

Proposed Budget Would Cut Departments, Raise Tax Rate 10 Percent

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 Jones was his administrative assistant, Renee Robinson, and Special Projects Coordinator Kelly Fields. The department's 15 parks maintenance workers were transferred to a new grounds maintenance division. The budget calls for the elimination of the recreation department's \$50,000 Older Adults travel program. The Clean County Committee would be moved to the engineering department under Recycling Coordinator Mary McCarley.

Among the vacant positions deleted in the budget plan are a soil scientist in the health department, two equipment operators in operational services, two building and grounds maintenance assistants, two register of deeds positions, an agricultural extension agent and a telecommunications supervisor in the 911 center.

In presenting his budget message to the commissioners, Harvey issued "a special note of thanks" to Emergency Services Director Doug Ledgett, Operation Services Director Darryl Somersett, County Engineer Robert Tucker and Director of Fiscal Operations Lithia Hahn "for significant involvement in the entire budget development process."

Major Restructuring
 In a major restructuring of county government, Harvey's budget proposes that he and the other four directors be appointed to head five new county departments with added powers and responsibilities.

Harvey would become the director of planning and development, overseeing divisions of community development and public housing, land records management, economic development and planning.

Ledgett would head all emergency services, with authority over Logan, Freeman and all operations at the 911 communications center.

Somersett would retain the title of operational services director with the responsibility of running the maintenance garage, a proposed county motor pool, the solid waste management division and the sign shop. Utilities Director Jerry Webb would work under Somersett as chief of public utilities with a reduction in pay grade.

County Engineer Tucker's department would include housekeeping,

grounds maintenance, public utilities and building maintenance along with his former duties as head of building inspections and recycling.

As director of an expanded fiscal operations department, Hahn would oversee a cafeteria division, computer services, purchasing and finance. Her salary would increase from \$47,829 to \$50,220.

No across-the-board pay hike is proposed for county employees.

Education Increases
 Harvey's formal budget message provided no details of which recommended spending increases contributed to the need for a tax increase. He later indicated that a significant hike in the board of education budget led to the overall increase in spending.

Capital Spending
 The budget calls for \$1.5 million in proposed capital improvements including a \$1 million reserve for closing the landfill, \$180,000 for a new landfill compactor, \$100,000 for a fiber optic network at the government complex and \$100,000 for im-

provements to public buildings required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Alternative Revenues
 Harvey told the board tax increase could be avoided by adopting a package of alternative revenue sources including solid waste tipping fees, an increase in the telephone surcharge for 911 service, a "slight increase" in water charges and an ambulance service fee schedule that would be collected both by county EMS and volunteer rescue squads.

In a preliminary study of possible ambulance fees, Harvey said he may suggest a charge of \$125 for each basic life support call and \$175 for advanced life support service. Additional fees of \$175 to \$200 might be charged for ambulance transport.

The county currently imposes a 50-cent surcharge on each telephone number for 911 service, which Harvey said is one of the lowest in the state. In a state-sponsored survey, 31 of 63 responding counties reported fees of more than a dollar a

month. Harvey said he will ask the board to consider increasing Brunswick County's surcharge to \$1.50 a month.

By a "relatively slight" increase of about \$1.85 in monthly water rates, the county could anticipate an additional \$1 million in revenue, "including paying off one-fifth of our debt service" in a single year, Harvey said.

While offering no specific rate-per-ton proposal for landfill tipping fees, Harvey estimated that six months of such charges could be anticipated to provide an additional \$1.2 million in revenue.

Workshops, Hearing Set
 The county board will hold public workshops on the budget May 24, 25 and 26 at 7 p.m. in the commissioners chambers. A public hearing has been scheduled for Thursday, May 27, at 7 p.m. in the public assembly room and the county complex in Bolivia.

A copy of the proposed budget is available for public inspection at the county administration office.

Library Board Volunteers Say Motive Is Political Or Personal

BY LYNN CARLSON
 "Somebody's mad at somebody, and it might just be me."
 That was the reaction of the Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees' chairman to news that the panel is targeted for extinction in the county's budget proposal.

Chairman Gene Pinkerton, a former county commissioner, said he is at a loss for motives other than the personal or political, since the trustees are volunteers who receive no stipend for their service.

"We're not costing them any money," said Trustee Edith Tillman, who said she has spent the past five years "trying to get a library for the children of Leland."

"We've not caused them any trouble either," added Trustee Margaret Harper of Southport.

The budget proposed by Interim County Manager John Harvey on Monday recommends dissolving the library board "in relation to a department otherwise directly under the county" and suggests the trustees would better serve the county "by undertaking countywide expansion of membership of Friends of the Library as a support group, and by seeking endorsements and legacies from our many well-to-do users of the system to further develop it."

Learning of the recommendation just as they adjourned their May meeting Monday night, the trustees expressed surprise and disappointment. If the board is dissolved, the action will become official just prior to the trustees' target date for starting construction on new library branches on Oak Island and in Leland. (See related story.)

"Everybody in this county who reads a book will have something to say about this," said Trustee Marie Harrison of Shallotte.

"I hope we're allowed to follow through on what we've promised the people of Brunswick County," Trustee Ann Hines of Yaupon Beach said.

Harvey's budget letter to the county commissioners states "funds are continued as appropriated for the libraries," referring to the two new libraries and renovations to the Southport and Shallotte branches currently scheduled for the first half of 1994.

"Brunswick County is in bad enough shape educationally without trying to dissolve library boards," said Pinkerton, who called the recommendation "unreal, with all the work we've been doing" and added that all the trustees' duties would fall on Chief Librarian Maurice Tate if the board is dissolved.

But Harvey, interviewed by the *Beacon* on Tuesday, said it was a

"possible conflict" for Tate that caused him to make the recommendation.

Tate must answer to both the trustees and the county manager, Harvey said, adding that Tate told him "getting her out from under that would be the best thing that could happen."

He said Tate was consulted on the matter and said "they (the trustees) get in her hair." However, at the trustees' Monday meeting, Tate gave no indication she favors the recommendation or was party to it.

"This must be a personal thing of some kind," Pinkerton told the trustees Monday night, later adding, "in all fairness to politics, (Harvey) might have been told to do this."

It was on Pinkerton's motion last June that the former all-Republican county board appointed the library trustees and appropriated \$1.5 million for the library construction projects.

The library board was established under state statute as an ongoing advisory board designed to function in the same fashion as a board of health or social services, Pinkerton said.

County Commissioners' Chairman Don Warren told the *Beacon* that Harvey's recommendation for the library board needs to be studied, and contended that the board of trustees was established as "a committee."

Pinkerton did not seek re-election this past November.

Rationale Given For Budget Recommendations

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 One of the significant changes recommended in Harvey's budget is the elimination of the Brunswick County Parks and Recreation Department along with its director, Bobby "B.J." Jones, and two members of his staff.

Jones was one of several people rumored to be on a "hit list" of county employees that would be removed after a three-member Democratic Party majority took control of the board of commissioners last December. Also high on the list was Clerk to the Board Kelly Barefoot, whose two protected positions have been deleted in Harvey's proposed budget.

Harvey said that despite Barefoot's experience as secretary to former County Manager/Attorney David Clegg, she was not placed in his newly proposed position of secretary to the county manager, "so the new manager will have the full priv-

ilege of deciding who his secretary should be."

Insisting that the county's recreational services "need to be taken in an absolutely different direction," Harvey said, "I took what I consider to be the people providing the core programs of recreation," and eliminated the rest.

"I saw no place for three positions in Parks and Recreation and he (Jones) was one of them," Harvey said. "Also the one who figured out how to spend \$50,000 on older adults travel and the one who does belly dancing at a Greek restaurant in Wilmington. The other was that blonde gal over there."

In the budget message, Harvey criticized the department's oversight of local community buildings.

"I found at one such building the parks and recreation department had reserved all five weeknights for aerobics so there could be no other use, and also given year-long commit-

ments to other strictly private interests, some operating at profit," he said.

"That's not true," said Parks and Recreation Administrative Assistant Renee Robinson.

She acknowledged that community buildings often were "booked up with reservations a year in advance," but not by profit-making enterprises, for which she claimed to have "turned away numerous requests."

Insisting that "there are no demotions in this budget," Harvey disputed that description of his proposal to make Emergency Management Director Cecil Logan the county fire marshal while naming his former assistant, Brenda Freeman to the post of emergency management coordinator.

"In Cecil's budget message he complained of working 80 hours a week and asked for some relief," Harvey said. "He also asked for a

fire marshal position. It struck me that Mrs. Freeman has all the credentials to be emergency management coordinator and that on two major events when he was...wherever, she handled it admirably."

"Since he issued a complaint of long hours and said he needed relief, I granted him relief," Harvey said.

Asked what Emergency Medical Services Director Douglas Legett's new responsibilities would be in the proposed new position of Emergency Services Director, Harvey answered, "To be the boss of Cecil."

Harvey also said that a previously approved position of soil scientist for the health department was deleted from the budget because a similar position already exists in the engineering department. When asked why the department had made the request, Harvey responded, "Because they don't know what they're doing."

Library Board Tables Shallotte Branch Closing

BY LYNN CARLSON
 The Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees agreed Monday to table until October action on whether to close the West Brunswick branch library in Shallotte while it is being renovated.

Extensive work on the library is scheduled to begin in January and last until July. On advice of its architect, the library board recommended the library be closed while the work is in progress. However, citizens have complained to some trustees, and both the Sunset Beach and Calabash town boards have asked that some temporary library be established during that time.

Chief Librarian Maurice Tate was asked by Board Chairman Gene Pinkerton to prepare a feasibility study determining the cost of moving the library to temporary quarters during the renovations and to present it on Oct. 18.

Pinkerton said the issue "has gotten way out of hand" and asked the board to consider not renovating the library at all, or scaling back the plans to eliminate the need for tem-

porary closure.

"I know this may sound harsh, but I mean for it to," Pinkerton said. "It's premature to make this so much of an issue. The work is not scheduled to begin until 1994, and the budget has not been approved for fiscal year '94. We're talking \$40,000 to \$50,000 to operate in another location for six or seven months and then move back. I've not seen that in the budget."

Pinkerton said the board had agreed to "treat all the libraries the same," but had never discussed opening a temporary Southport library during that branch's renovation period.

Citizens of Southwest Brunswick County have complained that, though the nearby new Oak Island library branch is scheduled to be open by the time the Southport library closes, there will be no library in proximity to the Shallotte branch during its scheduled closure.

"I'd be willing for us to scale back operation to keep it open. I'm in favor of letting them have what they want," said Trustee Ralph

Manager Candidates Interviewed

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 most recently as budget officer. Hargett is also the planning committee chairman for Wilmington's Downtown Area Revitalization Effort.

Citing his experience in three "painful" reductions in the city's work force, Hargett said he had "learned how to do more with less" and to find "innovative ways to continue services with fewer resources by improving productivity."

Hargett described the county manager's relation to the commissioners as that of "a CEO and a board of directors." He said he preferred a "team approach" to management.

Warren told each of the candidates that he expects the board to complete its interviews within 30 days.

Frazier of Winnabow.

"There will be two beautiful libraries open (in Leland and on Oak Island) before we even start renovating there, for just a few minutes' drive, still within our own county. Let's look at the positive sides," Pinkerton said. He then moved to officially table the matter until October, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Pinkerton said the board would still be willing to hear citizens' comments on the matter. A delegation of Shallotte-area residents, listed on the agenda as planning to address the library board at the meeting, did not appear. Trustee Marie Harrison of Shallotte said she believes the group intends to attend the June meeting.

In other business, Trustee Don Eggert, chair of the board's building committee, announced that bids will be opened March 25 for the new Leland and Oak Island branches. The bid-opening will take place at 3 p.m. in the county commissioners' chambers. If the bids are acceptable, and the county commissioners award a construction contract in June, ground could be broken in ear-

ly July, he added.

The trustees decided to schedule cornerstone ceremonies rather than groundbreaking for both facilities.

The trustees also:

- Agreed to ask the county commissioners to declare 1,500 volumes chosen by Tate as surplus property to be sold in the Friends of the Library annual book sale. All the books chosen are either worn out, outdated or unused for years, Tate said.
- Agreed to recommend Trustee Edith Tillman of Leland for reappointment by the county commissioners. Tillman is one of three trustees serving one-year terms which expire at the end of June. Trustees John Jacobs of Southport and Pearl Stanley of Shallotte, who were both absent, will be asked if they wish to seek reappointment. All three appointments would be for three-year terms.

The board's discussion took place prior to its learning of a proposal to dissolve it under the county's new budget, which will become effective July 1. (See related story.)

such thing as a transfer or promotion" in county government under his administration. He said that whenever there was a position opening, "everyone in the community was given an opportunity to apply."

Ingram applied for the new position, was hired and worked six months as a probationary employee, he said.

Clegg would not comment when asked if any disciplinary warnings had been placed in Ingram's personnel file.

Ingram was one of six employees who were asked to take a lie detector test in a 1989 sheriff's department investigation after \$225 was found missing from a building inspection department cash box. The polygraph examinations were deemed "inconclusive."

In February, 1990, Ingram was suspended from his position for what officials at the time called a personal conduct problem.

Benton's suit alleges that he "agreed to transfer from his former position of building inspector into the department of building and grounds on the condition that he continue to be paid the same salary as in his former position." It states that after working in the new job at his old salary for four months, Benton's job was reclassified, resulting in a pay cut from \$17,906 to \$14,734 per year.

The suit makes no mention of Benton being employed as building inspector on the condition that he obtain a North Carolina building in-

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Former Inspectors Charging Unjust Termination

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 spector's license, Clegg said. After failing the exam, Benton was offered another position "at a salary commensurate with that position." He refused to apply for the position.

"Mr. Benton terminated himself," Clegg said.

Ingram's lawsuit acknowledges that he was hired Oct. 19, 1987, as chief building inspector on a "probationary" basis. He was later advanced to the job position of building inspections director at an annual salary of \$27,838, according to the lawsuit.

Then the suit claims that "some or all members of the Brunswick County Commissioners wanted one Julius 'Buddy' Lewis to receive (Ingram's) job as building inspections director. For these reasons, the job position of purchasing agent was created and (Ingram) was advised to apply for this job."

Ingram sought the position and was hired as the county purchasing agent on Nov. 13, 1989. When he was fired by Clegg six months later, Ingram's suit claims he received "no notice or warnings...of alleged work performance deficiencies."

In contrast with Clegg's opinion, Ingram's lawsuit asserts that when he applied for and accepted the new job, the change was "a transfer preserving (Ingram's) appointment status as a permanent rather than a probationary employee."

But Clegg said there was "no

job without advertising the vacancy and without authorization from the county commissioners in apparent violation of state statute and the county personnel policy.

It is believed that the position was created in response to a threatened lawsuit from Hewett.

Although the board took no action against Harvey, the commissioners voted unanimously to prohibit him from creating positions without authorization.

The suit claims that Benton protested his salary reduction before the board of commissioners on Nov. 20, 1989, and was issued an ultimatum "to keep his last position at the salary then offered or to have his employment terminated." It asserts that the county failed to follow the employee grievance procedure by not referring the appeal to the advisory personnel board.

Benton's lawsuit demands that he be re-hired "at a salary no less than \$17,906," plus any additional compensation or raises received since July 1, 1989. It seeks "all lost compensation" resulting from his dismissal, plus attorney fees and punitive damages from the county in excess of \$10,000.

Ingram's suit also asks that he be reinstated and awarded back pay, lost benefits, punitive damages and attorney fees. Both suits demand jury trials.

Brunswick County is currently being sued in federal court by former County Clerk Regina Alexander, who claims she was fired because of racial and political discrimination, and in state courts by Velma Babson, a former animal control officer who was fired for alleged disciplinary problems.

Interim County Manager John Harvey recently created a new position without budget funding and hired former Landfill Director Leo Hewett for the job shortly after he was fired. Harvey gave Hewett the

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