

Sunset Voters Prepare To Have Say Tuesday On Sewer Plan

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 already fully planned for development. Last year it was cited by state planners as one of the fastest growing municipalities in North Carolina. The service area is bounded approximately by the state line to the southwest, the Atlantic Ocean to the southeast, an irregular line parallel to and northwest of U.S. 17, and the extraterritorial jurisdiction line for the Town of Ocean Isle Beach to the east.

The Calabash central business district rates top priority for sewer service because of its history of failed septic tanks and lack of space for repair areas.

As soon as collection lines are in place, the business district and some other still-undesignated Phase I customers will be connected temporarily to the Little River Water and Sewerage Co. system in South Carolina for discharge until treatment is available through the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority. Little River has offered up to 300,000 gallons per day capacity on a temporary basis.

Issue Development, Not Sewers?

Concern for scope and nature of future development and its environmental impact are forces cited by parties on either side of the referendum.

"I think the driving reason for more acceptability (in this referendum) is the environment," said

Tombro. "The population on the island has probably tripled since the previous vote. More areas around the island have closed to shellfishing."

Adding more pressure for sewer: Increasingly stringent septic tank regulations that prohibit development of small lots that were platted as early as 25 years ago.

He has produced studies anticipating that centralized sewer will reduce pollution from septic tank failure. Effluent disposal alternatives being considered could relieve demand for shallow groundwater for golf course irrigation and help recharge groundwater aquifers.

When it comes to protecting the local environment, "there's almost universal acknowledgment that sewer is one part of the solution," said Billups. "Ocean Isle Beach has sewer—and open shellfish waters around the island."

Light opposition to the referendum is expected at the polls, though Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association members pushed for documentation of the need for a sewer system and lobbied hard for concurrent development of a stormwater management system.

"I think the decision we are going to make is the most important we are going to make. It will decide the future of our town, what it will look like 10 to 20 years from now," said

What Will It Cost Users?

What will sewer service cost Sunset Beach residents? No one can answer that question until the system is built and operating.

The South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority does expect to cover the bulk of construction, operation and maintenance costs from revenues generated from residential and commercial users.

Consulting engineer Joe Tombro estimates that up to 85 percent of permanent residents—typically a two-person or slightly larger household—will qualify for the \$18 minimum monthly sewer rate based on not having used more than 5,000 gallons of water a month during the previous year. That's also on the assumption that most residents will be installing a separate meter during the coming months for water used for irrigating the lawn or washing cars.

Any household or business with a volume greater than 5,000 gallons during any month of the year can expect higher overall billings.

If a household's peak monthly usage is 9,000 gallons of water during July, for instance, the first sewer bill would be \$38.07.

Future bills would be based on actual monthly usage, but taking into account that peak demand. If the monthly usage in January were 5,000 gallons, for example, the charge would be \$35.82, not the minimum \$18. The bill would reflect a capacity charge of \$38.07 and deduction of a "low usage credit" of \$2.25.

island resident Sue Weddle, a member of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association. "For the people I talk with the issue is quality of life and development. The absence of sewers inhibits rapid, dense development."

Weddle said she doesn't oppose sewers in and of themselves, but doesn't think the community has taken the steps needed to mitigate "things that come with sewer."

"We are going to look like Myrtle Beach in 10 to 15 years, at least on the mainland," she predicted. She bases that view on initial residential unit projections provided to the consulting engineers by area developers that would push the peak seasonal population of southwestern Brunswick County into the neighborhood of 90,000. The figures were revised after state funding agencies

sought only the number of units for which developers were willing to sign upfront assessment guarantees.

Strongest support for the system will come from the Sunset Beach mainland, Weddle anticipates, not the island, based on her perception that most of those who settled in the two areas did so in pursuit of different lifestyles.

"They don't live on the water. I don't think they've educated themselves on all the issues related to the sewer system, and where they come from (having a central sewer system) was the civilized way to live," she reflected last week.

She is concerned that coming development will contradict—at least on the mainland—the desire for a single-family residential community expressed by residents and other property owners in the latest town land-use plan, which also spoke favorably of a central sewer system and addressed the higher building height cap on the mainland.

Based on building permit trends on the island, total buildout is expected within the authority's 20-year planning period, with or without a central sewer system, say engineers Billups and Tombro.

Billups questions use of sewer or lack of sewer as a land use management tool over alternatives within local government.

"Those who are concerned about

increased growth should be working with the town to put planning and zoning controls in place," he said.

The SBTA has pushed for a concurrent stormwater management effort to handle the increased stormwater run-off that can be expected from the development that will occur following construction of the sewer system, said Weddle.

Partly as a result of that focus, Sunset Beach and Brunswick County, working with the Authority, are pursuing the issue. The town recently submitted an application on behalf of the authority seeking a state coastal management planning grant for that purpose.

The Brunswick County Health Department has endorsed concurrent development of sewer and stormwater management system.

Earlier this month Brunswick County Commissioners voted to join the authority, if system financing plans proceed on schedule and the referendum is approved by Sunset Beach voters. Its membership is also contingent on time payment schedules or grants being available to customers who cannot afford the hook-on fees.

County participation is needed because mandatory hook-ons are a must to receive the state loans. Authority member governments are expected to transfer to the authority their power to require hook-ups within their respective boundaries.

County Seeking New Planning Director; Harvey Now Part-Time

BY ERIC CARLSON

John Harvey, Brunswick County's planning director for more than 13 years, was put on part-time duty last week to allow him the opportunity to care for his wife Betsy, who is seriously ill, according to County Manager Wyman Yelton.

The county began advertising for a full-time planning director this week. Yelton said he appointed staff planner Don Eggert to serve as acting director until Harvey's replacement can be found.

Yelton said Harvey had been out of work for almost two weeks "when it became obvious he could not continue full time" as planning director. The county manager said he plans to discuss the scope of

Harvey's employment with him this week.

"It's still up in the air as to what role he will play," Yelton said. "But I know he won't be playing the role of planning director. It's a difficult time for him. He wants to work, but he knows he can't. I expect that the most he could put in would be about half time."

Yelton said implementing the new county zoning ordinance has significantly increased the workload in the planning department, a situation made worse by the recent resignation of zoning administrator Wade Horne, who has been hired as town manager of Long Beach.

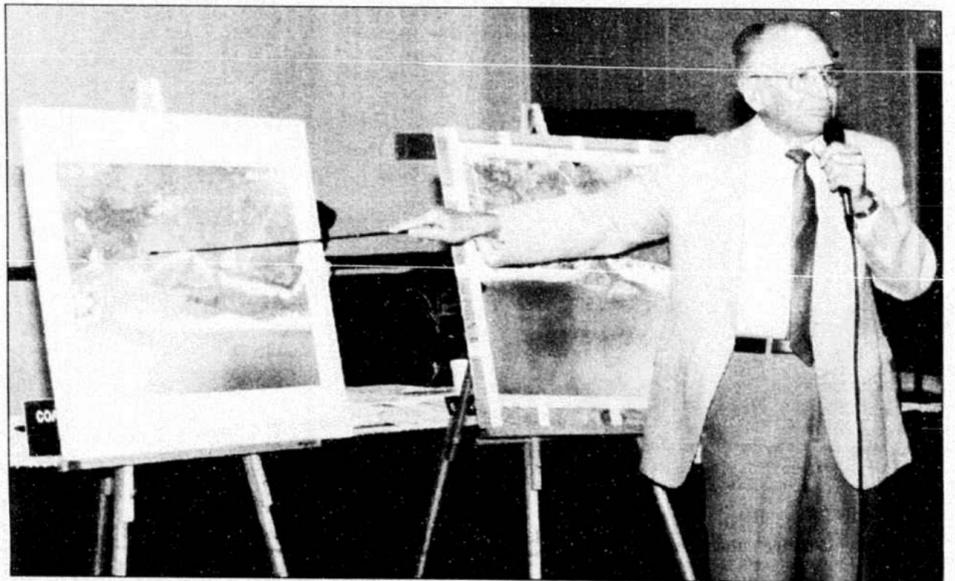
"They're in a tough situation over there," Yelton said.

At age 67, Harvey is eligible for retirement, but he has not indicated any intention to do so, personnel officer Starrie Grissett said Tuesday.

Harvey was hired as county planning director in August 1980. He was appointed interim county manager in April, 1993, after the sudden resignation of former County Manager/Attorney David Clegg. He returned to his former position when Yelton was hired three months later.

As planning director, Harvey earned an annual salary of \$49,028. Yelton said he has not decided how Harvey would be compensated in his new part-time position.

The county is offering a salary of \$35,564 for a new planning director.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Making A Point

Local issues from preservation of Bird Island to cleaning up Lockwood Folly River found a forum last week when the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission met at Sea Trail Plantation at Sunset Beach. Above, John Holden uses historic photographs to build his case for reopening Eastern Channel to improve flushing action and water quality in Lockwood Folly River. Though slight improvement was noted this past year, much of the river remains closed to shellfishing. Stories from the CRC meeting are on Page 12A.

Pleasant Weather Expected For Holiday

Pleasant springtime weather looks likely for the Easter holiday in the South Brunswick Islands.

The outlook calls for both temperatures and rainfall to be near normal.

Temperatures should average from the upper 40s at night to the upper 60s during the day, with around one-half inch rainfall, Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson

Canady said Tuesday.

"It may be a little cool at first, but should warm up toward the weekend," he said.

The week of March 22 through 28 was unseasonably warm with greater-than-average rainfall.

A daily average high of 75 degrees and a nightly average low of

56 degrees combined for a daily average temperature of 65 degrees, about 9 degrees above average.

Canady recorded a high of 78 degrees on both March 22 and 24, and a low of 39 degrees the night of March 23.

He measured 2.15 inches of rainfall at his home south of Shallotte.

Suit Against County Headed For Fed Court

BY ERIC CARLSON

A federal lawsuit filed against Brunswick County by former building inspector John W. "Billy" Ingram appears destined for an April 11 trial in U.S. District Court after lawyers for both sides failed to reach a settlement of the case last week.

The Brunswick County Board of Commissioners met in closed session for about 45 minutes Monday evening with County Attorney Michael Ramos and co-counsel from Wilmington to discuss the pending action. Board members said they could not comment on the case

after the meeting.

Ramos said a federal judge last Thursday ordered the two sides "to engage in settlement negotiations," but no agreement was reached.

Ingram's lawsuit, filed in May, 1993, claims he suffered "mental anguish and severe emotional distress, humiliation and embarrassment, denial of professional standing and reputation and loss of earnings" when he was fired three years earlier.

The suit asserts that the county violated its personnel policy by dismissing Ingram with "no notice or

warning" and denying him the right to appeal.

The lawsuit requests a jury trial and asks that Ingram be reinstated and awarded back pay, lost benefits, punitive damages and attorney fees.

In a response to the suit filed last July, the county asserts that Ingram was a "probationary" employee at the time of his firing and was therefore not protected by the personnel policy. It claims Ingram was fired "for not performing his duties in a satisfactory manner" and denies that there were no warnings given before his termination.

The response further states that Ingram "has failed to mitigate the damages he claims to have suffered by failing to obtain other work."

Moth Spraying Set To Begin

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that is toxic only to caterpillars and certain agricultural pests. It is marketed to home gardeners under the commercial names "Worm Whipper" and "Dipel."

On 4,000 acres where scientists have determined that Bt could harm rare or fragile species, an insect virus called Gypchek will be used against the moths. Gypchek is only produced in government labs and is in short supply. The local eradication program will use up the nation's stockpile of the virus.

Neither of the pesticides is considered harmful to mammals or to other insects, according to Brunswick County Agricultural Extension Agent Milton Coleman. The sprays are water soluble and will be washed away with the first rain. The applications should have

no effect on plant pollination, birds or aquatic life, Coleman said.

A special Gypsy Moth Hotline has been established for those who want more information about gypsy moths and the eradication program. That number is 1-800-449-9007.

Ulrich Defended

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Chapel Hill professor David M. Lawrence, also says board members cannot be prohibited from disclosing what happens during an executive session.

"What little case law there is suggests that if a public body sought to enforce such a prohibition, such as by censoring or attempting to suspend a member, it might be violating that member's constitutional rights of free speech."

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON
 Established Nov. 1, 1962
 Telephone 754-6890
 Published Every Thursday
 At 4709 Main Street
 Shallotte, N.C. 28459

SUBSCRIPTION RATES IN BRUNSWICK COUNTY
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