

BOARD CAUTIOUS ABOUT BUDGET

Shalotte Worried About State Funding Cuts

BY DOUG RUTTER

Although they're concerned about possible cuts in state-shared revenue, Shalotte officials made no changes last week in the proposed 1991-92 budget.

Town board members aren't planning any increase in the 47-cent tax rate, but they do plan to raise water and sewer rates starting July 1 because of higher charges expected from the Brunswick County Water System.

Monthly bills would jump at least 25 cents for water and 50 cents for sewer—raising minimum monthly bills to \$9.27 for water and \$7.50 for sewer.

Town officials didn't revise any figures during a budget workshop last Wednesday, but one board member suggested cuts in the police department to save money.

Alderman Joe Hewett recommended the town drop two officers from the seven-member police force and use more economical cars than the traditional patrol cars to save on maintenance and repairs.

Hewett said the town could use the money saved to hire more employees and upgrade salaries in the maintenance department.

Mayor Sarah Tripp and other board members said the town can't afford to cut back on its police force, but should consider purchasing vehi-

"At this point we're already batting zero. I don't see us kicking anything else in."

—Mayor Sarah Tripp

cles that cost less to operate.

Much of the discussion last week focused on possible cuts in money that flows out of Raleigh to local governments like the Town of Shalotte. State legislators may reduce funds given to towns because of state budget problems.

The town expects \$95,700 in utility franchise, inventory, intangibles and wine and beer taxes next fiscal year. All of that money comes from the state.

"It's still uncertain," Town Clerk Mary Etta Hewett said. "We're supposed to get some, but we just don't know how much."

Shalotte's portion of state funds also could be lower than expected if the U.S. Census Bureau doesn't increase its original population count for the town, which town officials say was about 575 people short.

The Census Bureau had the town's population at 828 last fall, but town leaders say the actual count is closer to 1,400. Some state-shared revenues are distributed to towns based on population.

Mayor Tripp said she was notified by letter last month that the Census Bureau is still investigating the town's population.

Alderman Wilton Harrelson said he doesn't understand how the Census Bureau could be so far off the mark. "I thought everybody could count," he quipped.

In light of possible state funding cuts, town officials decided against an increase in the annual contribution to the West Brunswick Branch Library during their workshop last week.

Mrs. Tripp said the town has been giving \$5,500 per year since 1987, and the library requested \$10,000 for next fiscal year.

Aldermen said the library is worth supporting, but money is too scarce to raise the contribution. They said the library should seek funds from other towns in the South Brunswick Islands.

The town clerk also said the town received a request to contribute to Hope Harbor Home, the county's shelter for victims of domestic violence.

NOTES PROGRESS HERE

Local Assistant Chosen As Hoke Superintendent

BY SUSAN USHER

A top administrator in the Brunswick County Schools has been named superintendent of the Hoke County Schools.

William C. Harrison, assistant superintendent of curriculum, said Monday he will assume his new post July 1.

"I had hoped it would be in Brunswick County, but that didn't work out," he said.

Employed by the Brunswick County Schools in July 1988, Harrison, 38, was one of four finalists considered for the superintendency of the Brunswick County Schools last September. Instead the board hired long-time associate superintendent P.R. Hankins.

Harrison said his three years in Brunswick County has been a good experience for him and that he hopes the people here feel they have gained from his having been here.

He's pleased with improvements in the county's reading and staff development programs and especially with the results he's seeing of team efforts over the past three years.

While having to deal with a certain amount of turmoil, staff have pulled together. The system now has a greater sense of direction and clearer goals, he said. "The potential here is great."

"I think we have made some strides in bringing the schools together," he said. "It's ready to come together, to really move and to make some progress."

"These are not things Bill Harrison has done; these are things we've done with groups of people and those people will be there to carry on."

The system has a solid foundation of program offerings at the high schools now that offer "good opportunities for all students," he said, many of which are the result of collaborative efforts with BCC and UNC-W.

In cooperation with UNC-W, Junior Achievement business programs are in place in all three high schools, along with an economic education



HARRISON

program. BCC and the public schools have put into place an outline for a new Tech Prep program that will be phased in starting this fall.

The county schools began a model student teaching program with UNC-W this year at Southport Elementary that will be expanded to Bolivia Elementary next year whether or not program grant funding is renewed, and steps have been taken to establish a new remedial reading program at the primary grades level.

Harrison was chosen for his current post in part because of extensive research and study on evaluation of principals. As it turned out, he spent very little time working on principal evaluations here, which he said was a little disappointing.

"But I did get to work closely with principals and that was rewarding," he said. His role was one of support, enabling principals to better enable teachers to meet the needs of students.

"I've learned a great deal," Harrison said. "I feel much more prepared to be a successful superintendent than I was three years ago."

The Harrisons, who have lived in Southport since moving here, plan to keep the vacation home they own at Ocean Isle Beach, which is within easy weekend commuting distance of Raeford.

The Hoke County school system has about 5,000 students. Key administrative staff includes one associate superintendent, a personnel director and combination finance officer/business manager, Harrison said.

He's excited about the possibilities awaiting him with the Hoke County post.

"It's a good situation for me and the type of person I am, the type of things I want to do and to accomplish in a school system," said Harrison. "I think there will be an opportunity to have a positive impact on the community."

Donna Baxter, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education, said the board would probably discuss the procedure to be used in filling the assistant superintendent's post at a special June 24 board meeting.

School System Sending Its Smokers Outside To Light Up

BY SUSAN USHER

Classroom teachers and other school system employees will be stepping outside to light up under a smoke-free building policy adopted by the Brunswick County Board of Education Monday.

Part of a package of seven proposed policies considered Monday, the measure was adopted with little discussion or objection. That wasn't the case with some of the other proposals on the agenda.

Regarding the smoke-free building policy, member Robert Slockett predicted that a letter from 12 Shalotte Middle School employees—the only written comment on the policy received—was simply a "test," and that more objections would be forthcoming should the board stick to its decision.

However, other board members said they've heard mostly positive responses the plan to prohibit smoking in all school system buildings as well as to ban the use of any tobacco products while supervising students at school functions.

"I've had a lot of teachers tell me they were glad we were doing it," said member Polly Russ. "One told she'd have a hard time with it, but that she'd manage."

Under the new policy, principals, and where applicable, Assistant Superintendent of Operations William Turner, are to identify a "discrete" area outside of each building where employees will be allowed to smoke.

The school system has received complaints in the past from parents about smoke filtering into classrooms through school ventilation systems. Chairman Donna Baxter explained at an earlier meeting, as well as some complaints from non-smoking employees. "I think students have a right to go to school in a smoke-free environment," she said at the time, citing the hazards associated with second-hand smoke in several research studies.

Monday night board member Doug Baxley said it found it interesting that the school board was addressing the issue.

"I would like to see a uniform county policy

regarding all public buildings," he said, questioning why county commissioners haven't addressed the issue. "It's certainly not in the best interest of the public's health."

Some schools are equipped with teachers' lounges with adequate ventilation and others are not, staff members indicated Monday night.

Bob Rhyne, principal of South Brunswick Middle School, said he had received no complaints from staff since establishing both smoking and non-smoking lounges, the latter being the larger.

Jokingly, he outlined plans to build a gazebo on the lawn for smokers on his staff.

Ms. Baxter said the letter received from Shalotte Middle School staff was taken into consideration, but represented a small number of people compared to all those affected by the policy.

In the letter the teachers said they feel "railroaded" because employees were not consulted in making the decision to create smoke-free schools and ask the board to reconsider.

The signers suggest that the system provide either "smoke stations" and/or smoking cessation classes for its employees, as many industries and businesses do when implementing smoke-free policies.

"Some of our best teachers are smokers," the letter indicates. "We feel that this policy limits their rights as adults and professionals."

The letter also suggested that the policy could curtail the number of hours volunteers, substitute teachers and others are willing to stay on school grounds.

Thumbs Down, Thumbs Up

Board members decided to abandon a proposed meeting policy that would establish a date for an optional second regular meeting the third Monday morning of the month and set a 9 p.m. adjournment time for the evening meeting.

After debate over several versions of the policy and its intent continued with no resolution in sight, Ms. Baxter said,

A proposed drug testing policy that would affect all persons authorized to drive vehicles

transporting students was tabled until July to give board members a chance to look over variations in how the program could be implemented.

Attorney Glen Peterson said the strongest testing program would be a "blanket" program that would entail testing of all such employees initially and annually as part of a routine medical exam. That type of exam for transportation employees has some basis in existing case law and has been recommended for funding at the state level. However, it is expensive, \$15,744 for the initial test alone, excluding re-tests or other program costs.

Otherwise the most effective combination and less costly alternative is that proposed in the policy: a combination of random testing of 5 percent of existing vehicle operators (\$3,072) plus testing to screen all new hires.

The random testing aspect of the policy is more subject to legal challenge, he said. "We're going to be in the forefront with this drug-testing policy," he said.

The board also adopted:

■ A policy that will, in practice, eliminate the existing practice of paying tenured administrators salary increases and benefits associated with a prior assignment after they are involuntarily transferred to a lower paying position. Under the policy the total compensation paid the person will not increase until the salary for the more recent position reaches or exceeds that of the previous job. Then they will be paid at the rate of the new position. Months of employment will remain the same as with the previous assignment.

■ A policy that requires all administrative staff travel to be reviewed and approved by the superintendent and all board member or superintendent travel must be approved by the board.

■ A policy that will require athletes, managers, cheerleaders and any other students participating in interscholastic athletics (including practice) to purchase school insurance, which now costs in the range of \$10 to \$12 annually.

County's New 911 Building To Cost \$1.6 Million

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County's 911 Emergency Services Center will cost slightly more than \$1.6 million.

County commissioners accepted low bids for the project at Monday's meeting, bids that total \$1,600,434. Last year, engineers estimated the project at \$1.5 million.

"All five bidders were within 10 percent of one another," said Doug Vaughn of Peirson and Whitman Inc. of Raleigh, the county's engineering firm for the 911 project. "That's very competitive bidding."

Bids were received in four areas: general construction of the building, electrical, heat and air, and plumbing.

Leader Construction Co. of Wilmington was awarded the general construction contract for \$1,178,039. That cost will include completion of the main building within 270 calendar days and completion of the project within 360 calendar days.

The county has planned to start the 911 program Jan. 2, 1992. The building will sit on a cleared space in front of the government complex in Bolivia.

A 500-foot radio tower and trans-

mitter building to be built next to the 911 center is included in Leader's bid.

Watson Electrical Construction Co. of Wilmington received the contract for electrical service for \$319,060. That figure includes electrical service for both the 911 center and the radio tower transmitter building.

T.R. Driscoll Inc. of Lumberton received the contract for heating and air with a bid of \$43,635. The plumbing contract went to Kelly Plumbing of Wilmington, for \$59,700.

The 911 Emergency Services Center is designed to match other buildings at the complex.

It will have a double set of earthen berms for added protection and a set of double garage doors where the emergency vehicles are to be stored, said Vaughn.

The county received bids for both a total package and as four individual contracts. The lowest total bid came in \$29,000 higher, said Vaughn.

He recommended that the county award four separate contracts and save the \$29,000.

"This was an interesting building for us to design," said Vaughn.

"There are not too many emergency services buildings around."

The radio tower is taller than in other counties because of Brunswick County's size. It will help radio signals reach the entire county, said Vaughn.

Clancy and Theys of Raleigh, the firm that built the county's new Department of Social Services building which opened last week at the government complex, did not bid on the project, said Vaughn.

"Apparently, they weren't as hungry as some other contractors," Vaughn said.

Other bids came in as follows: General Construction: Smith Construction of Whiteville, \$1,224,500; Harnett Construction of Wilmington, \$1,239,352; Hay Construction of Myrtle Beach, S.C., \$1,259,300; and Peden Construction of Raleigh, \$1,260,099.

Electrical: L.J.'s Electric of Elm City, \$330,600; McCarter Electrical Co. of Wilmington, \$338,291; Cape Fear Electric of Wilmington, \$341,460; Ashley Electric of Whiteville, \$350,265; and Heaton Holding Corp. of Myrtle Beach, S.C., \$356,000.

Heat and Air: Cannon Heating and Air of Wilmington, \$46,665; American Mechanical Electrical Co. of Lumberton, \$49,519; and Hanover Iron Works, \$55,800.

Plumbing: Williams Plumbing of Wilmington, \$68,222; R.J.W. Construction Co. of Burgaw, \$70,988; and James L. Cayton Associates of New Bern, \$78,203.

Calabash To Hold Hearing On Budget

Calabash Commissioners were to hold a public hearing Wednesday, June 5, at 7 p.m. in the Calabash fire station on the proposed 1991-92 budget.

The \$431,047 budget features a 7-cent cut in the tax rate, from 15 cents to 8 cents per \$100 of property valuation.

Major expenses in the proposed budget include \$149,157 for sanitation, \$98,700 for administration, \$45,500 for the street department, \$21,500 for road paving and \$13,500 for planning and zoning.

may result is a simple renegotiation of our contract (with TMA) for a fixed fee."

As TMA enters its third month of work in Brunswick County, some firms have already been notified by the auditors that irregularities have been uncovered in their property tax listings.

"And then I'm hearing from the companies," said Clegg.

Clegg said the tax commission isn't a court of law. State laws that allow counties to collect property taxes do not address contracts with private auditing firms, either on a commission basis or for a set fee, he said.

Ruling Won't Keep County From Seeking Back Taxes

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County will continue to go after businesses that owe back taxes, despite a ruling by the N.C. Property Tax Commission last month that declared the procedure void.

Tax Management Associates, which has offices in Charlotte and Raleigh, was hired by the county in March to audit the records of companies in Brunswick County to look for either deliberate or inadvertent cases of failing to list property for tax purposes.

TMA was hired on commission, earning 35 percent of the back taxes and penalties it uncovers, while 65 percent would be kept by the county.

Last month, the state tax commission ruled that a percentage-based fee arrangement between private auditing firms and counties violates public policy and should be declared void.

Brunswick County Manager David Clegg said TMA will continue to do the job it was hired to do here.

"The property tax commission doesn't have the jurisdiction to make that ruling," said Clegg.

For now, the county will simply ignore the commission ruling, he said.

Through a process called discovery, TMA audits business records to determine whether the company listed, for tax purposes, all property it was required to by law.

Prime targets are chain and national companies that have offices or stores in Brunswick County, rather than small or local businesses.

TMA sends auditors to the home offices of firms under investigation. In North Carolina, TMA has contracted to work for 24 counties.

The tax commission ruling followed a complaint filed by the Philip Morris tobacco company in Cabarrus County. Plant officials challenged TMA's contract agreement with Cabarrus County after TMA reported the firm had failed to list \$95.4 million worth of property over a six-year period.

Including late listing and penalty payments, the company would reportedly owe an estimated \$7 million in back taxes to the county. An appeal reduced the amount to \$3.6 million.

Cabarrus County has appealed the tax commission's ruling, said Clegg, who is watching the case closely.

"Nothing has changed, as far as we're concerned," said Clegg. "What

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