

NEW VOTER POLLING PLANNED

Seaside Incorporation Effort Surfaces From Winter Dormancy

BY SUSAN USHER

Efforts toward incorporation have surfaced again in the waterway community of Seaside between the towns of Ocean Isle Beach and Sunset Beach, along with opposition to the idea.

Whether the effort continues will depend on the outcome of a new survey of registered Brunswick County voters who live in the proposed town, said Gary Hendrix, the man who would be mayor if Seaside becomes a town.

At the first public meeting on the subject since last summer, approximately 50 people turned out last Monday night at the "Seaside Community Office" in Twin State Plaza, mainly to oppose a new town. The session drew a large turnout from the Laketree Shores and Tarheel Acres subdivisions at the northern end of the proposed limits.

Hendrix estimated a count of 12 for and 40 against, roughly proportional to written ballots returned to the Committee for the Incorporation of Seaside.

Efforts to secure incorporation continued quietly on through the winter because of perceived support last summer, Hendrix said.

Opponents Doug Baxley and Nick Newton said they thought the issue was dead because of strong opposition mounted last year. Others said they didn't like one small group of people being in control and thought communication within the community had been weak.

The movement should either gain momentum or halt within the next few months as a new effort is made to accurately survey the sentiments of registered Brunswick County voters in the target area.

With the help of volunteers from the Laketree Shores and Tarheel Acres areas, the new survey will be taken just as soon as wording can be made uniform.

"We're going to get a true census among registered voters as to how they would vote," said Hendrix. "If most say they would vote for incor-

"I don't think anybody wants it who's paying any amount of taxes. It would be adding insult to injury."—Doug Baxley

poration, we'll go to the General Assembly. The bill would be put in if we have to elect someone to do it." The soonest that could happen now is early 1995.

"If not," he said, "we should get out of it if they feel that way."

That's good news to Baxley, a Tarheel Acres resident who attended last week's meeting to voice his opposition. He believes incorporation of Seaside lacks a base of community support and would be a mistake.

Unlike Hendrix, he thought attendees at the final public meeting held last year were largely against the move and that the issue was dead, not simply dormant.

Residents of Tarheel Acres and surrounding neighborhoods haven't been notified of any meetings held since last summer and were not invited to respond by a "ballot" distributed last fall that asked slightly different questions from the most recent version.

Hendrix said recent efforts to contact would-be town residents were criticized as random, partly because an out-of-date list of registered voters was used and partly for other reasons such as mail service.

"A lot of people complained they didn't get a mailing," said Hendrix, "but there was nothing underhanded done."

In some cases, he and Baxley agreed, letters sent to accurate addresses were returned.

A tentative count of "ballots" submitted by mail or in person tallied last week about 75 percent against the town and 25 percent for, said Nick Newton, who is fighting the proposal. Since all ballots that had been mailed back had not arrived last week, he and Jimmy Gore, who favors incorporation, were to recount all ballots today (Thursday) for a more accurate gauge of community sentiment.

Arguments for and against incorporation continue to emerge.

Preserving the name and the heritage of "Brunswick County's first resort" is part of the reason a group of local residents seek incorporation, as well as independence from surrounding towns. With a proposed tax rate of 5 cents, few services are planned.

Hendrix said most residents of the area favor a public sewer system, but don't want required hook-ups except for new structures or when a septic tank fails. If Seaside were a town, he said, it could have a voice on the South Brunswick Water & Sewer Authority which proposes to serve the area with a central sewer.

Newton and Baxley see no reason to create another town.

"I don't think anybody wants it who's paying any amount of taxes. It would be adding insult to injury," said Baxley. "I think a well-organized Community Watch program would be more effective than what they've proposed."

Newton is convinced that a majority would be against incorporation because there aren't enough benefits to warrant it.

"I think we need to get it out in public and inform everybody," he said. "I think that would give us a little better indication of how people feel."

"I think we have too many municipalities now. We need to work together more."

No date has been set for the next meeting on the proposed incorporation of Seaside.



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Holden Beach Wins Power Struggle; FEMA Paying For Dune Construction

BY DOUG RUTTER

Maybe you can't fight city hall, but Holden Beach officials have learned that you can fight the federal government—and win.

The town has apparently won a year-long power struggle with a federal agency and gained the right to use federal money to build a sand dune along an oceanfront street threatened by erosion.

After a three-day visit last week, a team of federal officials told the town they will recommend the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) pay for construction of a dune covering the south side of Hillside Drive.

It was an agreement town officials had been waiting for since March 13, 1993, when a severe winter storm known locally as the "No-Name Hurricane" caused an estimated \$8 million damage at Holden Beach.

Town Manager Gus Ulrich said Tuesday he was still waiting for official word from FEMA's regional office in Atlanta that the team's recommendation has been accepted.

"We feel optimistic that it will be approved, but we don't know for sure," Ulrich said.

Mayor Wally Ausley also was optimistic. "They said they were going to take it back and were unanimously recommending it and they couldn't see any reason why their

boss would reject it," he said. FEMA officials first visited the island shortly after the March 13 storm and initially agreed to give the town \$57,000 to rebuild dunes at approximately 30 specified areas.

Town officials rejected FEMA's proposal for using the money and submitted its own plan, but the federal government was slow to accept Holden Beach's proposal.

Ulrich said a FEMA damage review team finally visited Holden Beach last week to re-evaluate the federal plan submitted about one year ago.

"This is something that the town has been requesting for some time," Ulrich said of the re-evaluation. "We've been asking them to come back since last summer."

Asked why FEMA officials finally agreed to the second visit, Ulrich replied, "We just kept pushing."

As part of the push, Mayor Ausley contacted Congressman Charlie Rose's staff to ask for help in dealing with the federal agency.

"I think Congressman Rose's office did sort of speed up the process by calling attention to our needs," the mayor said Tuesday.

Holden Beach officials have had harsh words for FEMA in the past year, but Ausley said in a phone interview Tuesday that the problem "was just a series of misunderstandings and oversights."

"They (FEMA) said there have been a series of mistakes. Everything was done quickly right after the storm," Ausley said.

Two weeks ago, Holden officials decided to go ahead with a project aimed at saving Hillside Drive. In some places, the ocean washes up to the pavement at high tide and it creeps to within 30 feet of the road everywhere else.

Wayne's Backhoe Service of Shallotte was hired to construct a dune on the south side of the road. The contractor will leave uncovered about 20 feet on the north side of the street right of way for vehicular access.

The top of the dune will be about 14 feet above sea level and the dune will be 28 feet wide at the base and eight feet wide at the top. Once work begins, construction is expected to take about 15 days.

"We're ready to start work any time," Ulrich said Tuesday. "The contractor said he hopes to start at the end of this week or the first of next week."

In addition to Hillside Drive, the project includes a 400-foot stretch just west of Hillside and a few

smaller elsewhere on the island where there is vacant property and a risk of the ocean washing past the dune line.

The 400-foot stretch of beachfront land is owned by Holden Beach Enterprises. The town has agreed to have sand placed on the lots in exchange for free sand that is being taken from a spoil disposal area owned by the company.

After the dune construction is completed, Ulrich said FEMA will reimburse the town the full cost of the project. The only expense to the town will be the beach grass and sand fence needed to stabilize the new dune.

As a result, the town will not have to spend much of its \$44,000 dune renourishment reserve fund.

"The town will be in a position to tackle some other sections that meet its criteria," Ulrich said.

Due to the dune construction, Hillside Drive homeowners who need access to their property will have to enter at Ranger Street. Blockades will be set up where Holden Road, Elizabeth Street and Bendigo Street enter Hillside.

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