

SHOPPING AREA PLANS STYMIED

# Sunset Beach Council Denies Request To Annex Seaside Tract

BY SUSAN USHER

"I can't believe it, I just can't believe it," property owner Alan Pearson of Lynchburg, Va., and Ocean View Landing repeated Monday night, shaking his head in dismay after the Sunset Beach Council denied a request from Long Bay Developers to satellite annex the proposed Seaside location of a Food Lion grocery store.

The vote was 3-1, with members Al Odom, Kathy Peed and Minnie Hunt denying the request, with Ed Gore voting against doing so. Mary Katherine Griffith was absent.

Odom made the successful motion

after Gore's motion to annex the tract failed for lack of a second.

Odom told the developers at the start of the meeting, "I have major problems with satellite annexation. I can't see any benefit, but I'm willing to listen to you." The majority of the board appeared to agree with that sentiment.

Earlier Pearson argued on behalf of the project, appealing to the town's interest in tourism: "This is right at the gate to Sunset Beach; wouldn't that be a tremendous boost?"

The grocery store was to anchor a "low country" style shopping center to be located on N.C. 904 north of its intersection with N.C. 179, on proper-

ty owned by Pearson and formerly used as the site of the N.C. Oyster Festival.

Steve Mercer, construction manager for Lat Purser & Associates Inc. of Charlotte, said the Food Lion lease, finalized last month, was contingent upon the area being annexed by the town.

"I understand the store can't support itself in an area this small without the beer and wine sales in the summer," Mercer said later. Seaside is in an unincorporated area of Brunswick County, which is "dry" and doesn't allow sales of beer and wine.

Mercer said the development firm had understood the Seaside area figured already in the town's future annexation plans. He was told that only a feasibility study of the Sea Trail area was under way, not a plan.

Speaking in favor of the annexation were Councilman Ed Gore, who challenged the board to work with the developers to improve the local quality of life, and Nick Newton. A real estate developer, Newton said rejection of the request would be a "disservice to the people of the community" and would, in effect, encourage them to shop across the state line in Horry County, S.C.

**'A Dead Issue'**

Mayor Mason Barber intervened at one point, noting the site's critical location in an unregulated area. But the board rejected his suggestion to refer the issue to the planning board for a recommendation.

With Monday's vote, Pearson termed the project "a dead issue."

"As far as I know this kills it," he continued as he talked with sympathetic local citizens outside the board room. "This is personal. They're voting a personal thing."

However, after the meeting Mercer and an associate from Lat Purser, Pender Murphy, asked board members if they would be more amenable to annexation if it were contiguous. Mercer said the partners of Sea Trail Corp., which owns the development between the town limits and the target area, are willing to request voluntary annexation of sufficient portions of the subdivision to make the properties contiguous.

While that would clear one major obstacle out of the way, Council members Odom and Minnie Hunt noted there could be other problems associated with taking only a portion of the subdivision.

Earlier Mercer and Murphy told council members the project was expected to generate between 50 and 60 new jobs, most of those at the grocery store, as well as substantially increasing the town's tax base without placing heavy demands for town services. "As far as drawbacks, we really don't see any," said Murphy.

The board reviewed Monday low and high estimates of revenue and expenses for the town should it annex the tract, which also includes a small residential area. While saying that the project wouldn't yield "significant revenue" for the town, Hunt said later that the figures weren't really a factor in the vote.

Action on the request had been delayed from the board's September meeting so that the figures could be compiled.

While the annexation request was the issue of the evening, the board took care of other business as well during its 2½-hour meeting.

**Quarterly Bills Coming**

Council members agreed to switch, effective Jan. 1, from monthly billing to quarterly billing effective for the town's 1,300 water customers.

They also increased the deposit for new owners and new construction from \$16 to \$26, or minimum billing for three months, with Ed Gore voting a token "no" since he favored a \$25 deposit.

Customers will get a bill in January for December usage, then won't be billed again for three months. The move is expected to be a time and labor-saver. Holden Beach already bills quarterly.

**Utility Hearing Set**

A public hearing will be held Nov. 7 at 7:30 p.m. at the town hall on plans to convert to underground electrical service and to assess property owners 100 percent of the cost.

Property owners can expect to pay \$57.50 plus tax for a lot with 50-foot street frontage. Property owners who don't already have underground service at their homes will have to pay an additional \$175 plus tax. Owners can pay upfront or pay annual installments over a 10-year period at 8½ percent interest.

The first phase, starting at the east end and working from 13th Street down, is expected to cost \$14,000.

**Other Business**

In other business, the board:

- Reappointed Vernie Hickman to a three-year term on the ABC board.
- Met briefly in executive session with Attorney Mike Isenberg to discuss "possible litigation," with no action taken afterwards in open session.
- Following a public hearing,

adopted a zoning ordinance prohibiting the keeping of wild animals and livestock within the town limits or extraterritorial zone, with existing situations to be treated as nonconforming uses. Horses were temporarily excluded from the ordinance, to allow the planning and zoning board to develop regulations that would allow the keeping of horses where sufficient land is available. Councilman Ed Gore first raised the question, with support voiced by various audience members during the hearing.

• Revised the budget to reflect a net gain of \$14,257, including \$8,554 income in property tax discoveries and increases of \$7,203 for expansion of the town hall and \$18,000 for addition of a new office employee.

• Referred unpaid 1987 taxes of approximately \$2,300 to the town attorney to initiate foreclosures.

• Heard reports on Beach Sweep '88 and plans by two local organizations to clean up portions of N.C. 179 under the "Adopt-A-Highway" program.

• On the advice of Isenberg, voted to readvertise for bids to pave 40th Street since belated adjustments in the project specifications put the lowest of two offers received over \$50,000, the minimum before the board must seek formal bids. APAC Carolina had bid \$46,518.40 and MAC Construction had bid \$54,794.30. The town council will meet at 4:30 p.m. Oct. 17 to act on the bids. At that time only one bid will be required for the town to award a contract if it so chooses.

• Adopted an ordinance banning the use of jet skis or similar devices between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. April 1 through Sept. 30 within 300 yards of the ocean shoreline or pier, including Tubbs Inlet and the bay. The misdemeanor is punishable by a fine of \$25.

APPLICANTS HAVE SECOND THOUGHTS

## Holden Commissioners Go Back To Square One

BY DOUG RUTTER

After learning during the past week that the two top candidates have decided against taking the position, Holden Beach Commissioners were back to square one Tuesday morning in their search for a town administrator/town manager.

"We're gonna look at what we've got and probably readvertise," said Mayor John Tandy. "We're back to the drawing board."

After trimming the original list of 50 applicants down to two finalists and interviewing those men early last week, commissioners met in closed session for about 1½ hours Wednesday morning and another 90 minutes Thursday morning before deciding to negotiate with one of the two finalists.

Prior to meeting in executive session again Monday morning, Mayor Tandy told the Beacon that the first choice candidate had backed out at the last minute. Tandy said he received a phone call from the candidate about 10 minutes before the Monday morning meeting and was informed that he was no longer interested in the position.

Following Monday's closed session, which was continued for about a half hour Monday evening, Tandy said the board decided to offer the position to the remaining finalist.

However, the mayor said Tuesday that candidate also turned down the job, saying he wants to stay in his present position.

Although both finalists decided against taking the local position, Tandy said he does not believe it is the town's fault. In talking with both applicants, he said they each have "investments" in their communities which they could not abandon at the present time.

The mayor said he would meet with the personnel committee—board members William Williamson and Gay Atkins—to decide the town's next step.

In light of a proposed switch from the mayor/council form of municipal government to the council/manager format, the town advertised for a town administrator/town manager. This position, which would pay between \$25,000 and \$30,000, would start out as administrator and change to manager if and when the town charter is amended.

During their regular meeting Monday night, commissioners adopted a resolution of intent to amend the town charter and to allow the town to operate under the council/manager form of government. If an ordinance is adopted to change the town charter, it will be subject to a referendum.

However, commissioners will have to hold a public hearing before it amends the charter by ordinance. A specific date for the hearing was not established this week since the board hopes to arrange a suitable time with

a representative of the N.C. Institute of Government. According to the resolution, it will have to be held sometime before the middle of November.

Also, before the public hearing the town also plans to mail to all registered voters an International City Management Association pamphlet outlining the council/manager form of government.

Commissioners have said a switch to the council/manager form of government will allow them more time to concentrate on formulating policy. Under the current system of

operation, town officials have a role in policy-making and administration.

Meanwhile, Holden Beach has been without an administrator since Sept. 2, when Tom Birmingham resigned to take a position with the Brunswick County Planning Department. Pointing to the need for a manager, Tandy said commissioners have been working three times harder than usual during their search for an administrator.

Unlike a town administrator, a town manager would have the authority to hire and fire town employees.



STAFF PHOTO BY EDDIE SWEAT

**Foreign Objects Wash Ashore**

This is one of two milk cartons found recently on the strand at Holden Beach by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick F. Schmidt who live on Lois Ave. The cartons, obviously from some Asian country, probably were dumped from a foreign freighter off the coast. There are no reports of medical waste washing ashore at the South Brunswick Islands beaches, as it has along the east coast lately.

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