

TOWN TO TIGHTEN UP ON WATER BILLING

Ocean Isle Board Reviews Fee Adjustments And Procedures On Privilege Licenses, Late Fees

BY SUSAN USHER

Does it cover the cost of providing the service and is it fair to customers?

Those were the two overriding concerns expressed Tuesday during a three-hour workshop as Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners reviewed town fees and procedures for everything from privilege licenses to handling \$10,000 in overdue water bill payments and late fees.

While formal action cannot be taken except in a regular business meeting, commissioners reached a consensus the town should change its water billing schedule to shorten the time period before water service is shut off due to nonpayment and to look at increasing water rates for 1994-95 to meet capital reserve needs in the water system.

As of Jan. 25, the town had \$10,000 outstanding in outstanding water bills and late fees, according to Cheryl Harrison, water and sewer billing clerk.

Under the proposed change bills would be payable on the 15th, a second notice mailed on the 16th, late fee imposed on the 20th (based on postmark of payment) and service cut off sometime after the mail is opened on the 23rd. The late fee would remain \$5.

But because Ocean Isle Beach is a resort community, commissioners agreed an extra courtesy is in order. The town staff will share a list of past-due water customers with the town's property rental firms so they can either pay bills, acting as their propertyowners' agent, to ensure service is not cut off while a rental property is occupied, or help contact the property owner.

The town is encouraging property owners who plan to be away for ex-

tended time to either put down a deposit in advance or use bank drafts to insure timely payment.

While most water customers do pay their bills, Utilities Superintendent Odell Williamson said the water department's still not making any money.

"We're barely paying our bills," Williamson told commissioners. "It shouldn't operate that way. We should have a reserve."

Commissioners agreed that before preparing the 1994-95 budget they need to look at increasing water rates to cover capital reserve needs, such as the overdue construction of a second elevated water storage facility at a projected cost of \$400,000 to \$500,000.

Williamson also suggested using some accommodations tax revenue to boost the capital reserve fund to cover future replacement or repair costs.

For fire suppression and other needs, the state requires maintaining a 24-hour supply of water at all times. Ocean Isle's 200,000-gallon tank provides that reserve much of the year, but hasn't during the peak summer season for several years, said town engineer Finley Boney.

Commissioners also plan to set a public hearing on and to apply before March 31 for a state grant to help cover the cost of building a second water tank.

Commissioners are also expected to act at a future meeting on these items on which they generally concurred Tuesday:

- to follow the state schedule for issuing privilege licenses, as recommended by Town Clerk Daisy Ivy.

- to follow the county standard and charge \$15 to disconnect and \$25 to reconnect a water service for

outstanding bills (not for winterization).

- to survey water users to determine the number of meters in each size range from three-fourths inch to six inches, with the idea of establishing a minimum monthly water rate based on meter size rather than the number of kitchens in a structure. The fee basis came into question after a property owner, when paying a sewer tap-on fee, volunteered to the town that his structure was a duplex served by a single water meter, not a single-family structure as indicated in town records, and his billings were subsequently changed.

- increase the water deposit for commercial accounts from \$50 to \$100;

- increase from \$12.50 to \$25 the town charge for mowing vacant lots and billing the cost to the property owner, to better reflect the cost to the town, including labor and use of the tractor and bushhog. If the bill isn't paid, the town ordinance calls for placing a lien against the property.

- charge \$5 for town decals all year long. Because the town has been reducing the cost to \$25.0 after July 1, most property owners wait until then to buy one. The decals are needed for property owners to return onto the island in the wake of a hurricane or other disaster.

While no action is required, commissioners agreed the town hall should continue to provide photocopying and FAX service as a convenience for town customers, with rates to be posted.

"We're a small town and we're all neighbors...it's nice to have the service available as long as it's not abused," said Commissioner Kendall Suh.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Top Essayists Honored

Four Shallotte Middle School eighth grade students received U.S. Savings Bond awards from Calabash Elks Lodge No. 2679 for having the winning entries in an essay contest on "What the American Flag Means to Me." From the left are Kippy Sellers and Tonia Jackson, who each received \$100 bonds and will advance to district and state competition; Jaime Atwell and Pete Testa, who received \$50 bonds; Elks Exalted Ruler Dick Owens and Patriotism Chairman John Martocci, who coordinated the project. All four winners are students of English teacher Janice Gore.

OIB Ends Home Inspections

Ocean Isle Beach is out of the home inspection business.

For more than 10 years, since sometime before Druid Roberson became building inspector, Ocean Isle Beach had provided inspections of houses mainly as a courtesy for absentee home buyers—until Tuesday.

Following a commissioners' workshop on town fees, Mayor Betty Williamson instructed Roberson he could stop providing the service immediately.

To Roberson's knowledge, Ocean Isle was the only area town providing such a service. An inspection involves ascertaining and documenting the current condition of a house.

After first joining the town staff Roberson said he

was asked to do only about four inspections a year, but over the past few years the number has risen to "upwards of 40," most of them very old homes.

Each inspection cost \$35, which Roberson said didn't cover the average cost of providing the service—\$75 would have come closer.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Kendall Suh, Roberson said such inspections could carry potential liability for the town. He has consistently not opted to do inspections in his off-hours outside the town limits because of insurance and liability issues.

Instead of increasing the inspection fee, Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners reached a consensus during the workshop that the town didn't need to be in the home inspection business at all.



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•B165A 1987 Dodge Grand Caravan SE-Loaded	\$6,125	\$4,950
•N226A 1991 Ford 350 Van-15 passenger, running boards, 36,000 miles, great for travel	\$15,250	\$13,950
•N219A 1985 Ford Econoline Conversion Van-Capt. chairs, nice	\$6,950	\$4,950

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	Avg. Retail	Sale Price
•N284A 1989 Dodge Ram 100-V-8, only 60,000 miles, auto, air	\$8,075	\$6,950
•N208A 1990 Chevy 1500 Silverado-V-8, loaded, air stereo, power windows and brakes	\$11,625	\$10,950
•B177 1993 Dodge Dakota Club Cab-Mark III conversion, V-8, must see	\$18,650	\$16,950
•B130A 1993 Nissan Club Cab-Rails, low miles, nice	\$13,925	\$10,950
•B176 1993 Dakota Sport-Black with rails, V-6 engine, loaded	\$12,480	\$10,950
•B183 1993 Dakota-Long bed, bedliner, rails, super nice	\$13,025	\$11,250
•B206 1992 Dodge D150-V-8 Magnum, loaded with options, only 11,000 miles	\$12,750	\$10,450

SPORTS AND EXOTICS

	Avg. Retail	Sale Price
•B189A 1990 Mazda RX 7-Convertible, CD player and cassette, leather, automatic	\$18,200	\$16,950
•N186A 1993 Dodge Stealth-Rear spoiler, low miles, loaded, A steal	\$20,900	\$17,950
•B140A 1989 Honda Prelude SI-White, auto, sunroof, absolutely loaded	\$10,450	\$8,950
•B175A 1992 Nissan Stanza XE-Automatic, sunroof, loaded, only 22,000 miles	\$12,885	\$10,450
•N110A 1992 Subaru Legacy Wagon-Loaded, super nice	\$13,925	\$10,950
•B191 1992 Dodge Spirit ES-Red, V-6, auto, loaded, low miles	\$11,955	\$10,950
•N112A 1992 Honda Civic LX-Loaded with all options	\$11,200	\$10,200

NABER'S CAR CORRAL

	Sale Price
•N184A 1979 Mercedes Benz Wagon-300 TD, great shape, only 149,000 miles	\$4,450
•B196A 1986 Hyundai Excel GLS-White, 4 door, sunroof, 43,000 miles, auto	\$2,950
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