

# Latest Sewer Committee Report Sparks Debate At Holden Beach

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach's new town board got off to a rocky start Monday morning when a special meeting called to set goals for the upcoming year turned into a heated debate over a sewer system.

The verbal exchange was sparked by a sewer committee report concerning an upcoming visit by a N.C. Division of Environmental Management official. The DEM's Eric Stockton is expected to meet with commissioners Jan. 3.

A committee report dated Dec. 1 indicates that Stockton has offered free assistance in planning for a system. Committee Secretary Jim Lowell's report says Stockton can coordinate the project and help the town save money.

Some commissioners were bothered by one statement in the report: Stockton "indicated two prime needs before he can agree to pitch in: the town's commitment to making a sewer project a number one priority and appointing sparkplugs to assist in the venture."

Commissioner Jim Fournier said Monday the report implies that the

*"Being committed to a sewer system I'm not. Preparing for one if we need it, I'm committed to that."*

—Commissioner Sid Swarts

town board must commit to a sewer system before Stockton agrees to help. He said that's something he's not willing to do.

Commissioner David Sandifer accused Fournier of being "anti-sewer" and said he was trying to prevent other board members from getting the information they need to decide if the town really needs a sewer system.

"Nobody is trying to stifle information," Fournier insisted.

Sandifer said the sewer committee was instructed to act on the assumption that the town needs a sewer system as it compiled information about which type of system would be best for Holden Beach and how it could be funded.

A lively discussion on the issue ultimately led to a shouting match

between Fournier and Sandifer over which one of them initiated the idea of impact fees at Holden Beach.

"I can go back and show you the original paperwork on who wrote it," Sandifer said of the fees, which may be used to pay for sewer or stormwater runoff systems on the island.

Fournier also got into a verbal battle with Lowell Monday morning over several other statements in the report.

Fournier objected to statements that a sewer system would not increase density on the island and that septic systems are polluting the soils and are considered "inadequate" by the county health department.

"It's just dreaming to think a sewer system won't change density," Fournier said.

The commissioner also said two engineering studies done at Holden Beach have not demonstrated that septic systems are causing pollution. "You're using opinion as fact," Fournier said.

"I'm sick of you calling me a liar," Lowell responded.

Once order was restored, Commissioner Sid Swarts said he doesn't know if the town needs a sewer system or not. He said he is "more than glad" to meet with Stockton to get more information.

"Being committed to a sewer system I'm not," Swarts said. "Preparing for one if we need it, I'm committed to that."

Commissioner Gay Atkins said the town board needs to plan for a system now because it will take several years to design and construct one. If the board waits until a system is needed, Atkins said it will be too late.

"I think the commission understands, and I think he (Stockton) understands we are not committed to anything other than hearing this gentleman speak," Mayor Wally Ausley said.

## Town Offered Free Sand

Holden Beach Mayor Wally Ausley says the town will be using "free" sand when it rebuilds the dune along Hillside Drive and repairs dunes elsewhere on the island this winter.

Holden Beach Enterprises has agreed to let the town remove sand from a spoil area it owns near Boyd Street, as long as some of the material is used to protect company property at the east end of the beach, Ausley said Monday.

The mayor said between 2,000 and 3,000 cubic yards of sand will be dumped near Lockwood Folly Inlet in an effort to bolster dunes at Holden Beach Enterprises' old state park property.

The town plans to place several thousands cubic yards elsewhere along the oceanfront, including the erosion-threatened Hillside Drive area. Ausley said the only cost to the town will be for hauling the sand to the strand.

Town Manager Gus Ulrich said the town will be sending letters to every oceanfront property owner to find out which ones are interested in paying to have their dunes repaired.

Interested owners who respond by Jan. 15 will be given a permit application and a list of local contractors who can handle the work.

Town officials are encouraging property owners to repair dunes that were damaged during the severe winter storm last March.

"I think we have to make every effort to make things easier for these property owners," Commissioner Jim Fournier said.

## School Board Files Civil Suit To Recover Cafeteria Equipment

A civil suit filed Monday by the Brunswick County Board of Education court seeks to recover either cafeteria equipment sold improperly to a Long Beach restaurant owner, or its market value in cash.

In late July a school system employee sold equipment once used in the Southport Elementary School cafeteria to restaurant owner Jarvis Jones for \$350. Jones later sold part of the equipment to a nephew, a Wilmington restaurant equipment dealer, for \$7,800. The school board wants to recover at least \$10,000—its estimate of the actual worth of the total property, said board attorney Glen Peterson.

The dealer is not named in the suit; only Jarvis Jones.

Peterson said the suit doesn't mean the schools' investigation is completed.

"As we go through the process of interrogatories and briefs we may receive new information that leads us in other directions," he said. "One thing we want to find out is what happened to the rest of the equipment, who owns it now."

School board chairman Donna Baxter said in October, when the board first began discussing the matter in executive session, that the employee involved—child nutrition director Rebecca Brandon—did not

know the sale violated system policy and submitted the check from Jones to the school finance department as a routine transaction. Her immediate supervisor, Assistant Superintendent Bill Turner, was out of town at the time.

System policy and state law dictate that equipment first be declared surplus by the school board, then advertised for sale or auction.

To date no disciplinary action has been taken against Brandon; that aspect of the incident is being handled by Superintendent Ralph Johnston as a personnel matter.

Baxter said the school system plans to bolster employees' awareness of such policies to avoid similar situations in the future.

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Trojans Rejoice

The morning after capturing the eastern 3A football championship, members of the West Brunswick High School Trojans greet fans from a float in the Shallotte Christmas parade last Saturday.

## Baxter, Bright Re-Elected On Split Votes

BY SUSAN USHER

There will be no change in leadership on the Brunswick County Board of Education during the coming year, with both Chairman Donna Baxter and Vice Chairman Yvonne Bright re-elected Monday night.

But unlike a year ago, neither vote was unanimous.

Baxter and Bright, both nominated by Bill Fairley, won election on identical 3-2 votes.

Board member Polly Russ was nominated for chairman by Thurman Gause, and in turn nominated him for vice chairman. They cast the minority votes.

While saying she thinks it good for an organization to have periodic changes in leadership styles and the way things get done, Russ said "that doesn't mean there won't be support (for Baxter). We'll still be working together as a board."

"I just think it would be good to have people continuing on the board who have that experience," Russ said in explaining her bid for the chairmanship.

She said that since Baxter has held the post for three consecutive terms, none of the other four members has gained experience with day-to-day dealings with the budget or in setting meeting agendas.

"We could have had three board members, not one, with that kind of experience."

Baxter, who has been criticized at times as having a confrontational style, said she allowed herself to be

elected to a fourth term as chairman "reluctantly."

"She didn't want to do it; I made her, because she's such a fine chairman," said Fairley. "She is very clear about where she wants to go and very consistent."

The vote was not along party lines. Russ, Baxter and Gause are Democrats; Bright and Fairley are Republicans.

"The fact of the matter is partisan politics doesn't have anything to do with the school board, or at least I hope that's the case," said Fairley.

Baxter, who ran from District 4 but has renting part of the year on Oak Island in District 3, said Monday she is in the process of moving back to Boiling Spring Lakes, into the former John Dozier residence. Earlier this year she sold a home in Boiling Spring Lakes, saying she needed a smaller house.

During its three-hour meeting Monday night at Leland Middle School, the Brunswick County Board of Education also:

- awarded a \$106,900 contract to low bidder Howard Roofing Systems of Raleigh to replace the leaking roof of a building at Lincoln Primary School with a metal roof, the last recommendation from the state labor department aimed at improving indoor air quality.

- noted that May Moore of South Bruns. Middle School, Brunswick County's Teacher of the Year, finished second in district competition.

- heard that Carolina Power &

Light Co. has donated to the school system used desks suitable for use by teachers, tables and chairs with an estimated value of \$100,000 and \$150,000. "We're letting principals turn in wish lists and trying to fill them," said Assistant Superintendent Bill Turner.

- gave first reading to a student improvement policy amendment that would drop references to specific standardized pre- and post-tests; and provide that when site-based goals in a certain area are not met by a school, the differentiated pay those

teachers would have received will instead be used for staff development in that area. The policy change gets a second reading in January.

Some teachers have told the countywide Performance-Based Accountability Planning Committee the policy needed to allow more flexibility at the school level and was too rigidly worded.

- Met behind closed doors nearly 1-1/2 hours to discuss personnel and attorney-client matters before approving routine personnel actions in open session.

### New Year's Eve Dinner

Friday, December 31, 5:30-9:30 PM

Seafood cocktail—shrimp, scallops and crab, choice of sauce (cocktail or remoulade). Garden Salad (choice of dressing). Choice of: baked stuffed lobster or filet mignon on an almond eggplant crouton with bernaise sauce, baked potato and vegetable medley. Chocolate mocha cheese cake or tuxedo pie for dessert.

\*Complimentary Champagne Offered With Dinner

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## Happy Holidays

Our offices will be closed at 3 P.M. Friday, Dec. 24.

We will re-open Tuesday, Dec. 28



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