

Ocean Isle Requests Upfront Payments For Canal Dredging

BY DOUG RUTTER

Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners this week decided to request upfront payments from canal lot property owners to fund a proposed dredging project.

Under a proposal agreed to Tuesday morning, commissioners will ask each property owner abutting the project to pay \$650 per 50-foot lot no later than Sept. 1. If the town does not receive at least 90 percent of the payments before that deadline, commissioners will reconsider whether to proceed with the dredging.

Commissioner Debbie Fox, who has organized the project for the town but was absent this week, previously estimated the cost of the project at \$625 per 50-foot lot. However, the town board decided to request the extra money in case the estimate is too low.

If property owners are not willing to fund the project with upfront payments and a contract cannot be awarded, the town board will return all money it does receive no later than Oct. 15.

The proposed dredging project includes the four finger canals bordered by Laurinburg, Monroe, Fairmont, Wilmington and Concord streets as well as the first canal east of the causeway.

During a public hearing held April 16, the majority of property owners present supported the project and said they were willing to pay the assessments. At that time, Commissioner Fox said the total cost of the dredging would be about \$250,000.

Although the project cannot begin before October, commissioners plan to advertise for bids for the dredging before that time and have an idea of

the actual cost of the project before the fall.

During discussion this week, Town Attorney Elva Jess told the board that it could not force property owners to pay the estimated assessments upfront without state legislation. Ocean Isle Beach did get a special bill passed a few days ago which allowed it to collect sewer assessments in advance.

"We don't have the right to collect prepayments," said Ms. Jess, explaining that the payments will be entirely voluntary. She will write a letter to be sent out to all canal lot property owners informing them of the status of the project.

She also briefed the board on a similar dredging situation at Sunset Beach, where the town council has requested upfront payments or bank letters of credit no later than July 1.

While discussing the percentage of upfront payments needed by the town for the project to be pursued, Commissioner Bill Benton recommended that the figure be lowered to 85 percent.

Suggesting that it will difficult to collect 90 percent of the money upfront, he said, "I want this thing to fly, but I don't think it will if we set the goals too high."

Lawsuit Discussed
For 30 minutes Tuesday, commissioners discussed a pending lawsuit with their attorney in executive session but took no action.

According to Mayor Betty Williamson, the suit concerns the previous condemnation of about 120 acres of property now being used for the town wastewater treatment plant. The property was owned by International Paper.

Ocean Isle Adopts Budget

Ocean Isle Beach Tuesday morning became the first town in the South Brunswick Islands to approve its budget for the coming fiscal year.

Following a public hearing during which no comments were made, commissioners adopted a budget ordinance that calls for no change in town property taxes or water and sewer rates.

Based on the town's rate of 17 cents per \$100 of property valuation, a tax base of approximately \$275 million and an estimated collection rate of 99 percent, the town expects to collect \$463,216 in taxes.

Commissioners expect revenues and expenditures of \$810,980 in the general fund, \$299,893 in the water fund, \$273,400 in the accommodations tax fund, \$1.312 million in the sewer fund, \$55,000 in the airport fund, \$728,665 in the sewer capital project reserve fund and \$6,500 in the CAMA grant fund.

The mayor said the condemnation suit should come to trial next month.

Budget Revised
In a related matter, commissioners approved three pages of budget revisions which included the transfer of nearly \$50,000 to cover a recent land acquisition settlement.

Mayor Williamson said the money will cover the out-of-court settlement cost of acquiring about 85 acres of land owned by a number of heirs. This land had also been taken for the sewer treatment plant. In January, commissioners authorized the town attorney to settle the matter.

Other budget revisions in the sewer fund, which totalled \$111,592, included the addition of \$2,866 in capital reserve, \$7,000 in construction, \$1,500 in materials and \$400 in vehicle

maintenance. The majority of those funds, \$102,206, were taken out of sewer revenues with the remainder coming from interest earnings.

In the water fund, the town took \$11,000 from administrative wages, \$7,586 from tap-on fees \$3,434 from equipment and \$2,444 from interest earnings to apply toward payments to the Brunswick County Water System for water, which were higher than anticipated.

Of the \$24,465 transferred, almost \$23,000 will be used to pay for county water while the rest will go toward payroll taxes and health insurance.

Commissioners also approved the transfer of \$106,240 in revenues and \$61,240 in expenditures in the general fund.

A large portion of the revision in

revenues, \$45,000, came from the accommodations tax fund. Part of that fund was transferred to pay for the 12-inch water line which was recently extended to the island.

Another \$55,010 in sales tax refunds and \$27,214 in interest earnings was transferred to cover general fund expenditures such as \$44,936 for contingency capital projects and \$7,017 for building inspector wages.

Ordinance Requested

In other business, commissioners authorized the town attorney to draft an ordinance which prohibits the storage, sale and rental of recreational devices such as surfboards, sailboats and bicycles on the strand between Halifax and Clinton streets.

Request for the addition to the town code followed the closed session. If approved, such activities would be prohibited within one block of the pier.

Set For Hurricane

Mayor Williamson said the town is prepared to take part in this week's statewide hurricane drill, which is being held during National Hurricane Week.

Building Inspector Druid Roberson said, "It's gonna be a pretty hectic

period from what we've been briefed on."

Membership Approved

Also this week, commissioners agreed to pay \$100 per year to join the N.C. Resort Towns Association at the request of the mayor.

Mrs. Williamson said the organization works on legislation which benefits and addresses the special needs of resort towns in such ways of dealing with seasonal increases in population.

Referring to the increased need for police protection and water and sewer services during the summer, she said, "I think all resort towns are in the same boat we are."

Other Business

In other business, commissioners:

• Agreed to let Building Inspector Roberson take the necessary steps to keep the strand and streets free of litter. Commissioners have been trying to hire someone who will work under a contract but have had no luck so far.

• Heard from Roberson that eight building permits were issued in May for an estimated valuation of \$357,650. Fees collected were \$3,575.

College Receives \$40,000 Federal Child Care Grant

Brunswick Community College last week was awarded a \$40,000 federal child care grant which will enable more parents of young children to attend the school.

Under the daycare program, children will be placed in licensed, existing local day care centers while their parents are at school and parents will be subsidized for that cost.

According to Anne Marie Schettini, BCC public information officer, the college will begin offering the program during the fall 1988 quarter and expects to assist 25 to 30 students per quarter.

She said the goal of the program is to help single parents and homemakers stay in school.

To be eligible for child care assistance, students must meet guidelines established by the Job Training Partnership Act.

Although the grant was awarded for only one year, Ms. Schettini said institutions can receive up to \$168,000 over a five-year period if they demonstrate that the program has been successful.

BCC is one of 13 community colleges in the state which received approval for such grants during last week's meeting of the State Board of Community Colleges. In all, the schools will receive \$463,917 this year in child care grants. BCC received the maximum amount of funds available for the project.

She said the program, which was first offered in 1985, has enjoyed an 85 percent retention rate among the parents who are able to take advantage of the services.

Referring to statistics compiled by the college's student services department, Ms. Schettini said the lack of childcare for preschool children is the leading cause of attrition among female students at BCC.

Recent surveys also indicate that approximately 58 percent of BCC students currently enrolled have children, she continued, and 42 percent of those children are less than six years old.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

'Do We Have To Go Home?'

Heather (left) and Margaret Fisher of Hendersonville were building sand castles last Wednesday while enjoying the last day of a week's vacation at Ocean Isle Beach. The two came to the area right after school let out in the western part of the state.

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