

# Holden Beach Tourists Will Pay Occupancy Tax

BY DOUG RUTTER

Tourists visiting Holden Beach next year will face a three-percent increase in room rates in the form of an occupancy tax.

Town commissioners Monday unanimously approved the levy of the tax to take effect March 1, 1989. It will apply to the rental of all accommodations subject to state sales tax as well as the rental of private residences.

The full board of commissioners and a handful of residents attended the regular monthly meeting Monday, which also included an update on the wastewater treatment study. Gus Ulrich, who will take over as

town administrator in January, was also present for the session.

Toward the end of the meeting, the board met behind closed doors for approximately 25 minutes to discuss a personnel matter without taking action. Police Chief Raymond Simpson was invited in for part of the executive session.

The resolution outlining the levy, collection, administration and distribution of the occupancy tax states that the tax must be collected by the agency or person renting the dwelling and forwarded to the town on a monthly basis.

In return, the town must furnish all forms needed for filing tax returns

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—Gay Atkins

Holden Beach Commissioner

and instructions to ensure the full collection of the tax.

An agency or individual who fails or refuses to file the return can be penalized \$10 for each day's omission. Additional penalties can be added after one month, and any person who attempts to evade the tax completely can be found guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by a fine not to exceed \$1,000 and/or imprisonment not to exceed six months.

The resolution also states that the town board of commissioners can reduce these penalties if there is a good reason.

Prior to approval of the tax levy, commissioners briefly discussed how the money collected would be spent and eventually appointed Commissioner Gay Atkins to head up a committee which will suggest various projects to the full board.

"We have a narrow line we're walking," Mrs. Atkins said while requesting the committee. "The residents on the island should have an input how the money is going to be spent."

All revenue derived from the room tax will have to be used to meet the costs of public services and facilities directly benefiting the tourism industry. Those services and facilities could include increased police protection, sidewalks, beach access and beautification.

During a public hearing last month on the tax, the majority of those attending supported it as a means of br-

inging more revenues into the town without increasing taxes on the property owners.

Commissioners had earlier considered reimbursing local real estate companies for the cost of collecting the tax, but took no action on that this week.

Holden Beach is the second local municipality to approve collection of the room tax this year and the fourth overall. In October, Sunset Beach Town Council agreed to start collecting the tax effective Jan. 1, 1989. The tax is already collected at Ocean Isle Beach and Yaupon Beach.

The N.C. General Assembly passed legislation earlier this year allowing the town to levy the tax.

#### Terms Discussed

Commissioners also received public input this week on the issue of restricting appointments to the town's two appointed boards.

Under a proposal initiated by Commissioner Bob Buck and later supported by the Holden Beach Property Owners Association, members of the planning and zoning board and board of adjustments would be limited to two consecutive three-year terms. These appointees would have to sit off for at least one year before they could be reappointed.

However, a recommendation from the planning and zoning board would have its members continuing to serve at the pleasure of the town commissioners and not be limited to a number of terms.

## Soil Scientist Says Pollution Is Limited

Holden Beach Commissioners this week heard promising news from a consultant working on the ongoing wastewater treatment study.

Dennis Osborne, a soil scientist working on the study with Houston and Associates of Shallotte, said water underneath the island is not heavily polluted and that there are no viruses anywhere on the island or in the canals which indicate the leaching of septic tanks.

"You've got less pollution under this island than any other place I've studied in the United States," he said, adding that, in his opinion, the town has no problems with its soils.

Osborne, president of Osborne and Associates of Raleigh, has analyzed and mapped soils on Holden Beach and is coordinating the water sample analysis.

He also told the board that there are very few areas on the finger canals that he considers poor sites for septic tanks. Most canal lots, he said, have about 33 inches of sand over fill material.

"What you folks have in here, by and large, is fine sand piled up on blue mud," said Osborne.

Contradicting the current stance of state health officials, he said the presence of blue mud does not necessarily make a site unsuitable for a conventional wastewater treatment system. Osborne added that some state septic tank regulations are so strict that they cannot be met anywhere.

The water table at Holden Beach, he added, is farther below the surface of the land than on most barrier islands, and it does not fluctuate with the tides as much as it does on other islands.

Both of these factors, he said, are positive when arguing the feasibility of conventional septic systems at Holden Beach.

## Marina Application 'On Hold'

A state official said Tuesday that an application for a proposed marina facility on Lockwood Folly River remains on hold, pending Channel Side Corp.'s next move.

As part of its Lockwood Folly golf course and residential community, Channel Side applied for a CAMA permit to build a 50-slip marina basin and dry dock storage. Consideration of the application was delayed, awaiting submission of a waste treatment plan.

County residents concerned about the fragile nature of the river and its shellfish resources opposed the permit, saying the marina would harm the river.

In October, as the water quality of the river became a county election issue, Channel Side officials announced the corporation was considering modification of the permit to seek dry dock storage only. Spokesman Mason Anderson said Channel Side was negotiating with the state regarding that possibility for economic and other reasons. Anderson was out of the office and could not be reached Tuesday afternoon for comment.

Tuesday afternoon, James Herstine, Wilmington regional direc-

tor for the N.C. Office of Coastal Management, said the status of the project hasn't changed since October.

Herstine said there have been discussions of possible changes in the package. But, he added, the permit is still on hold "waiting for them to move it off center" by submitting new ideas or information or withdrawing the application.

## Shelter Offers Varied Choices

A three-year-old neutered shorthaired male cat who likes people, but not other cats, is among the animals recommended for adoption this week at the Brunswick County Animal Shelter.

Animal Control Supervisor Zelma Babson also recommends adoption of eight "very nice looking" assorted mixed retriever puppies, nine weeks old, male and female. Colors are blonde and white and black and white.

Also available are several white, black and tan female mixed terrier pups, three months old and playful.

These pets and others can be seen from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at the shelter, which is located off N.C. 211 south of Supply.

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