

# OIB Board Okays Contract For Inlet Dredging To Aid Beach Renourishment Plan

BY LYNN CARLSON

Ocean Isle Beach officials have approved a plan to piggyback on the Army Corps of Engineers' routine dredging of the Intracoastal Waterway to excavate the Shallotte Inlet channel and use the spoil to renourish the beach's badly-eroded east end.

"We'll be renourishing the east end and at the same time helping boat traffic get in and out," Mayor Betty Williamson said Tuesday.

The mayor reported to the town's board of commissioners that the contractor's dredge left Savannah on Monday and will be at Ocean Isle Beach later this week.

When the waterway project is complete, the inlet dredging can begin and is expected to continue through much of February, she added.

Using a contractor already in the area for another project will save the town the considerable cost of transporting dredging equipment from another, she said in an interview after Tuesday's monthly board meeting.

The town has raised about \$90,000 to fund the beach renourishment project, setting aside \$80,000 in accommodations tax revenue, with the balance coming from the town's three-cent ad valorem tax increase last year.

The mayor said the inlet dredging and beach renourishment projects are the culmination of nearly three years of effort. The Corps turned down the town's original application as unfeasible; on resubmission, the plan was approved.

"Hurricane Hugo increased erosion at the east end," Williamson said. "We need all the assistance we can get."

She added that this project is a short-term fix, but that the town will be devising a long-term erosion control plan in hopes of becoming part of a federal-local partnership program in which the federal share is 65 percent of the cost of renourishment efforts.

Other area communities, Carolina and Wrightsville beaches, are already on the federal funding list for renourishment, she said.

Plans are to dredge the main channel of Shallotte Inlet to a depth of eight feet below mean water level and to place as much spoil as is suitable on the beachfront beginning at Asheville Street and continuing west 250 feet past Lumberton Street.

The dredge area will measure 200 feet wide by 900 feet long and the spoil area, 40 feet wide by 2,560 feet long.

An estimated 25,000 cubic yards of material will be excavated at a cost of \$2 per cubic yard to the town. The town board approved the contract price after a 30-minute closed-session discussion of the matter.

As much dredge spoil is as "suitable"—sand as opposed to mud—will go toward the renourishment project.

A public beach access in the spoil area will "remain in place and will be extended as necessary to prevent damage to new growth vegetation as it occurs," the town's Corps application states.

Once the dredging is complete, sand fence and American beach grass plantings will be used to keep the fill material in place.

The dredging project is expected to be applauded by local boaters, who have complained that, because of inadequate maintenance, virtually no channel exists in Shallotte Inlet at this point.

## Streets Commissioner Defends Maintenance

The town's streets commissioner and original developer Odell Williamson defended what he called rumors that he used town equipment

to maintain two uninhabited streets he owns on the island's east end. "There's a rumor I've tried to develop some of my land at taxpayers' expense," he told the town board. "I assure you I haven't."

Odell Williamson said he has maintained the streets for 20 years and plans to have them added to the map used for Powell Bill street improvement funds.

"They have water and sewer (lines), and I paid for the taps when the sewer system went in. I gave the town \$170,000 to let the sewer contract. Some people think that Odell wants something for nothing to haul a load of coquina," he said.

Although he did not name the streets, they are believed to be in the area between Lee and Moore streets. Lots are platted on both sides of a canal between Lee and Goldsboro streets; the property between Goldsboro and Moore street has never been subdivided.

"One street goes to a dump where sand and shell are used for maintenance," he said. "During Hugo, all the sand and shell for the east end came from there." The other, he said, is frequently used by fishermen.

"I've never in my life tried to take advantage of a dollar," he said, protesting that "somebody's running around trying to make me look like a thief."

Odell Williamson said "a fraction above \$60,000 remains in the town's street maintenance fund and will be spent this spring "to take care of some headaches" in street flooding caused by record rains this winter.

Mayor Betty Williamson asked townspeople attending Tuesday's meeting what areas they believe deserve priority for street maintenance and was asked to consider Isle Plaza, North Duneside Drive, West Second Street and Driftwood Street.

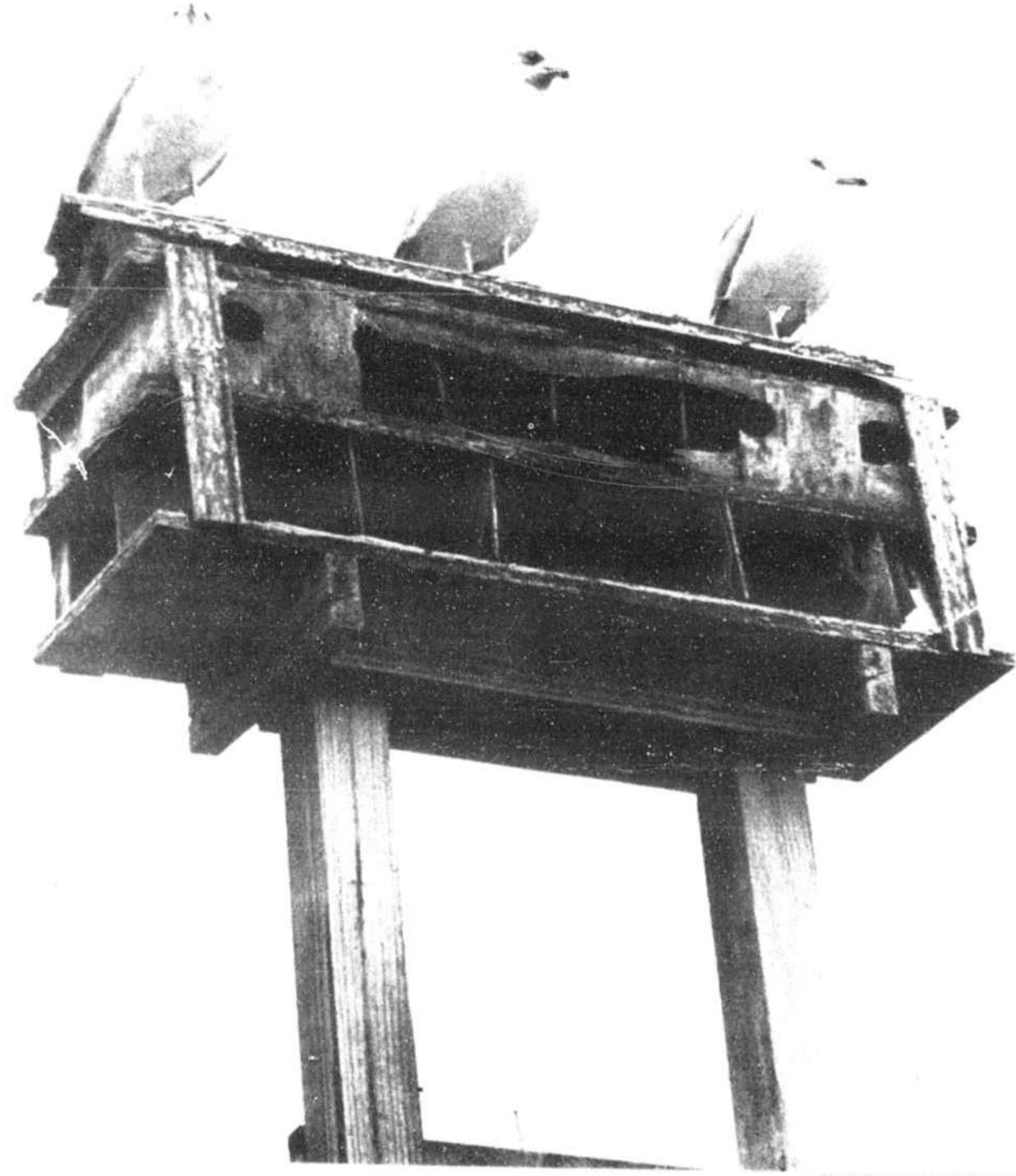
## Other Business

■The mayor reported that sewer system extension work has begun on the east end and in the area where the new lagoon will be built.

■Police Chief Curtis Pritchard reported that two men have been arrested in connection with a west end burglary that occurred a year and a half ago.

Local police followed leads to Winston-Salem and Concord, where cooperation with police in those towns resulted in the two being brought back to Brunswick County to be charged.

■Developers of the Ross subdivision, which has been before the town board and planning board frequently in recent months, met with Town Attorney Elva Jess following the meeting to discuss "language on particular items" involving the subdivision plan.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## House Sitters

A trio of seagulls found this dilapidated purple martin house made a nice place to rest on a lazy afternoon at Holden Beach.

# Calabash Splits On Proceeding With Carolina Blythe Purchase

BY ERIC CARLSON

Three Carolina Shores members of the Calabash town board Tuesday continued efforts to delay a proposed central sewerage system by trying unsuccessfully to block the hiring of a consultant to negotiate a purchase price for the Carolina Blythe sewer system.

As the otherwise routine commissioners meeting drew to a close, a heated discussion arose over whether the town ought to pay Certified Public Accountant George Dennis a fee of \$1,500 to see if he can persuade the Carolina Blythe's owners to reduce their asking price of \$4.5 million.

The purchase of Carolina Blythe, which currently provides sewer service to the Carolina Shores section of Calabash and some other areas, is the cornerstone of the first phase in an ongoing effort to build a joint Calabash/Sunset Beach sewer system.

Joseph Tombro of Powell Associates, consulting engineers for Calabash, told the commissioners that Dennis is an experienced negotiator in utility company acquisitions who has worked for the N.C. Public Utilities Commission.

Dennis has offered to negotiate a reduced price for Carolina Blythe in exchange for a commission that would equal 3 percent of the difference between the current \$4.5 million offering and the eventual purchase price.

Tombro asked the board to hire Dennis so the engineers can estimate the rates customers of the new sewer system would have to pay for service. Those figures cannot be computed until the cost of purchasing Carolina Blythe has been determined, because rates will be set at a level that will allow the towns to pay back loans for building and operating the system.

Commissioners George Anderson, Robert Noe and Ray Card, who have voiced past opposition to the joint sewer system, raised numerous objections to the hiring of Dennis.

Anderson first criticized Tombro for moving too quickly toward negotiating a purchase of Carolina Blythe. Next he questioned the 3 percent commission rate. Then he insisted that the hiring be put off "until we get this quote-unquote divorce settled."

There is an effort in Calabash to split the three-year-old town in two, with the largely commercial District 1 area of old Calabash returning to its former boarders while the residential retirement community of District 1 would become the town of Carolina Shores.

State Senator R.C. Soles has said he will introduce legislation to make the split, but Rep. David Redwine says he won't support the measure without convincing support throughout the two communities.

Tombro said it seems that much of the support for the split in Carolina Shores is motivated by fears that the new sewer system would charge higher rates. He insists that will not be the case and suggested that hiring Dennis might help defuse the issue.

He urged the board to go ahead with plans for the system because the downtown area of Calabash will need central sewage regardless of how the issue is resolved.

Noe said he doesn't see "why we're in such a big, fat hurry" to proceed with the Carolina Blythe negotiations. He suggested the board should first meet with company owners on their own. He also warned that the board would be committing themselves to a purchase by hiring Dennis to negotiate a price.

Town Attorney Michael Ramos said the town would be obligated to pay Dennis a commission only if it purchases Carolina Blythe.

"All you are approving is the spending of \$1,500 to establish an asking price and to begin negotiations leading to a proposed transaction. If you don't buy it, you don't pay it," he said.

Tombro said he feels Dennis has made the town a very attractive offer and urged the board to accept it.

"If he can save you \$1 million, and from that he makes \$30,000, you've gotten a good deal," Tombro said.

Card also recommended that the town hold up on hiring Dennis because "there are major issues pending in this town that need answers." He said he had assumed that an earlier rate-base analysis of Carolina Blythe would have included an estimated purchase price. He said the town was "jumping from fire to fire" in spending money on studies.

Tombro said Carolina Blythe's owners will not provide the internal financial records needed to establish an accurate picture of the company's worth until the town makes a good-faith offer to purchase. He said it is "normal business practice" for a company not to provide cash-flow figures and a detailed profit-and-loss statement until such an offer is made.

Eventually, Anderson made a motion to table consideration of the Dennis offer indefinitely. Noe and Card voted yes while Carolina Shores commissioner Jon Sanborn joined old Calabash members Stuart Thorn and Ed Rice in voting against it. Mayor Doug Simmons broke the tie by voting no.

A second vote on a motion to hire Dennis split along the same lines, with Simmons breaking the tie by voting yes.

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