

## SUNSET HEARING MONDAY ON ENGINEERS' REPORT

## County Board Gives Informal OK To Regional Sewer Concept

BY LYNN CARLSON

The Brunswick County Commissioners have informally agreed to cooperate in seeking state funds for a regional environmental management program which would include a central sewer system for Sunset Beach and Calabash as its first phase.

Consulting engineers James Billups and Joseph Tombro have released a 15-page final report to the Sunset Beach Town Council concluding that septic tanks are polluting estuarine waters around the island portion of that town.

The report will be the subject of a public hearing Monday (April 26) at 6 p.m. at the Maples Clubhouse in SeaTrail Plantation.

Billups, along with Sunset Beach Mayor Mason Barber and representatives of the towns of Ocean Isle and Shallotte, appeared at Monday night's county commissioners' meeting to encourage the county's

participation in efforts to create a regional environmental management program, a concept endorsed last week by the Brunswick County Board of Health.

While the commissioners did not discuss becoming the "lead agency" in such a project, and took no vote on the issue, Chairman Don Warren said his board would cooperate in asking Governor Jim Hunt to fund a plan to form the coast's first combined regional sewer and stormwater management system in the South Brunswick Islands.

The town boards of Ocean Isle, Calabash and Sunset Beach had previously agreed to make similar requests, while Shallotte and Holden Beach had held off to see what role the county would take.

Sunset Beach and Calabash have formed the South Brunswick Regional Water and Sewer Authority and have appointed three members each to serve as a "management

*"Many of the town's property owners...have been exposed to a considerable amount of innuendo and half-truths by those who had previously formed anti-sewer opinions..."*

—Engineers' report on Sunset Beach

entity" for receiving sewer system grants and loans.

As other communities begin showing interest in exploring a regional wastewater and stormwater program, deep division remains at Sunset Beach regarding the source, severity and possible remedy for water pollution there. Members of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association were told April 10 by their treasurer, Minnie Hunt, that the engineers had presented "inaccurate

and incomplete" preliminary data regarding pollution around the island. Leaders of the taxpayers' group have said they are not convinced that septic tanks are the source of pollution around the island and that a \$200,000 stormwater runoff management system alone might clean up area waters without construction of a \$25 to \$30 million sewer system.

The engineers, in their final report to the Sunset Beach Town Council,

assert that "many of the town's property owners, both resident and non-resident, have been exposed to a considerable amount of innuendo and half-truths by those who had previously formed anti-sewer opinions without regard to factual evidence in support of the need for sewers."

The report reiterates the engineers' earlier briefings of the Sunset Beach Town Council, summarizing that their tests indicate:

■Septic tank systems on the island of Sunset Beach are contributing pollution to waters around the island as well as the groundwater table aquifer beneath it;

■Surface water and groundwater pollution from septic tanks are most likely the result of excessively permeable soils, high groundwater levels and the improper use of convention and alternative septic tank systems; and

■Centralized wastewater collec-

tion and treatment is "preferable both environmentally and economically" to the continued use of septic tanks.

Billups said in a telephone interview Tuesday that copies of the final Sunset Beach report, as well as "a stack of 40-plus documents and all our reference materials" have been delivered to the town hall for citizens' examination. He said he was confident the final report "makes a simple, concise statement" indicating the need for a central sewer system.

Monday's hearing was scheduled at SeaTrail, which will accommodate more participants than the small town hall. At the December 1992 public hearing on forming the sewer authority, tempers flared when more than 40 residents were turned away because there was nowhere for them to sit in the town hall. Those who remained outdoors were allowed in the chambers one at a time to speak.

## Shallotte Aldermen Will Renew Fight For Town's Post Office

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte officials are still fighting for their post office, nearly a year after most mail-handling operations were moved from the downtown branch to the new facility at Seaside.

Resurrecting what had been a dead issue, aldermen vowed Tuesday night to return to their May 4 meeting with complaints and suggestions regarding the local post office. They will be compiled and sent to Congressman Charlie Rose.

Alderman Roney Cheers, who last year organized a petition in an attempt to keep postal operations in Shallotte, said Rose is interested in hearing what the town wants from the postal service.

"It's advanced to that point, and hopefully we can get something done about it," Cheers said. "Charlie wants us to do this, and I urge the board to see if we can't get something done here. It's pathetic."

Town officials are upset that the Shallotte office closes for lunch. They also say service has become worse since most postal service workers were moved to the South Brunswick branch last May.

"They've not only cut the hours, you don't get the mail service you used to get," said Planning Board Chairman Carson Durham, who runs a business in town. "We don't have fifth class mail up here."

Alderman Wilton Harrelson suggested Tuesday that residents and merchants disenchanted with the postal service get involved by providing the town with complaints or suggestions to improve the service.

One complaint Cheers has is that the door on the south side of the post office is always locked.

"We do not want a little Hamlet here with people trapped inside the building and can't get out," he said, referring to the deadly 1991 blaze at

a North Carolina chicken processing plant.

Town officials also said Tuesday that the Shallotte Post Office is always busy while the spacious, new offices in Seaside and Supply are hardly used.

"I've never seen more than two vehicles parked there," Cheers said of the South Brunswick branch.

**ETJ Zoning Approved**

After more than a year of work by the town planning board, Shallotte's extraterritorial area is finally zoned.

Aldermen accepted the planning board's final recommendation for the zoning regulations and map Tuesday night.

Durham said the board made three adjustments to the zoning map following a second public hearing on the proposal April 8. The board had made 30 changes following the first hearing in January.

As a result of input at the April

hearing, he also said the minimum lot size in the B-2 business district was changed. Instead of requiring 20,000 square feet in all cases, the minimum size will be 15,000 square feet if water and sewer are available.

The extraterritorial area (ETJ) includes about 2,000 pieces of property located within a mile of the town limits. Officials wanted to zone the area so they can control future development. Most of the ETJ is zoned residential.

"I think the planning board's done an excellent job," Mayor Sarah Tripp said Tuesday. "I know you all had a lot of other things to do but you made this a priority."

Harrelson said the planning board "performed a miracle" by getting the landowners around Shallotte to understand and go along with the zoning proposal.

**Smoking Ban Rejected**  
Shallotte officials Tuesday reject-

ed a proposal to prohibit smoking in town-owned buildings, one night after Brunswick County Commissioners approved a similar ban at the county government complex.

Instead of outlawing smoking, aldermen decided to let each department head decide if he or she wants to put "Thank you for not smoking" signs in the offices.

"I don't smoke, but I think they're pushing this smoking deal a little too far. I won't support it," Alderman David Gause said of a smoking ban.

Harrelson, a reformed smoker, agreed. "If it becomes a nuisance to anybody just ask them not to smoke and they'll do it. It's become an emotional issue bordering on the hysterical."

**Other Business**

In other business Tuesday, aldermen:

■Deleted a section of town code that required the owner of adjoining

lots that didn't meet minimum lots size requirements to combine those lots. The small lots can now qualify for development as non-conforming uses.

■Discussed efforts to collect approximately \$16,410 in unpaid taxes dating back to 1983. Tax Collector Sandy Hewett and Town Attorney Mark Lewis are trying to collect the money. They plan to give the town board a list of taxes they consider uncollectable at the May 4 meeting.

■Took no action after meeting for 35 minutes in executive session to discuss a legal matter.

■Received copies of Calabash's ordinance restricting adult entertainment businesses. Alderman Morris Hall said Shallotte needs similar regulations. "I think we need to look at this and get an ordinance before we wind up like Carolina Beach," he said.

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