

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, JULY 29, 1993

Planning Board Fine Example Of How Volunteers Can Serve

In the coming weeks, the Sunset Beach Town Council is expected to settle the complex issue of how best to zone Bird Island, balancing the fragility of the environment and the wishes of a vocal public against the legal rights of the property owner.

The process of getting to this point has been more than arduous. The circumstances surrounding the issue have been as dynamic as the island itself, shifting with the the regulatory tides and the owner's ever-evolving development plans. The vast majority of the work has been handled not by professional planners, but by the town's planning board, volunteers performing admirably in an often thankless and invariably painstaking job.

A year ago, a professional planner's zoning proposal for Bird Island was abandoned on the grounds that it might infringe upon the owner's right to use the property. Since that time, nearly all the legwork has been accomplished by the planning board under the able leadership of Richard Good.

Don't think for a minute that Bird Island has been the only issue on the planning board's to-do list in a year. Quite the opposite is true. A dozen or more other proposals have been drafted, definitions devised and consequences "what-iffed" in a clear, thoughtful fashion on topics as diverse as miniature golf courses and privacy fences. That's a tall order in a town where folks are picky, and rightfully so, about what kinds of growth and change they'll sit still for.

Sunset Beach doesn't have the only commendable planning board in Brunswick County, but theirs is the best example that comes to mind of the positive difference dedicated volunteers can make to a small town's future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Schools Should Recruit Blacks From Colleges

To the editor:
 Having read the statement of July 14 in the Wilmington *Morning Star* concerning the controversy over the lack of blacks in the Brunswick County school system, I was not surprised, but stunned and bewildered.

According to my feeble understanding, one of our school board members stated that there was a lack of black candidates for positions in the Brunswick County school system.

If Brunswick County school officials spent as much time recruiting black persons for administrative positions as they spend on whites, there would be no problems recruiting qualified blacks.

If only they would inform A&T College of Greensboro, Johnson C. Smith of Charlotte, Bennett College of Greensboro, whatever they need will be found. Qualified blacks will never be found for the Brunswick County school system as long as we wallow in the mud flats of racial segregation.

No solution with be forthcoming as long as Brunswick County continues to attempt to turn the clock of progress back to the ungodly days of scalawags, carpetbaggers, wiggle tails, sock legs, intimidators, cowards, cross-burners and sheet-wearers.

Jesse A. Bryant
 Supply
 EDITOR'S NOTE: Jesse Bryant is president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Cedar Grove Branch, Supply.

Leaflet Was 'Trash'

To the editor:
 I received a leaflet included in my newspaper several weeks ago. I have delayed writing in hopes of containing or restraining my emotions.

I have not and will not read that trash. Before knowing what it was, I saw enough to realize it's another

product of small minds. It matters not which side of the various abortion issue you support, and there are many sides of this issue.

Adoption in many cases cause as many problems as any other social deficiency, so it is not an all-solving answer. Murders and mental cases abound!

I support abortion in certain cases, and I share some of the pro-life concerns. But I do not support those who muddy the issues with the trash included in your newspaper.

If you want to write editorials, be my guest. But try to stick to the real issues.

I also feel what you did is illegal and have written the postmaster. I'm trying to determine who best to forward your trash.

Charles C. Rose Jr.
 Sunset Beach

Thanks For Reception

To the editor:
 We wish to thank the Town of Holden Beach and all our many friends for the nice reception given to us.

It has been our honor to live in such a beautiful community and have so many special friends.

We love Holden Beach and look forward to spending more time here with our friends.

Mabel and Hugh Dutton
 Holden Beach
 (More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

The *Beacon* welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Under no circumstances will unsigned letters be printed. Letters should be legible. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to *The Brunswick Beacon*, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.

NEED AND WANT ARE TWO DIFFERENT THINGS

Defending School Budget A Healthy Process

The debate over the Brunswick County Schools' 1993-94 county budget allocation is about the accountability of two boards caught in a spiral of rising expectations.

The board of education must answer for both how the school system is operated and for the quality of its product, though it lacks full control over either.

For funding, the schools are at the mercy of the federal, state and county governments. The local school board must adopt its budget before the state adopts its own, though the state provides right at 60 percent of the money used to run the schools. Substantial chunks of that money are designated for spending in specific areas as well, limiting the schools' flexibility to match resources to its own priorities or needs. County government should be able to relate to this, because the state imposes the same sort of demands on it.

In North Carolina, unlike some other states, the school board is elected by and accountable to the voters, but must ask the county for money.

This means the county commissioners are responsible for making sure the school system has enough money to provide local students a decent education. It also means the commissioners must share the responsibility for the quality of education provided.

If the two boards don't agree on school funding, state law provides for mediation through the courts, a rarely-used procedure, but one that Bladen County Schools resorted to this year. Earlier this month com-



Susan Usher
 missioners there agreed to provide another \$283,000 for the schools, raising the property tax rate, after the Superior Court brought in a professional mediator to help resolve the deadlock.

Brunswick County sees itself in a bit of a bind, ranking education as just one among many needs it must address, such as water and sewer infrastructure and industrial development. (Sadly enough, one of the top reasons traditional industry has given for being slow to locate here is the less-than-satisfactory quality of the schools and the local workforce. Perhaps beefing up our schools might be the county's best long-term job creation/development investment?)

Certainly there are questions about what constitutes a "decent" or "adequate" education, a standard that changes with the times. Schools—like any other entity—tend to deliver exactly what's expected or demanded of them and no more. If a community doesn't want much, well...

Brunswick County is changing. We have a new breed of parent—a relatively small, but growing number—that expects more from the schools. We have prospective em-

ployers who expect more of high school graduates. We have state public school, community college and university systems expecting more of graduates.

All these rising demands and new standards of excellence have forced the school system to take a fresh look at how it does business and begin making some difficult, though necessary, changes. It has to get faculty and staff and students to buy into those rising expectations as well—to expect more of themselves and each other.

The school board is saying it's time to end a longstanding pattern of just getting by. And, if it is to continue to bear the brunt of criticism for the failures of the system, then it wants the personnel, equipment and infrastructure needed to do the job right. Among other things it wants: to improve the way teachers are trained and retrained; to acquaint students with the new technology they need to understand in the workplaces of tomorrow; to build the additional classroom space needed to relieve overcrowding in a rapidly-growing school system; to improve communication and cooperation within a school system spread over a large geographic area; to make mid-level administrative people more helpful and more responsive to individual school staffs.

The current board of county commissioners feels it has fulfilled its campaign promise to be education-minded, funding a request for energy money at mid-year and allocating the schools 17 percent more than they received last year—including \$1 million for new technology.

With other needs pressing, the county is demanding assurance that the schools are already doing the best they can with what they have. That's a reasonable demand, though difficult to prove or disprove.

While a compromise between the two boards would have saved legal costs and time, the questions of accountability would have lingered. I, for one, welcome the journey on which the schools and commissioners are embarking. The self-examination required to justify its programs, staffing and spending will be healthy for the school system, as will finding ways to effectively communicate its needs and priorities to the court (the public).

If the school board can explain and defend its needs, then the county should gladly dig deeper and provide more money, as well as begin thinking in terms of a long-range plan for school system improvement.

If the schools cannot justify their spending and demands, well, as the Rolling Stones remind us, "You can't always get what you want..."

Need versus want. That's a lesson we learn every day when spending our own money, much less someone else's.

It's just a shame the budget and performance of every department in county government will not be put through the same degree of scrutiny and justification. The same question could be asked of each that Don Warren, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, asked of the schools: "Can they reallocate the resources they have and spend them more wisely?"



Too Much Information Running Through My Brain

Go ahead. Admit it. There's nothing to be ashamed of. Just say it out loud:

"I am tired of hearing about the flood-ravaged Midwest."

There. Feel better now? Or maybe just a little guilty?

No need to. It's understandable.

For the past two weeks, there has been no way to avoid the tragic scenes of people sloshing through their living rooms in hip waders. Of valiant townspeople tossing little sandbags into big holes in crumbling levees. Of bankrupt farmers gazing across lakes that used to be corn fields.

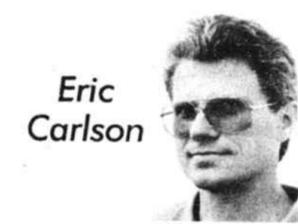
It's depressing to think about what those folks are going through. Especially here on the coast, where we might face a similar disaster. So any effort to turn that empathy into action—perhaps by donating to the American Red Cross—would be a worthwhile thing to do.

But do we have to keep watching it and watching it and watching it?

In the age of instant communications, newspapers and television networks face a real dilemma when deciding how much to report about protracted disasters like "The Flood of the Century" or the "Tragedy in Yugoslavia" or the "Starvation and Chaos in Somalia."

When news organizations devote only occasional coverage to these relentlessly heart-wrenching stories, they are accused of ignoring, or covering up, or not caring about the suffering.

But if each day's front page is awash with muddy water photos and the first 20 minutes of every newscast is spent talking to coping and hoping flood victims, readers will



Eric Carlson
 turn to the sports section while TV viewers reach for the remote control. It's the other side of that double-edged sword of modern technology. We are now capable of being transported LIVE to St. Louis or Sarajevo or Mogadishu. So now we have to decide whether or not we want to go.

This is a relatively new problem. Back in August, 1931, more than three million people were killed when the Huang He River flooded in China. That story probably made the front pages of major newspapers for a day or two. But how many Americans read about it then or remember it today?

Two years ago, we were taken LIVE into the front yards of homeowners in California as wildfires raged through the suburbs of Oakland, claiming 24 lives. Imagine what television would have done with the 1871 forest fire in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, where 1,182 people died.

We all remember the devastation and the weeks of news coverage devoted to Hurricane Andrew last year. Most viewers were left with the impression that nature's fury can't get much worse.

Tell that to the 6,000 people who died in September 1900 when a storm surge inundated Galveston,

Texas. That was before they named hurricanes or showed the aftermath in aerial footage on TV.

The power of immediate news coverage came into focus on a May night in 1937, when the German zeppelin Hindenburg came in for a routine landing in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

The airship burst into flames and burned an indelible image into the minds of everyone who saw the newsreel footage or listened to narrator's tortured voice lamenting, "Oh, the humanity!" as 36 people met horrible deaths.

Even today's teen-agers can recognize the famous picture (on the cover of Led Zeppelin's first record album) that all but ended the promising future of lighter-than-air flight.

Three years before the Hindenburg disaster and 30 miles to the northeast, three times as many people met a similar fiery fate on the waters off Asbury Park. But no camera recorded it. No reporter described it. And no rock groups were named after the sunken steamship Morro Castle.

Yesterday's news story is tomorrow's history. But modern news coverage often goes beyond recording history by making things happen. Famine had been killing people in Ethiopia for years before the gaunt faces of wizened children began to flood our TV screens, sparking a worldwide relief effort (and another number-one record).

Who can say how long the Vietnam War might have dragged on if the screams of wounded American soldiers were never heard in our living rooms. Or how many of the 10

million killed in World War I might have been saved if Dan Rather had reported from the trenches of Verdun (where 600,000 died in a battle that lasted six months).

On the other hand, too much coverage of terrible things tends to make us numb, to shrug our shoulders and say, "I know it's bad, but what can I do?"

Making things worse is the way all this information is packaged in the same way. The morning "news" shows might have a segment about collecting Barbie dolls, followed by maimed children in Bosnia, followed by Wolfgang Puck's latest recipe for soft shell crabs. So which is more important?

When every news organization is focusing all its attention on a single story, like the Persian Gulf War, you begin to wonder what else is going on in the world that would have been a top story on a "slow news day."

It's like that tree falling in the forest thing. If there is a flood or a famine or a massacre somewhere and no news camera captures it, does anybody die?

Of course they do. But does anybody care?

Of course they do. But war and disease and pestilence and famine and natural disasters have always been with us and always will be. We just know more about them now.

All we can do is ask, as theologian Reinhold Niebuhr did:

"God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

Worth Repeating...

■ The time which we have at our disposal every day is elastic; the passions that we feel expand it, those that we inspire contract it; and habit fills up what remains.
 —Marcel Proust

■ I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: "O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous." And God granted it.
 —Voltaire

■ Useless laws weaken the necessary laws.
 —Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu