

EXCEPTION TO HEIGHT CAP APPROVED

New OIB Ordinance Spells Out Requirements For Developers

BY SUSAN USHER

A new subdivision ordinance adopted by Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners Tuesday after nearly a year of discussion and review is intended to cut confusion and provide developers a step-by-step guide.

While tackling one of their lengthiest agendas in months, town commissioners also amended the zoning ordinance height restriction to allow for construction of two-story homes on lots in low-lying flood hazard areas.

Building Inspector Drued Roberson said one of the biggest improvements in the new subdivision ordinance is that it provides a checklist, which could end the calls to his office from developers asking "What the heck do you want?"

"This answers that question," he told commissioners.

Planning Board Chairman DeCarol Williamson described the document as, "... the best, to our knowledge, we can probably do."

The ordinance was adopted unanimously, with Commissioner Janet Sanders absent, after a second public hearing at which no members of the public addressed the board. The additional hearing was scheduled because a series of minor changes, mainly dealing with time frames, had been made since the first public hearing last year.

The 50-page document, drafted by the planning board with the help

of consultant Roger A. Briggs and commissioners, completely modifies and supercedes the previous ordinance. That was a 10-page document that had been copied from another town and used by Ocean Isle Beach for approximately 30 years, Roberson later told *The Brunswick Beacon*.

The new rulebook reflects "the difference in the 1960s to the 1990s. It's an updated, modern professional subdivision ordinance. It recognizes that all subdivisions are not the same."

"Somebody can take this ordinance and go strictly by it and walk in with a plat they know will be approved."

The ordinance details the methods for subdividing land within the town and its extrajurisdictional areas and provides a checklist of criteria that must be met before a plat is approved. It addresses issues such as the type of streets required, dedication and maintenance of streets, utilities and the marketing of multi-phase subdivision projects when all utilities are not put in place upfront.

The previous ordinance was full of generalities such as "up to town standards" and "as approved by the town board" which left developers guessing at whether their plans were satisfactory.

"It closes a lot of loopholes," said Commissioner Ken Proctor, who served on the planning board until

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—Building Inspector Drued Roberson

his election last November to the town board.

The decision to revamp the ordinance was sparked in part by the experiences of Ocean Isle Partners Inc. The development group proposed the first subdivision the town had had "in a long time," Proctor said. It kept bringing proposed plats to the town only to be met with new or changed rules each time.

Height Limit Exception

Commissioners approved a "foot-note" to the height limit clause in the zoning ordinance that allows two-story homes to be built in flood hazard areas and conform to town and federal regulations.

In the V-zone only, where higher elevations are required, the existing 36-foot height cap can be exceeded by no more than four feet when necessary to provide eight-foot ceilings for two livable area floors, so long as the lowest living floor is constructed within 1 foot, 2 inches of the required flood plain ordinance base flood elevation.

"We didn't want the house to be any higher than it had to be," said Planning Board Chairman DeCarol Williamson. He said the exception allows "everyone to have a buildable lot" with a two-story house, reasonable eight-foot ceiling heights

rather the state's seven-foot minimum, and a roof with a 5/12 pitch, while keeping the maximum height below the 40-foot limit of the state building code.

The exception will apply to new homes built in low-lying areas and will allow rebuilding of existing homes in those areas should they be destroyed.

After a public hearing, in a related action, commissioners added a definition of "grade" to the ordinance to provide an objective means of calculating elevation. It is to be determined as eight inches above the center line of the street at the center of the property front, or when that does not apply, it is to be determined by averaging grade at four equidistant points around the exterior that have not been artificially altered for that purpose.

"This gives a level playing field for everyone to read and determine how to measure grade," said Roberson, saying a lengthy definition was necessary to cover areas off the beach and not in subdivisions as well as on the island.

Rezoning Request Withdrawn

After extensive discussion during a third public hearing, a spokesman for WRP Properties, Inc., withdrew a petition for rezoning lots 3-20 on

Asheville Street, which the group owns, and adjacent properties.

Town council members received 10 letters from property owners opposing the rezoning and five from those supporting it.

Real estate developer Odell Williamson spoke against the rezoning, saying it would be unfair to other property owners because it would impose greater restrictions on them while the existing zoning does not keep WRP Properties Inc. from developing its land as the owners desire. If need be, the company could add deed restrictions for added control. While considering it not "good policy," Williamson said he wouldn't object to rezoning of only the company's lots.

Speaking against the rezoning in addition to Williamson were Tripp Sloane, representing his mother, Rae Sloane Cox, an affected property owner, and Jim Caulder of Charlotte, owner of two vacant lots.

Van Williard, a principle in the project, said the owners had only wanted to rezone their own property from R-2 to the more restrictive R-1 single-family only designation, which he said is in keeping with the town's land use plan references to limiting multi-family development.

In withdrawing the company's request Williard told commissioners, "We don't want to jeopardize anyone else's property, but we were advised that it would never fly if we limited the rezoning to our property because it would be considered 'spot' rezoning and the board would never accept it."

Williard said later he didn't know

if the group would decide to re-submit a rezoning request affecting its property only.

The proposed rezoning would have limited development of the lots to single-family housing only, while the R-2 designation allows multi-family projects.

Under questioning by Commissioner Debbie Sloane Fox, Building Inspector Drued Roberson said other R-1 requirements are also more restrictive—five feet side lines instead of seven feet, with a limit of 36 percent lot coverage by impervious surfaces and heated space. He also said the change would put at least five houses in the position of being non-conforming uses.

Committee Targets Channel

In other action, Mayor Betty Williamson appointed Commissioners Ken Proctor and Bill Benton, and engineer Finley Boney to a committee charged with investigating the possibilities of a dredging project to reopen Eastern Channel to boating traffic.

The town plans to work with Proctor on a property owner participation canal dredging project, but Proctor and Boney said dredging the canals would be of limited use if Eastern Channel were not reopened as well.

"There's got to be a solution, or what we know now as Eastern Channel will be Eastern Mud Pond," said Boney.

Commissioners also approved a letter from Town Attorney Elva Jess notifying Vision Cable that the town is now empowered to regulate cable rates within its jurisdiction.

Calabash Approves Newsletter To Explain Sewer System Plan

BY ERIC CARLSON

In an effort to answer questions and head off misunderstandings about the Southwest Brunswick 201 Facilities sewerage plan before an upcoming public hearing, the Calabash Board of Commissioners Tuesday agreed on the wording of a town newsletter that will be mailed to all its citizens.

The hearing on the plan will be held Feb. 17 at 7 p.m. in the Calabash Fire Department and moderated by Mayor George Anderson.

A 201 Facilities Plan is an analysis of area water quality and the factors that affect it. It is a formal study required of applicants for state and federal grants and loans for public sewer systems.

A copy of the plan for the Southwest Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority is available for inspection at the Calabash town hall.

The Feb. 17 hearing will begin with a description of the recommended plan for providing sewer service to Calabash and an explanation of the public hearing process. This will be followed by a period of public comment, with each speaker limited to five minutes. Written comments may also be submitted for entry into the record.

The newsletter approved Tuesday night outlines the town's plan for joining with Sunset Beach in a water and sewer authority that will accept grants and issue revenue bonds to finance a \$34.9 million waste water collection and treatment system. It explains the method of financing the project and the proposed plan to pay off the debt through water charges and impact fees on new customers.

The mailing also notes that state law does not require the town to hold a referendum on the creation of the water and sewer authority, nor does legislation exist that provides for such a vote.

After a lengthy discussion of proposed modifications to the newsletter, the board voted 4-to-2 to approve it, with commissioners Bob Noe and Teddy Altreuter dissenting.

In other business, the board agreed to appoint a new zoning board of adjustments comprised of commissioners Al Leisey and Forrest King, Planning and Zoning Board Chairman Al Smith, and citizens Bob Crocker and Pati Lewellyn. The former board was made up of five commissioners.

Anderson proposed changing the board's membership to make it more representative of the town in one of his first actions as mayor.

In another matter, the commissioners tabled consideration of Altreuter's suggestion that the town adopt an ethics policy for officials and employees. She distributed a copy such a policy adopted by the town of Holden Beach, which received lukewarm support from the board.

"The public must have confidence in government," Altreuter said. "To give even the appearance of personal gain in decisions erodes their confidence in all public officials. This helps us address that concern more directly."

Anderson said he would not object to such a policy. But Town Attorney Mike Ramos noted that it would have no binding effect, since an elected official can't be removed from office unless he or she violates the law. He suggested that an ethics code for commissioners could be written into a broader personnel policy for all town employees.

Other board members said an ethics code was unnecessary. "No larger than we are, I don't think we need it," said Commissioner Keith Hardee.

"When I took this office, I swore on the Bible to uphold the laws of this town, this state and this country. I think that about covers it," said King. The board informally agreed to table consideration of the measure.

Wetlands Plan Sign-Up Set

Brunswick County landowners can sign up between Feb. 28 and March 11 for the second federal Wetlands Reserve Program.

Sponsored by the USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), the program purchases permanent easements from participating owners of farmed wetlands, prior converted wetlands and riparian areas that link wetlands.

For fiscal year 1994, the program has been funded nationwide at \$66.6 million to enroll up to 75,000 acres.

By taking the wetland or water-related areas out of agricultural use, the goal is to protect and restore habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, help purify water supplies and help to absorb flood waters.

Participants agree to accept no more than the fair market value of their land for agricultural use in return for a lump sum payment and cost-share assistance in putting in place wetland restoration practices.

Specific compatible uses of the property are permitted on the restored acreage by the landowner and any successors.

No Brunswick County lands were

enrolled under the first Wetlands Reserve Program funded in 1992, said Richard Toler, executive director of the Brunswick County ASCS office in Bolivia. "Two landowners applied," said Toler. "From what I understand one was not accepted because he wanted too much money, and the second pulled out."

That year 49,888 acres on 265 farms were tentatively enrolled nationwide. The acreage is being restored to 30,868 acres of forested wetlands, 10,105 acres of emergent wetlands, 3,374 acres of scrub-shrub and other types of wetlands, and 1,542 acres of riparian area or upland buffers.

Many of the provisions that applied in 1992 will apply again this year, according to Grant Buntrock, federal ASCS administrator. This time, however, state ASCS committees will have greater discretion in selecting wetlands that meet specific state environmental goals, such as flood protection, water quality, migratory birds and wildlife habitat benefits.

Interested landowners should contact Toler at the ASCS office in Bolivia.

Specialist Said Key To Improving Minority Recruitment

BY SUSAN USHER

Phasing in a plan for recruiting more minority instructional personnel into the Brunswick County Schools is proposed over three budget years, starting in March.

Monday night, the Brunswick County Schools' Task Force will tell school board members their top recommendation is the immediate hiring of a minority recruitment specialist who will be "aggressive" in recruitment and can begin implementing other task force recommendations.

An immediate need is also seen for creation of brochures or other materials for recruitment and marketing.

The panel's formal recommendations fall into four areas: marketing materials and strategies to promote the schools; establishing incentives to attract minority instructional personnel; modifying procedures for recruiting, selecting and hiring all certified staff; and establishing support groups, social opportunities and networking systems for minority instructional staff.

At a work session Monday Charlotte Middle School Principal Sandra Robinson described her experiences on a recent teacher recruiting trip to a college.

"We didn't have any visuals. We were out there with nothing but an outdated application, a fact sheet, an old brochure, and a copy of the supplement sheet that had been copied too many times and was smudged," said Robinson.

Exhibitors around them had displays, colorful brochures, packets and other materials.

"We've got to do better, we've

got to do something this year," said Robinson.

According to Superintendent Ralph Johnston, implementing the package will require more human resources than fiscal resources.

However, costs of individual recommendations range from nothing for extending early contracts to five minority teacher candidates to as much as \$40,000 a year to increase salary supplements for all beginning teachers by June 30, 1995.

Other changes proposed this year include modifying hiring procedures to decrease subjectivity and providing training for those who participate in hiring interviews; sending visitation teams to college schools of education with large minority student enrollment; hosting a local job fair and social event for selected college graduates and potential graduates; and extending early contracts to at least five minority teacher applicants since the county frequently "loses out" on candidates who have accepted jobs with other systems by the time they receive an offer here.

It recommends making up to five interest-free relocation loans of up to \$1,000 to minority teachers with less than three years of experience, to be repaid through payroll deductions; offering workshops on interviewing skills to interested minority applicants; and establishing a Community Minority Advisory Council to provide support and assistance to minority educators from the community.

Other efforts, to be implemented over the following two years, range from a minority staff newsletter and recruitment videotape to mentoring county students to develop teacher

recruits from within the system. National Teacher Exam preparation workshops, and lastly, a tuition reimbursement plan that encourages teacher assistants of all races to become certified teachers, and summer remedial and enrichment programs that provide more employment opportunities for teachers.

The panel, which included school system employees and community members from across the county, met six times over a four-month period. Members said Monday they intend to continue working together as a group on related issues.

The task force was created in response to "grave concerns" that have been repeatedly expressed about a steady decline in employment of minorities in certified (instructional) positions in the system and the need to turn that trend around.

Among other benefits identified by the task force, increased minority participation on the instructional staff will provide students better role models, increase awareness and respect for cultural differences, help build tolerance and increase equity of opportunity for minority employees within the system.

A key goal of the recruitment plan is to bring the proportion of non-white instructional staff in line with the proportion of non-white students in the system. As of mid-October, the school system had 8,894 students, of which 2,379 were minorities—blacks, Hispanics, Asians and American Indians.

As of Nov. 9, the school system had 650 certified employees, of which 119 were minorities. They constituted 18.3 percent of the sys-

tem's certified employees, while minorities comprise 26.75 percent of the student population.

Minority representation on the certified staffs ranged from highs of 26.98 percent at South Brunswick High School and 36 percent in the school system's central office to a low of 6.25 percent at South Brunswick Middle School.

In August 1989, there was a 6 percent difference between the percentage of enrolled minority students and the percent of minority certified staff—a gap that had widened to 8.44 percent by last October.

According to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction data, the number of certified staff positions in the county schools increased 26 percent from 1984 through 1993. During the same time, the number of minority certified staff decreased 14 percent, following a trend also seen at the state and national levels.

"You can see that at that rate, in 10 years, at that same trend, we would lose 8 percent of our minority certified personnel," said community task force member Moses Stanley.

While school board members Donna Baxter and Yvonne Bright praised the task force on its cooperative effort, an admittedly impatient Thurman Gause said he was disappointed that activating the task force took so long and that all principals were not at the work session to hear the report.

"They need to hear what you have heard tonight because they are the ones who have created a lot of the problem," he said. "And the board has created a part of this problem."



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