

# Health Board Asks For More Sanitarians To Speed Inspections

BY TERRY POPE

Three hours of discussion Tuesday night provided no immediate solutions to help eliminate a three-week backlog in septic tank inspections for the Brunswick County Health Department.

Board of health members met in joint session with the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Tuesday to discuss problems in providing services to residents. Commissioners called the joint meeting after receiving complaints from the public, but health board Chairman John Madison said the complaints "exist now, and they will exist in the future because it's not a very popular job" turning down septic tank applications.

A short term option to help eliminate the three week backlog in providing septic tank inspections was proposed by Health Director Thomas Blum, with little reaction from commissioners. According to a state study prepared in 1983, the depart-

ment needed 10.5 sanitarians, or 4.5 additional sanitarians, to help handle the workload of inspections. The department currently has just four sanitarians while a fifth position is in the process of being advertised.

"My concern is that I am not convincing the board of commissioners on the issue of staffing," Blum said. Sanitarians in the state average from seven to eight septic tank inspections per day while in Brunswick County the average is between 14 and 20 inspections for each sanitarian per day.

"We do not have the horses to deliver the goods," Blum added. "We've got some good horses, but we don't have enough."

On two occasions during the three-hour meeting Tuesday, individual board of health members questioned why they were called to a joint meeting and asked the commissioners to deal specifically with two issues: 1) how to eliminate the backlog of inspections and 2) how to

improve public relations between the department and residents.

Commission Chairman Chris Chappell said improving public relations between the health department and the residents was an "inhouse thing," something the health department must do on its own. After looking at the number of actual complaints filed compared with the number of inspections made, health board member Bill Rabon said he thought the public relation problem was already being addressed.

Chappell added, "I want to be able to sit down and say, 'Yes, we can have a permit issued within one week,' but we don't have any control over the department. The state has the control, but yet we (commissioners) have to fund it. That's where the people come to us. We become the scapegoats."

Chappell said in the future, he will forward all complaints on septic tank permits he receives to the health board members. Commissioner Grace Beasley said she received six

complaints in six days regarding the sanitarians' attitude while turning down applicants.

Charlie Jackson, state sanitarian with the N.C. Division of Health Services for district 7, which includes Brunswick County, said the number of complaints filed by Brunswick County residents constitutes less than one percent of all inspections made, a figure that is about normal. Jackson added that his answer to the backlog is to hire more sanitarians.

"This county is about four and a half sanitarians short for the amount of work that needs to be done," Jackson said. "I feel I can document that pretty well."

According to figures provided by Blum, there were 6,627 total sewage inspections performed in the county in 1981. In 1983, there were 10,074 inspections conducted while there were 10,235 inspections in 1984.

While the number of septic tank inspections continue to rise each year because of increased development,

the number of site evaluations has decreased with the adoption of a \$20 inspection fee last year, Blum said.

Commissioners agreed to adopt the fees to help lower the number of inspections, but Blum said it is not solving the problems. He invited commissioners to spend a day with the sanitarians on their rounds. "I think you will see the real situation out there," he added. "That's an open invitation to you."

"I feel like our sanitarians need all the support they can get," health board chairman Madison said. "They're overworked."

"I came here hoping to be able to go home with a very good feeling that we had accomplished something," Commissioner Beasley said after the three-hour discussion. "Somewhere, we're going to have to get together."

Health board member Joe Stevenson said he also came to the meeting hoping to help solve the problems of backlog inspections and improving public relations while the discussion for hours centered around "looking

at ways to get things approved that were not approved."

"We're not here to get permits that have been turned down approved," Chappell replied.

Several members of the audience also joined in the discussion Tuesday, with questions and comments on the septic tank inspection process.

According to the options presented by Blum Tuesday, ways to reduce the backlog of inspections is to employ one environmental health clerk, which was approved in the 1985-86 budget; employ and train a fifth sanitarian and discontinue subdivision review, or to employ a soil scientist to perform the sub-division review.

The addition of a fifth sanitarian will increase field staffing by 25 percent, but only one application has been received, Blum said. A fifth sanitarian worked for the department in the spring for six weeks before quitting due to overwork and stress, he added.

© 1985 THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

HOPKINS & SONS BOOK BINDERY  
12/31/83  
SPRINGPORT MI 49284

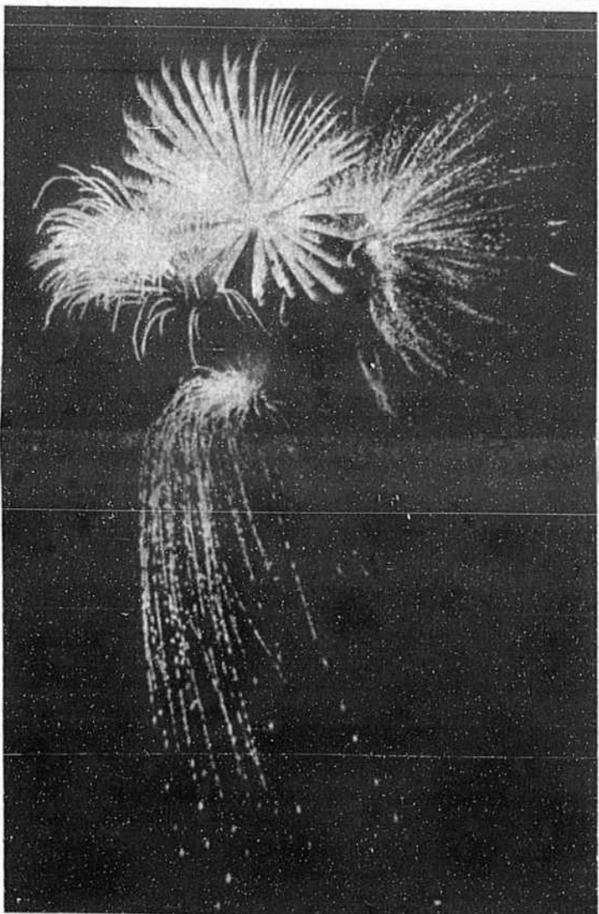
# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Volume 23, Number 35

Shalotte, North Carolina, Thursday, July 11, 1985

25c Per Copy

26 Pages



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

## A Star-Spangled Fourth!

A sparkling barrage of fireworks above the Cape Fear River drew occasional gasps from thousands of onlookers as Southport's annual Independence Day celebration drew to a close last Thursday night. Included in the \$3,500 exhibition were static displays of Miss Liberty and the U.S. flag mounted on the city pier by Chairman Randy Ellis and members of the fireworks committee. More N.C. Fourth of July Festival coverage is inside this issue.

## Countywide Building Inspection Program Begins On Monday

BY SUSAN USHER

A staff has been hired, the state building code adopted and a schedule of fees approved, clearing the way for a new county building inspection program that begins Monday.

Starting next week, residents of the unincorporated areas of the county must obtain several new permits before beginning a construction project.

As required by the state, Brunswick County will now enforce all, not just specific volumes, of the state building code in its rural or unincorporated areas.

Builders with construction "in progress" before Monday, said County Planner John Harvey, won't be required to obtain construction permits, but must apply for all other permits. He offered two examples of activity that does not constitute work in progress: clearing of a lot and setting of piers.

To help recoup part of the cost of the inspection program, fees will be charged according to a set schedule. The fees apply to new construction or additions, the moving or relocation of structures, installation of below- or above-ground tanks of 50 gallons or greater capacity that are used to store flammable or combustible liquids, heating and air conditioning systems, electrical and plumbing connections, and mobile home installations.

Carl Lewis and Van Weeks will continue performing electrical inspections in the county, but no permits will be issued in the field, said

Harvey.

Also, inspectors cannot be scheduled through calls to their homes.

All permits will instead be coordinated and issued from the building inspections office, which is located in the planning building at the Brunswick County Government Center. Judy Holden of the Lanvale community is the new office technician. The office telephone number is 253-4368, with hours from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mrs. Holden is in the office all day, while inspectors are in the office one hour at the start and end of each work day.

"We're trying to make this as much of a service as possible, though it is state-mandated that we do it," Harvey said. "We felt we should have been doing it already for reasons of safety."

Two new inspectors, Frank Adams and Julius "Buddy" Lewis, who began work July 1, will perform all inspections other than the electrical. Both are certified by the state.

At least to start, Adams will work the area south and west of N.C. 211 and Stone Chimney Road and Lewis the area to the north and east.

In addition to inspections that must be made on request, they also will make routine surveys of the county on a schedule established in conjunction with the state. Among other things, they will look for unsafe housing and other violations of the building code.

Permits will be issued to two groups of people only: property owners who plan to do their own construction and to contractors licensed by the state.

Property owners who plan to do their own construction—they must sign a form pledging it will be done to state code standards—are encouraged to apply for all needed permits at once. They should already have obtained a septic tank permit from the health department before applying for permits from the inspections office.

Licensed plumbing, electrical and mechanical contractors, said Harvey, will apply for the appropriate permits as they begin their part of a construction job.

As part of an effort not to be "hard-nosed," Harvey said, the inspections office will help contractors who don't have state licenses to obtain them.

For qualified, licensed contractors, the office offers an additional convenience: monthly billing and call-in service for certain types of permit applications.

Meanwhile, Harvey and Adams said persons applying for permits for construction valued at more than \$20,000 should have the following information:

- Tax map and parcel numbers and/or other proof of ownership.
- Two complete sets of building prints for the inspection division.
- A plot plan by a licensed surveyor showing the location and size of the lot, elevations of corners and location of the structure on lot showing distances to property lines; and
- An estimated cost of the structure

(See PERMITS, Page 2-A)

## Drug Suspect Arrested At Ocean Isle

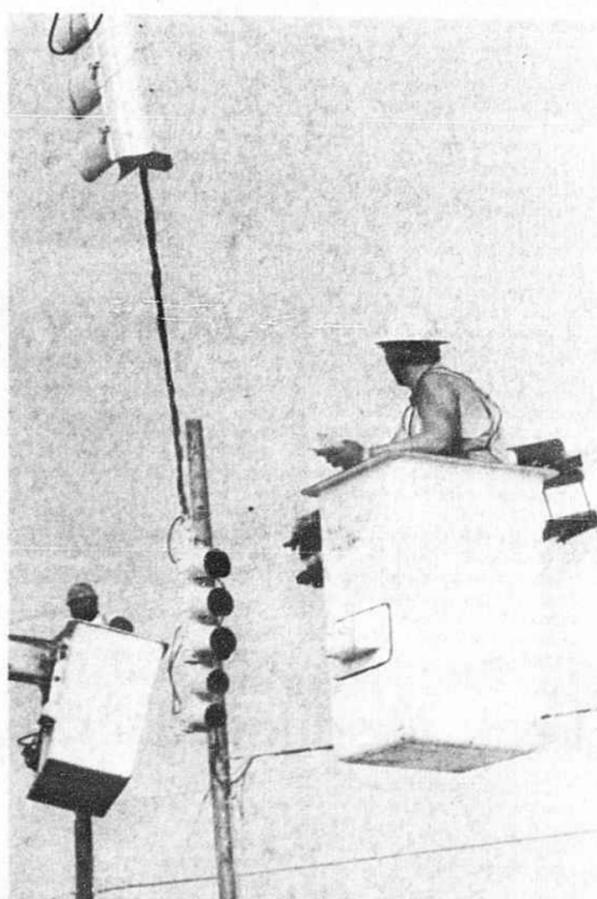
An Ohio man was arrested at an Ocean Isle Beach condominium early Friday morning and charged with drug conspiracy in connection with a 44-foot ketch that was seized in the Cape Fear River by federal agents.

Steven J. Coughlin, 30, of Vermilion, Ohio, was among the five men arrested in connection with the seizure that involved 10,000 pounds of Columbian marijuana. The vessel was seized in the Cape Fear River near Wilmington early Friday morning.

Others arrested and charged in the drug smuggling attempt were Daniel Bertocchi, 27, of Homosassa, Fla.; Brian Scott French, 24, of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands; Edward Francis Garrigan Jr., 29, of Cambridge, Mass., the boat's captain; and Timothy O'Hare, 20, of Miami, Fla.

Estimated value of the marijuana was \$5 million. Four of the suspects were arrested on or near the vessel, the "Fantasy," while Coughlin was arrested in Ocean Isle Beach.

Six others named in federal indictments in connection with the case are being sought. Agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Customs Service kept the vessel under surveillance from Wednesday night, when it entered the mouth of the Cape Fear River at Southport, until Thursday at midnight, when they boarded the vessel.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

IN A DOUBLE-BUCKET BOOST to the wires, DOT employees Wayne Bing and Paul Pope made several brief adjustments last Wednesday evening to the new mid-Shalotte traffic signal at Smith Avenue and U.S. 17. A second light, at the intersection of U.S. 17, Wall Street and Shalotte Avenue, was to be in operation by the end of this week.

## First Up; Second Signal Should Be Working Soon

BY SUSAN USHER

It might have blinked yellow and red part of the holiday, but the first of two new traffic signals went into operation in downtown Shalotte on the eve of the Fourth of July.

Lights at two locations on U.S. 17 were approved by the state this spring after an extensive campaign by local officials seeking help in getting side road traffic onto U.S. 17. The first went up Wednesday at Smith Avenue and U.S. 17.

"They asked if we could have it up by July Fourth," said Leslie Smith as he watched technicians Wayne Bing and Paul Pope adjusting the lights overhead. He is traffic signal technician supervisor with the Department of Transportation Wilmington office.

"I said it would take some overtime, but that we could do it," he added.

And they did. The lights regulated

traffic the evening of the third, then reverted to blinking red and yellow for part of July 4th.

Unlike existing lights in town, this three-phase signal is electronically programmed, said Smith. Existing lights in town are electromechanical.

A second light being installed this week at the intersection of U.S. 17, Wall Street and Shalotte Avenue also is programmed, he said.

With the electronic programming, if a short or other problem develops at the Smith Avenue signal, for example, the lights automatically revert to a blinking pattern. U.S. 17 traffic gets a blinking caution light while traffic exiting Smith Avenue or the shopping center and bank across the road get blinking stop lights.

Motorists get a 4 1/2-second amber, or caution light before lights for all traffic go to red for one second so that traffic can clear the intersection. Only then does the green light switch on. From the shopping center,

motorists activate a "presence loop" when they approach the signal. Once traffic has cleared from a certain point on U.S. 17, shopping center and Smith Avenue traffic automatically gets the green light at the same time, Smith said.

At the Wall Street location the lights will be programmed in a slightly different fashion so that the green light for the side streets will alternate from Wall Street to Shalotte Avenue or vice versa.

This was needed, said Smith, because the intersection area isn't as open as at the Smith Avenue location.

The Wall Street signal was expected to be working by sometime Thursday.

Installation of the two lights doubles the number of full traffic signals in Shalotte. The previously existing lights are at the intersections of U.S. 17 and N.C. 130 West and N.C. 130 East.