residence, Walton said. Tolliver's body was taken to the Brunswick Hospital in Supply by the Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad for further examination.

The State Bureau of Investigation crime scene unit was called in Tuesday night to help investigate the shooting. SBI agents were to begin their investigation of the crime scene at daybreak Wednesday morning, said Sheriff's Detective David Crocker.

## County Property Revaluation Effort Said To Be On Schedule

BY SUSAN USHER

Reappraisals of county property are 95 percent complete, revaluation project manager Brent Weisner told Brunswick County commissioners Monday night.

Five local listers have completed visits to property in Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Calabash and the first three rows of Long Beach.

They're expected to complete Holden Beach this week and move into the area behind the beach, he added. Listers are also working in Leland, Carolina Shores and the area north Ocean Isle Beach.

In late July Weisner's staff will complete a schedule of values for the board's consideration. The goal of the schedule is to have uniform values for like properties.

"We're putting it off as long as possible because there are so many sales this time of year," Weisner said. "I want to see as many sales as

possible before I stick my neck out."

So far, he said, appraisals have been consistent with sales analyses. Property valuations will be based on the schedule of values adopted by the commissioners. Tax notices are to go out sometime in October under the schedule agreed upon by W.P. Ferris & Co. and the county.

Chairman Chris Chappell said Weisner has talked with several local groups about revaluation and is available to talk to others.

Eight-five percent of the information about the county's 70,000 parcels of land has been coded and 70 percent of the land data entries completed. Weisner said 40 percent of all improvements had been reviewed, while 35 percent of the file information has been verified with the field information.

FEMA Reimbursements  
County commissioners also accepted \$70,918 in reimbursements

from the Federal Emergency Management Agency for expenses incurred as a result of Hurricane Diana last September.

The money will be divided up as follows among departments: landfill, \$44,932; sheriff, \$5,621; building and grounds, \$1,225; parks and recreation, \$18,190; fire departments, \$75; rescue squads, \$24; health, \$75; and water system, \$56.

Computer Project  
Approved a bid of \$108,354 from Cott Index Co. for a computer system to be used by the Register of Deeds Office in conjunction with the clerk of court and tax offices.

None of three bids submitted met specifications. Instead of re-advertising, Register of Deeds Robert Robinson and Emory Thigpen of Government Consultants, negotiated with the low bidder for a package that included all specifications plus an addi- (See COMPUTER, Page 2-A)