

HEARING SET MONDAY

Sunset Beach Land Plan Addresses 4 'Key Planning Issues'

BY LYNN CARLSON

The need for a public sewer system, conservation of Bird Island, the future of the Sunset Beach pontoon bridge and maintenance of building height limits are "key planning issues" identified in the town's land use plan update, to be the subject of a Monday public hearing.

The update, required every five years under the state's Coastal Area Management Act, was the result of surveys and workshops involving townspeople who identified those four issues as priorities last year.

The update was drafted by planning consultant Peggy Hayes of Wilmington. The hearing will take place at 7 p.m. Monday, March 15, in the town hall.

Sewer System

A proposed central sewer system for Sunset Beach and Calabash is supported in the plan "as a means to eliminate runoff of surfaced effluent from malfunctioning or inadequate on-site septic systems." Also supported is the "preparation of a regional comprehensive stormwater management plan for southwest Brunswick County."

In an April 1992 survey of townspeople, 44 percent of respondents said they favored a public sewer system for Sunset Beach. Forty percent were opposed and 16 percent were unsure. "Many said their support was dependent upon environmental need," the plan states.

Opponents of the project have said inadequate proof exists that septic tanks on the island of Sunset Beach are causing pollution problems. They also argue that a less expensive stormwater runoff system might be a better alternative.

Engineers working for the town say runoff management should be part of the sewer system plans, but that both are needed to clean up area shellfishing waters and prevent future pollution by waste-borne bacteria.

Since the survey was conducted, the cost of a regional sewer system to serve Sunset Beach and Calabash has been estimated at \$25 to \$30 million. A six-member South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority has been formed by the two towns' governing boards to serve as a "management entity" to seek grants and loans for the project.

Bird Island

The update says the town "supports efforts to acquire Bird Island in order to preserve (it) for conservation. The undeveloped barrier island is off the west end of Sunset Beach across Mad Inlet. Its primary landowner has announced plans to develop her property into 15 four-acre homesites and to construct more than a mile of bridging and causeway to make them accessible.

"Preservation of Bird Island by the state or a non-profit organization is the ultimate objective of the town and most of the residents," the update says. "If that does not happen, only low-density development will be allowed." It adds that the provision of "urban services" such as city water and central sewage disposal "will not be extended to Bird Island."

The Bird Island Preservation Society is currently raising money to try to buy the property; meanwhile, Rep. David Redwine, D-Brunswick, said he is seeking state funds to help in the effort.

"It is not possible for the town to prevent develop-

ment (of Bird Island) through zoning restrictions," the plan states, because such a move would constitute "the taking of private property for public use without just compensation."

The town council and planning board will be discussing proposed zoning plans for Bird Island at a work session scheduled for Thursday, March 18, at 10 a.m. in the town hall. The planning board has proposed single-family zoning only, while the owner's attorney is seeking more liberal classification for the property.

The Bridge

The 1992 survey indicated townspeople were almost evenly divided on whether the town's old pontoon swing bridge should be replaced. Though the bridge cannot operate during extremely high or low tides and requires periodic repairs, 49 percent of those polled said they favored maintaining the current bridge. Forty-eight percent said they would prefer some type of new bridge.

The plan calls the bridge "a public safety issue," and cites instances in March and June 1992 when emergency workers were unable to immediately respond to calls because of the bridge being open for boat traffic. It adds that "fire protection services are severely hampered" because larger fire trucks are two wide or long to cross the bridge.

Replacement of the bridge has been delayed until a court-ordered environmental impact statement is completed in 1994 or '95. Although the state has acquired rights-of-way for a new bridge, no construction funds have been allocated in the state transportation plan through 1998.

Height Limit

The town council recently approved an ordinance mandating a 35-foot height limit for buildings on the island of Sunset Beach and in some other zones. The ordinance as passed could be amended only through a successful referendum of Sunset Beach voters.

Redwine has said he will introduce a local bill in the state legislature during this session to make the referendum clause binding.

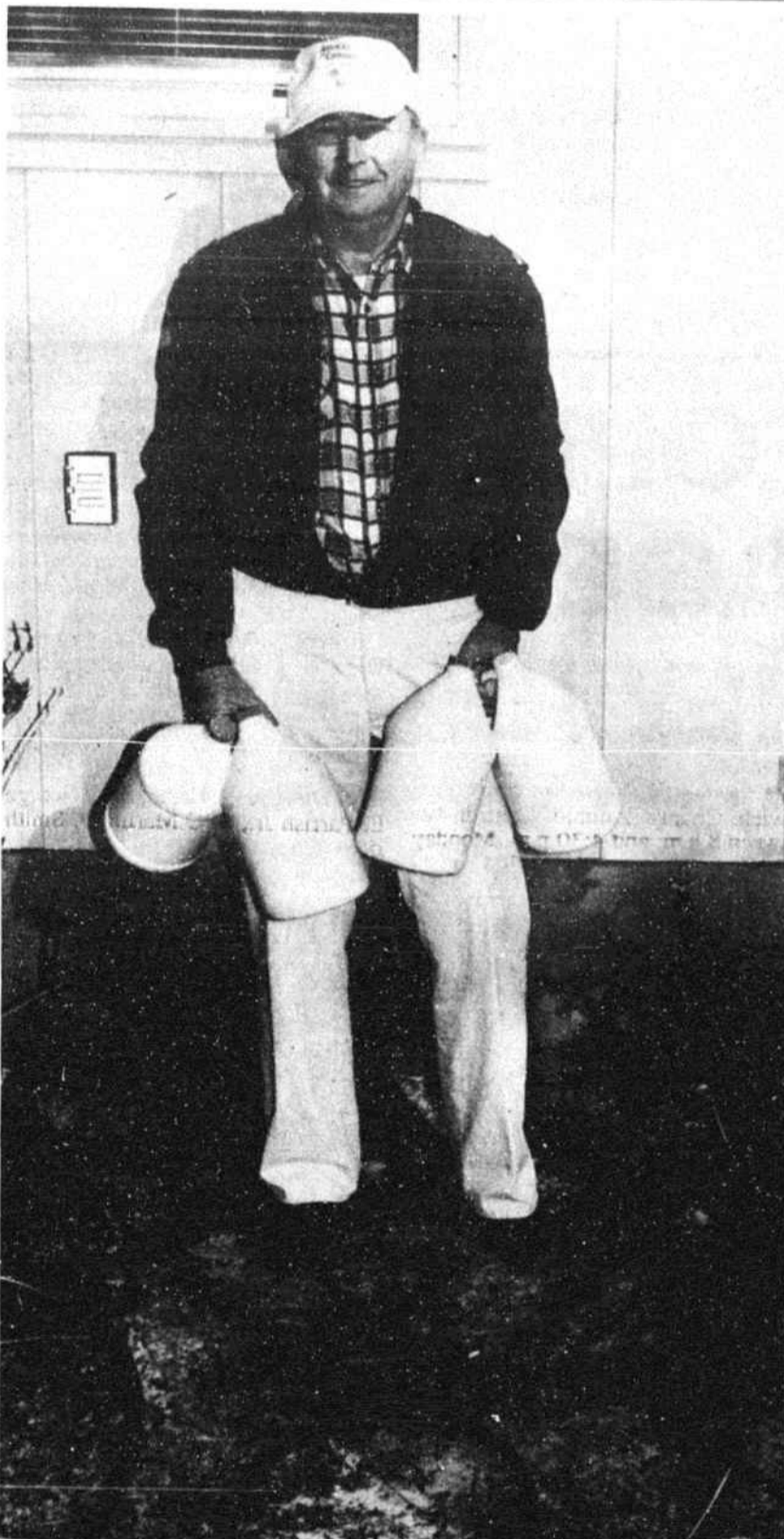
Access, Public Facilities

The plan says residents expressed "strong support" for the town to provide public beach restrooms, public boat ramps and better access, including parking, to the intracoastal waterway. The town "has and is continuing to study the feasibility of providing public restrooms on the island," the plan states. "The ability to acquire a suitable site at a reasonable cost has been the restraining factor."

It says public boat ramps "tend to be a nuisance in residential areas and there is no suitable location on the island" and asks the N.C. Division of Wildlife and Fisheries to build a boat ramp and parking lot at the location of a "new or improved" bridge.

The plan estimates the year-round population of the town limits at 491 and of the town's planning area as 783. It says residential units have increased by 226 percent in the past 12 years, and puts the 1992 figure at 1,482 units.

It estimates that 60.4 percent of Sunset Beach's residential lots have been developed, and says property valuation for taxes increased from 32.9 million in 1981 to \$179.4 million in 1991.



BOB BLACK of Shell Point holds the jugs he uses to collect drinking water and stands next to the garden hose that supplies him water from a neighbor's home.

Brunswick County UOB Recommends Water Project For Shell Point Area

BY ERIC CARLSON

"Water, water, everywhere. Nor any drop to drink."

The ancient mariner's rhyme is a popular bit of black humor around Shell Point these days.

But it's no laughing matter for Bob and Flora Black. Their stunning view of the Shallotte River has been all but forgotten since their well went dry again.

Instead, they keep a worried eye on a garden hose connecting their home with the one next door and hope that their neighbor's well isn't the next to go.

For the past three years, on the second Monday of every month, Bob Black has returned to the Brunswick County Utilities Operations Board to ask politely for county water in Shell Point.

Sometimes he brings petitions from his neighbors. Last month he brought a water filter clogged with the ugly brown stuff that stains their sinks and clothing.

Monday night, Black's persistence paid off. The UOB voted unanimously to recommend that the county commissioners fund a water system improvement project that would extend service to the 3,700 potential water customers in the Shell Point, Boones Neck, Gray Bridge Road and Seashore Road areas.

"This section has the largest potential customer base of any area in the county," said Utilities Director Jerry Webb. "It would nearly double the number of people we serve."

At its February meeting, the UOB asked Webb to have County Engineer Robert Tucker prepare hydrological studies of how best to provide water service to Shell Point. Those findings were presented Monday night.

Tucker's research indicated that the most efficient way to expand the system to that area would be to extend two water mains from the trunk line on U.S. 17 to another major line along N.C. 130. One line would run

"This thing has gotten real personal now. My well is gone and we haven't had any water in nine days. It's a mess." —Bob Black, Resident

down Stone Chimney Road to Sabbath Home Road and another would lie along Mt. Pisgah Road and Civietown Road.

The two lines would be needed to provide enough pressure on the N.C. 130 line to extend service to Shell Point without reducing the flow to the Holden Beach area, Webb said. He said cost estimates for the project have not been prepared.

Discussion of the proposed extension came after Black and several other residents of Shell Point appeared before the board to request county water service.

"I've been coming here for three years, but this thing has gotten real personal now," Black said. "My well is gone and we haven't had any water in nine days. It's a mess."

Walter Goldsberry said he was returning to the UOB to renew his request for water service in the Gray Bridge Road area. In 1990, he and Black were among those who brought petitions bearing 252 signatures asking for county water.

Thomas Horn of Buccaneer Hills reminded the UOB that he had brought the board a petition several months ago asking for water service in the Seashore Road area.

Raymond Carter, who lives off

Gray Bridge Road, also appeared to request water service in that area.

"If this is where the largest customer base in the county lives, it seems like that's where you ought to run the next water line," said Jim Guffy, pastor of Shell Point Baptist Church.

"It's hard to argue with your logic, sir," said UOB Vice Chairman Robert Nubel.

Chairman Al Morrison agreed. However, he cautioned that the board of commissioners three years

ago turned down a UOB request for service to the Shell Point area. Instead, waterline improvements were authorized for areas west of Shallotte along Thomasboro Road, N.C. 904 and Seaside.

"It's a new board now. Maybe they'll see things differently," Black said Tuesday morning as he looked out across the Shallotte River.

Then he stooped down to inspect the green hose that trails from his home and across the yard to the house next door.

"Yes. It's a beautiful place," said Black. "But so is the Sahara Desert."

In other business Monday night, the UOB conducted a public hearing on the proposed Special Assessment District (SAD) 19, which would allow water hookups in areas around Calabash, Sea Village and the Mount Misery Road area of Leland.

About 75 property owners from the three areas attended the hearing. Nearly all of those who spoke were in favor of the assessment.

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Achievement Nominations Due March 28

March 28 is the deadline to nominate local women for recognition as 1993 Cape Fear Women of Achievement.

Ed Harris, president of Comprehensive Home Health Care (CHHC), is the honorary chair of this year's program, which is sponsored by the YWCA in Wilmington.

CHHC administrator Carrie M. Davis of Supply was an honoree in business last year.

Women may be nominated for their contributions in any of 11 areas: the arts; business; community service; education; entrepreneur; government; human services; industry; professions; sports/recreation; and teen leader.

Nomination materials are available from the YWCA by calling 1-919-799-6820 or writing the YWCA at 2815 S. College Road, Wilmington, N.C. 28412. Women from Brunswick, Columbus, New Hanover and Pender counties are eligible.

Nominees will be honored and award recipients announced Thursday, May 6, at the Wilmington Hilton with a 6 p.m. reception and 6:45 p.m. dinner. Tickets are \$35 and are available for purchase from the YWCA.

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