

ASSESSMENTS TO BE ADJUSTED

Holden Beach Commission Rejects Ground Level Definition

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners last week rejected a proposed definition for "ground level" and decided that canal dredging assessments need to be adjusted before bills are mailed.

On a 3-2 vote, commissioners balked at a "ground level" definition that would have brought the town code into compliance with state law concerning the town's 35-foot building height limit.

The board had voted 3-2 in favor of the definition three weeks ago. But Mayor Pro Tem Gil Bass switched his vote at last Wednesday's town meeting to kill the proposal.

Board members David Sandifer and Gay Atkins also voted against the definition drafted by the N.C. Institute of Government, while Jim Fournier and Sid Swarts were in favor.

The 3-2 vote means Holden Beach will continue measuring building height from the lowest finished grade—such as a concrete pad under the house—to the mean level of the slope of the roof.

The Institute of Government proposal, which was similar to one submitted by the town planning board, defined ground level as the average of the highest and lowest elevations measured along the edge of the building footprint. For lots filled with dirt, ground level could not be more than 12 inches above the crown of the street in front of the lot.

Sandifer said the new definition would prevent some

landowners from building more than a one-story house on the island where flood regulations are the strictest.

He also said it wouldn't stop people from putting huge mounds of dirt on their property before building homes, which has become a problem in the last few years.

Proponents of the new definition say it's needed to bring town code into compliance with the state law limiting buildings on Holden Beach to 35 feet.

The state law says the town won't allow buildings that are more than 35 feet above ground level, but the town doesn't have a definition for ground level in its code.

"We've got to bring our code in concurrence with the state law," Swarts said last week.

Instead of the new definition, Bass suggested the town hold a referendum in November to change the state law. Bass said the town should start measuring the actual size of the building, not how high it is off the ground.

After Hurricane Hugo, federal officials changed the flood elevation requirements at Holden Beach. As a result, some lot owners can't build two-story homes and still comply with the flood rules and height limit.

Supporting an earlier proposal by Sandifer, Bass said the town should change the state law and limit buildings to two habitable floors. Houses could be restricted to 27 feet from the bottom of the structure to the rooftop.

Bass asked Town Manager Gary Parker to find out what the town board needs to do in order to have a refer-

endum on the state law, which can only be changed by a vote of residents.

Assessments Adjusted

Following a public hearing last week, Holden Beach officials have decided not to include side lot lines when figuring assessments for the Holden Beach Harbor and Heritage Harbor dredging projects.

As a result, most landowners in those two canal subdivisions will pay a little bit more than what was indicated on recent notices from the town.

Holden Beach Harbor cost \$134,307 to dredge and the entrance to Heritage Harbor cost \$23,678. The town figured the owner of each 50-foot-wide lot would pay \$366 in Holden Beach Harbor and \$145 in Heritage Harbor.

However, commissioners voted last week not to assess for side lot lines of corner lots that face the canals. All owners will end up sharing that cost.

Property owners in Holden Beach Harbor who haven't paid yet will be billed for \$381.75 for each 50-

foot lot. In Heritage Harbor, the cost per lot will be \$150.71.

Original estimates for the dredging were \$430 per lot in Holden Beach Harbor and \$150 in Heritage Harbor. Holden Beach Harbor owners who paid the \$430 in advance will receive refunds in about two months.

During last week's hearing, two Sanford Street property owners, Pete Stalling and Gladys Watkins, said the town should require that all canal lots be bulkheaded so dredging isn't needed so often.

Commissioners recently passed an ordinance requiring bulkheads on canal lots before construction. The town also requires maintenance of bulkheads, but doesn't require seawalls on vacant lots.

Town officials received also four letters from Holden Beach Harbor property owners opposing the assessment.

One man wrote that dredging benefited just a few people and the assessment was too high. Another owner asked the town to cut his bill because he cannot get a septic tank permit and build on his lot.

New Inspector On Job At Holden

Jim McSwain, who has 14 years experience as owner of a commercial and residential construction company, started work Monday as Holden Beach's new building inspector.

He fills the post vacated by Dwight Carroll, who retired earlier this month after nine years on the job. McSwain, formerly of Cary, built a home at Holden Beach about one year ago.

Town Manager Gary Parker said McSwain was chosen from approximately nine applicants. McSwain holds a general contractor's license and electrical and plumbing contractors' licenses in North Carolina.

Based on the licenses he holds, McSwain said Tuesday he expects to receive state certification as a building, plumbing and electrical inspector this week. Heating and air conditioning certification could come next week.

Since 1977, McSwain has owned a residential and commercial construction business. From 1983 to 1992, he was vice president of Parro Corporation, a commercial development company in Cary.

McSwain graduated from Glade Valley High School in Sparta and received an associate degree in applied agriculture from N.C. State University, according to his job application.

Parker said he sought assistance from the N.C. Code Qualifications Board in selecting the new inspector.

"Unlike some other positions I've recruited for, this is a pretty technical area here," he said.

McSwain's starting salary will be \$22,896, which is above the level of pay normally given to new hires at Holden Beach.

Under the town's personnel policy, Parker is authorized to hire at "step one" or "step two" on the pay scale without the permission of the board of commissioners.

Parker said he couldn't hire a qualified building inspector at the

"step two" salary of \$19,700.

At their meeting last Wednesday, commissioners gave the town manager permission to go beyond the "step two" level to hire an inspector. The board's decision was reached during a 75-minute closed session.

Mayor Wally Ausley said the building inspector's position was one of two personnel matters discussed during the closed session. He said the town board did not reach a decision on the other matter, which was not disclosed.



STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

Earth Day At BCC

Brunswick Community College students celebrate Earth Day April 22 with help from Recreational Grounds Management Technology students who sold herbs and perennials and gave away slices of a large cake decorated to mark the occasion. Above, student Debbie DeMatties and program assistant Frank Gault serve cake to students who stopped by to look at the plants. Proceeds of the plant sale will go toward expenses of a student field trip to N.C. State University.

National Guard To Rebuild Sand Dunes On Long Beach

The N.C. National Guard, working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Town of Long Beach, is helping to rebuild sand dunes washed away in the March 13 storm.

Two members of the 881st Engineer Company of Rockingham are spending two weeks at Long Beach. The soldiers are driving dump trucks full of sand to areas where dunes were leveled by the March storm. The storm caused coastal damage similar to that caused by a minor hurricane.

The cooperative federal, state and local project was arranged by Congressman Charlie Rose, whose district includes Brunswick County.

National Guard units are often

asked by local agencies to perform various functions as community action projects. The projects provide additional training for soldiers and result in new facilities or assistance for local community needs, according to a news release from the N.C. Dept. of Crime Control and Public Safety.

"The situation in Long Beach was also considered to be of an emergency nature, as the loss of sand dunes to the storm raised the likelihood of flooding or damage to property," the news release said.

The town will cover the cost of motel rooms for the soldiers, and the National Guard funds their salary and meals.

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