

Forum, Environmental Study Sought On Quarry Controversy

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The ordinance was adopted in November 1992 at one of the last meetings of the former board of commissioners. Monday night, the new board voted unanimously to begin enforcing the ordinance Nov. 1.

Opponents fear the mining operation will pollute ground and surface waters, dry up a major aquifer and increase heavy truck traffic near residential areas. They also warn that regular blasting at the quarry could cause safety problems at the nearby Brunswick Nuclear Plant and the giant ammunition terminal at Sunny Point.

These were among the concerns raised by the more than 20 people who addressed the commissioners Monday night. Similar comments were expected at the planning board meeting Wednesday when mining opponents said they would ask that the heavy manufacturing zone that includes the Martin Marietta property be re-zoned for low-density commercial use.

"Do something good for the peo-

ple who elected you and to whom you owe your office," said John Snyder of Southport. He asked the board to call for an environmental impact statement of mining proposal and cautioned that the road damage caused by heavy gravel trucks would cost the county more in repairs than it could receive in tax revenues.

Arthur Green, former mayor and developer of Boiling Spring Lakes, warned that Martin Marietta's plan to use 10 million gallons of water per day will dry up the lakes that attract residents to the county's third largest municipality.

"The town was built on the idea of those lakes," Green said. "If you allow them to be destroyed, you will destroy the town of Boiling Spring Lakes."

Mark Stewart, the town's current mayor, agreed, warning that N.C. 211 is "built on a swamp" and was not designed to accommodate regular traffic from heavy trucks. He also said the mine would lower property values.

"Folks, St. James Plantation will

bring in more money than Martin Marietta ever will," Stewart said.

Leslie Myrie, a former member of the county's Economic Development Commission, said he had repeatedly asked EDC Director Tom Monks to arrange a public hearing "to ask Martin Marietta to explain its intentions." Myrie said he had also asked that the RDC request an environmental impact statement.

"The only answer I received from the director was that they were still collecting studies," Myrie said. "He told us when they're through, we'll have a public hearing."

Pender County resident John Kepner said he attended meetings at which Martin Marietta proposed a similar mine there and promised no harmful environmental effects.

"They told us they had found the best outcropping of rock on the coast and that they would be pumping 10 million gallons per day and that nothing bad would happen. Does that sound familiar?" Kepner said.

"I'm not the smartest guy in the world, but I know that you don't

blast next to a nuclear power plant," he said. "And if you want to hear things go bump in the night, imagine what will happen if they start getting sinkholes at that ammunition depot."

All but two of the speakers voiced opposition to the mining operation, often to loud rounds of applause.

Boiling Spring Lakes residents Jerry Carmichael and Gerald Clark both spoke in favor of the mine, saying it would bring needed jobs and provide local access to construction materials.

"I don't see the sense of giving incentives to one business and running off others," Carmichael said.

At the close of their regular meeting, the commissioners unanimously supported a resolution to:

"1. Request that Martin Marietta provide a public forum to advise the citizens of their intent and business

plan for the operation.

"2. Facilitate an environmental impact study utilizing all available federal, state and local resources.

"3. Request the Brunswick County Economic Development Commission prepare an economic impact report."

After the meeting, board member Wayland Vereen of Long Beach said he favors changing the zoning to prohibit the mine. He said that the recent controversy has sparked more telephone calls than any issue he has faced as a commissioner.

"I'm concerned about all those trucks running up and down the road," Vereen said. "We already have more traffic than we can handle. What if one of those blasts triggers an alert at the power plant. We'd have a dangerous situation if we had to call for an evacuation."

Commission Chairman Don Warren said he hasn't made up his mind about the rezoning request and wants to see what information comes from the requested environmental impact study and the public forum. He said the board plans to visit a Martin Marietta quarry in Castle Hayne within the next two weeks.

In an interview Tuesday, commissioner and planning board member Jerry Jones said he also wants more information before making up his mind.

"I think people have a lot of apprehensions and legitimate concerns and Martin Marietta should come and answer their questions," Jones said. "I need to hear more from both sides. It's going to come down to whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages."

County Land Values Are Up As Revaluation Process Completed

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ally decreasing. Properties that could be considered wetlands are losing value as potential buyers are discouraged by the possibility that environmental regulations might prohibit improvement of such properties, Williamson said.

Related to that problem is the one of percolation, he said. The county is beginning to run out of property that will meet ever-tightening septic-tank requirements. And some lands that might have been suitable for building eight years ago cannot be developed today without a central sewer system.

Property owners should begin receiving valuation notices in mid-November, Williamson said. Those who have questions about their assessment should call the number listed on the notice. Many clerical errors can be corrected by phone.

Those who have questions about how the assessment was done or who disagree with the valuation can set up an appointment to see an appraiser for an informal review. After examining the field evaluation report and any new information provided by the property owner, the appraiser may or may not modify the assessment.

A property owner who is dissatisfied with the appraiser's decision can appeal to the Board of Equalization and Review, a group of five local citizens who will review each case and make a recommendation. Its decision can be appealed to the N.C. Property Tax Commission.

Williamson said that during most revaluations, about 5 percent of property owners—an estimated 4,500 this year—can be expected to come in for an informal review. He expects about 350-400 to come be-

fore the equalization board, with about 20 or so appealing to the tax commission.

"At some point, you have to ask yourself if it's worth it to appeal," said Danny Deese of Tax Management Associates, the Charlotte firm that conducted the revaluation. "The current tax rate is 68 cents (per \$100 valuation), so getting your valuation reduced by \$10,000 would only save you \$6.80 a year. Still, some people see it as a matter of principle."

Tax Management Associates will be paid \$8.21 per parcel, or roughly \$739,000 for its services.

Williamson plans to meet with the commissioners again before valuation notices go out. He said he will present a more detailed report of local values and a total of the county's property valuation for tax purposes.

Evaluation Pleases Schools' Head

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before the opening of school, and getting a better grip on the school system's finances.

"Most of the concerns they raised were ones which I had already recognized," said Johnston. "I recognize we do need to be more efficient and more effective with the dollars we have and more accountable as well."

The board used a locally-modified version of an evaluation tool de-

veloped by the North Carolina School Boards Association that addresses the superintendent's performance in seven broad areas of management and leadership, such as personnel, community relations, communications and finances.

Board members took the evaluation forms home, filled them out and brought them back for board attorney Glen Peterson to tally. Then, Monday night, they reviewed the results with Johnston before deciding in private to award him merit pay.

Areas where Johnston sees the greatest need for more attention include "pulling more of the county together," something begun with the systemwide performance-based accountability planning that includes teachers, administrators and parents, and "keeping the communication flowing" both within the system itself and between the schools and community.

He's been especially pleased thus far with the good support of the community for changes in the school system, and of the business community's support of the new Tech Prep initiative.

He, too, is optimistic that policies established in the past year, restructuring of the central office staff, and changes in principalships this past year have laid the groundwork for more substantial changes and improvements in the system and in student performance.

In the community, he said, "I sense a real confidence that we are starting to move forward."

Under the terms of his contract, the board could have awarded Johnston up to \$5,000 in extra pay, tied to progress in achieving seven goals established jointly by him and the board nearly a year ago:

- creating a clear mission and expectations accepted by all staff;
- reorganizing the central office staff to support schools' improvement efforts;
- setting higher standards for students in all grades, reflected by a challenging curriculum;
- establishing higher expectations for both teachers and students;
- preparing and equipping principals to create an environment that allows teachers to unleash their abilities to work with students;
- helping teachers become and stay up-to-date on subject content and on ways of engaging students in learning; and
- development a system of accountability that incorporates and tracks progress of both systemwide and school goals for achievement.



WELL-WISHERS cheer as champion shucker Karen McNeil (right) strides forward to accept a check for \$100.

Under-3-Minute Adjusted Time Yields McNeil Third State Win

BY SUSAN USHER

"Presentation, presentation, presentation." That, plus fast hands and a little luck, are what it takes to claim the N.C. Oyster Shucking Championship.

Just ask Karen McNeil, who did it again Saturday, besting a field of six other men and women to reclaim the title she's held twice before.

Wielding her oyster knife expertly, McNeil whipped 24 raw oysters from their shells in a speedy two minutes and 19.34 seconds. She extended her arms into the air confidently well ahead of the next-closest finisher, Lofton James, at two minutes and 37.03 seconds. James, a return competitor, is one of McNeil's co-workers at Lloyd's Oyster House at Shallotte Point.

Time isn't all that matters in the event. Judges can add penalty seconds for a sloppy presentation—blood, grit, an oyster still clinging to the half-shell or a missing oyster, for example.

Or, for an exceptional tray of oysters, they can subtract seconds for a stronger finish, rewarding neatness over speed.

Determined spectators hovered patiently under umbrellas and a drizzle of rain was falling Saturday afternoon as judges peered at the finished trays and wrote their comments on damp entry forms.

Even with 38 seconds in penalties added to her total, McNeil's finish held up for first place. The showing earned her \$100 cash, which she planned to spend half on bills and half on celebrating, plus an engraved plaque and an expense-paid return trip to the National Oyster Shucking Championship in Leonardtown, Md., next October to represent the Tar Heel State.

"I was nervous," McNeil admitted to reporters after-

Shucking Contest Results

Shucker	Time	Adj. Time
1. Karen McNeil	2:19:34	2:57:34
2. Alice Hill	2:45:59	3:02:59
3. Dorothy M. Hill	2:46:12	3:11:12
4. James Lofton	2:37:03	3:20:03
5. Gloria Daniels	3:02:03	3:24:03
6. Ed Brown	3:20:53	6:38:53
7. William Daniels	withdrew	

wards. With four of her coworkers in the running, she said, "There was some good competition here."

This was McNeil's third state championship. She held the title first in 1989 and again in 1991, and placed in the money in 1990 and 1992 at the women's nationals in Leonardtown.

Forty-seven seconds in penalties pushed James back to fourth place, same as last year, behind Alice Hill and the 1992 first runner-up, Dorothy Mae Hill.

One competitor, William Daniels, withdrew Saturday after a nasty encounter with a stubborn oyster.

Ed Brown, a brick mason from Supply, drew blood, but kept struggling with the hard-shelled bivalves, only to finish last in the field. He failed to open one of the 24 oysters on his tray.

"I don't know where that one came from," he said afterward.

Brown said he plans to keep entering the annual event until he wins.

New Hospital Executive Not Chosen As Of Tuesday

Contrary to rumors circulating in the western end of Brunswick County this week, no new administrator has been announced for The Brunswick Hospital.

"We haven't selected anyone for the position yet," said Helen Street, finance officer and interim chief executive officer.

Street said a HealthTrust administrator from a Terre Haute, Ind., hospital has been helping out temporarily, coming in three days last week and again several days this week.

"That may have contributed to the rumors," she said.

Larry Andrews, chairman of the Brunswick County Hospital Authority, which leases the hospital to HealthTrust Inc., also had not been notified of any hiring decision.

Earl Tamar of Holden Beach left his post as chief executive officer of the hospital suddenly Sept. 21 after two years on the job and five years with the company.

HealthTrust Inc. indicated at the time that it expected to have a new administrator on staff by late fall. Street was appointed acting administrator.

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Comfortable Weather In Forecast

More comfortable fall temperatures are in the forecast for the South Brunswick Islands area.

Temperatures during the coming days are expected to average around the mid-50s at night, ranging into the mid-70s during the daytime, with about a half-inch of rainfall.

"We couldn't improve on that too much," said Jackson Canady, Shallotte Point meteorologist.

For the period Oct. 12 through 18,

Canady recorded a high of 81 degrees on Oct. 18 and a low of 48 degrees on Oct. 13.

A daily average high of 75 degrees and a nightly average low of 55 degrees combined for a daily average temperature of 65 degrees, which Canady said is "just about normal" for this time of year.

He recorded 1.27 inches of rainfall in his gauge near Shallotte Point.

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