

# County Asks State To Check Pollution Levels At Sunset After Town's Request

BY ERIC CARLSON

The N.C. Division of Environmental Management has been asked to study pollution levels in canals and estuaries around Sunset Beach to determine whether overloaded septic systems have made their waters unsafe for human contact.

Brunswick County Environmental Health Supervisor Andrew Robinson told the county health board Monday that he has asked the state to sample the waters there after an engineering firm's recent study indicated unacceptable levels of fecal coliform bacteria in all five of the areas it tested.

The samples were taken April 23 by Powell and Associates of North Myrtle Beach, the engineering firm hired by Sunset Beach and Calabash to help the two towns create a joint sewerage system.

Found in the intestinal tracts of warm-blooded animals, fecal coliform is a commonly used indicator of pollution caused by septic tank overload

and stormwater runoff.

Coliform levels as high as 5,700 parts per 100 milliliters of water—from a sample taken at the canal between Marlin and Sailfish Streets—were recorded. Other test sites showed level ranging from 27 to 88 parts per 100 ml.

Robinson said waters are considered polluted when a coliform level greater than 14 parts per 100 ml. is recorded.

"We need to see if these waters are safe for human activity," Robinson told the board.

He plans to ask the state to conduct more extensive testing. Water samples will be taken at different tide levels before and after the peak tourist season. Robinson hopes the first round of sampling can be completed before the July 4 weekend.

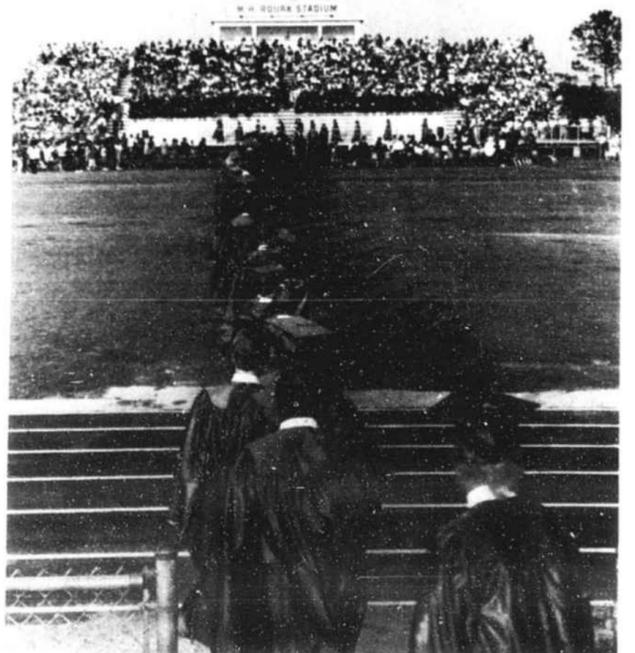
In a June 3 letter to Robinson, Sunset Beach Mayor Mason Barber Jr. asked the county health department to study the canal waters "and to advise us of any actions necessary to protect our cit-

izens and visitors." The letter outlines the results of the Powell Associates sampling and asks that a more thorough study be undertaken.

"The results of the testing have raised concerns of some homeowners that swimming in the canals may pose a health hazard to children and adults," the letter said, noting that the study "indicated a presence of human waste in some of the canal waters."

The test samples showed a coliform level of 88 in the estuary at the end of Inlet Avenue, 56 in the canal between Sixth Street and Marlin Street, 32 in the estuary closest to 40th Street and 27 in the estuary at its closest point to North Shore Drive.

"The comparison of estuarine test results versus canal test results further confirms the island as the origin of significant pollution, even during a time period of limited occupancy," said Powell engineer James Billups in this transmittal letter with the study.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

## Graduation March

Clad in kelly green, West Brunswick seniors march across the ball field as family, friends and faculty look on at commencement exercises June 9 in M.H. Rourk Stadium.

# Shallotte Board Backs Employee Pay Raises

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte Aldermen gave a vote of confidence to the town's 19 employees this week after one board member questioned pay raises included in next year's proposed budget.

Alderman Roney Cheers said he objected to giving \$23,918 in pay raises while the state is struggling to increase salaries for its employees and no raises are planned for county workers.

"It appears that we have become a mecca for raises," Cheers said during Monday night's three-hour workshop on the 1993-94 budget.

However, other town board members said the employees deserve the raises. Aldermen described many of the employees as underpaid and loyal people who are working with outdated equipment to help keep the tax rate down.

"I think they're worth every penny that they ask for, and if it came to a vote I'd vote for it," Alderman Wilton Harrelson said. "I think the salary scale is less than you'd expect for most governing bodies."

Mayor Sarah Tripp and board members Morris Hall and David Gause also backed the proposed pay raises, which would add an average of \$1,258 to each employee's annual salary.

The pay raises are part of a \$1.28 million budget for the fiscal year starting July 1. For the fifth straight year, town officials plan to keep the tax rate at 47 cents per \$100 of property.

At a public hearing on the budget Tuesday night, Shallotte businessmen Beamon Hewett and Dykes Hewett also questioned the proposed raises. They said merchants are struggling to pay town taxes.

"What's going to happen when people start closing up when they can't pay the bill?" Beamon Hewett asked. "It's tough out there and we're paying the bill. You need to consider it."

By keeping the tax rate at 47 cents, Beamon Hewett said the town board, in effect, would be raising taxes on business owners because merchants must now pay for trash pickup the town used to provide. If

salaries weren't increased, Hewett said the town could cut the tax rate.

Another merchant, Carson Durham, supported the proposed pay raises. "The town is going to see a lot of growth in the years to come and we're going to need good people. If we don't pay them good salaries we won't keep them."

Mayor Tripp said Monday night that the efforts of the town employees have helped keep the tax rate down. "They're working with machinery held together with bubble gum and bailing wire."

With few exceptions, Harrelson said employees are still using the same equipment they were using when he was first elected to the town board 10 years ago. "They have MacGyvered it to death."

Aldermen said many town employees earn less than other government workers in the area. Board members also praised the quick response of maintenance workers to water and sewer problems.

Gause said health insurance is going up 17 percent for town employees this year and they'll need the raises to keep pace. "You've got to consider things like that too," he said.

No new positions have been proposed in next year's budget, but Tripp said Albert Hughes will need an assistant soon. Hughes is building inspector, sewer plant supervisor and public works director for the town.

"If he makes it through this year, he's going to have to be a miracle worker," the mayor said.

Aldermen will hold a second workshop on the proposed budget next Tuesday, June 22, at 7:30 p.m. The town board plans to adopt the budget at a special meeting June 29.

### New Computer Nixed

While most board members agreed the proposed pay raises are warranted, they voiced some concern Monday night over the fire department's budget for next year.

Officials said they don't think the department needs a computer, which had been included in the proposed budget as part of the \$6,300 departmental supplies fund.

"I'm not against the department, but some of this stuff is a little ridiculous," Gause said. Officials said the department could use a computer in town hall if it needs one.

Mayor Tripp also said the town needs more control over fire department spending. Firefighters can spend up to \$500 without town board approval, and there is no limit on how often \$500 can be spent.

### Time For Change?

Aldermen also decided Monday to reconsider which bank the town uses. Shallotte currently keeps its money at Southern National Bank, but will invite proposals from United Carolina Bank and NationsBank.

Town board members said Southern National gave the town a great deal when it switched from UCB about four years ago. Aldermen want to see if the town is still getting the most return on its money.

Cheers raised the issue Monday night and questioned whether the town should continue allowing the bank to keep interest generated by a \$28,000 certificate of deposit in re-

turn for services.

"No one bank has discussed this one iota with me," Cheers said. "I stick my hand on a stack of Bibles on that."

Harrelson said letting all three banks make proposals would be fair. "We changed to Southern National because they offered the best deal at the time. I don't see anything wrong with seeing who can give us the best deal now."

Shallotte keeps about \$400,000 in the bank. The town had earned about \$5,700 in interest through three quarters of the fiscal year, according to Town Clerk Mary Etta Hewett.

### Pigott Resigns

Aldermen accepted the resignation of veteran planning board member Conrad Pigott Tuesday night.

Rebecca Hawes was appointed to serve the rest of Pigott's term, which expires Feb. 4, 1994. Pigott had served on the planning board since its inception in 1974.

Aldermen also voted Tuesday to ask the N.C. Department of Transportation to update the town's thoroughfare plan, as recommended by the planning board.

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