

BOARD RECONVENES AT 7:30 A.M. THURSDAY

OIB Commissioners Unhappy About Beach Access Withdrawal

BY SUSAN USHER
Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners weren't pleased Tuesday to learn that a property owner had already recorded a partial withdrawal of an oceanfront accessway across from Driftwood Drive.

Commissioners met behind closed doors with town attorney Elva Jess to discuss the possibility of legal action. Afterward the board adopted a resolution accepting dedication of all existing public accessways.

Jess said the notice the town received last month was given at the same time the withdrawal was recorded. The homeowner reclaimed a 10-foot section of the 25-foot wide accessway, creating a 65-foot-wide lot for a house that now sits 3 1/2 feet from the old side lot line. The reclaimed section has been fenced off from public use as long as 10 years.

"Our only option is to file a lawsuit asking a judge to declare the withdrawal void," said Jess during open session. "It is my belief they did not have a right to do that."

Odeii Williamson, utility commissioner, said the withdrawal as a "land grab." While accessways are intended to provide public routes to the beach, Williamson said the breaks are also important for fire containment.

While a formal resolution isn't necessary for the town to accept a dedication, according to Jess, she expects the resolution adopted Tuesday to reduce the likelihood of future attempts to withdraw dedication.

She said the town's building of a walkway at the Driftwood Drive access was evidence of its acceptance of that public access.

Driftwood Won't Close

Commissioners unanimously denied a written request from John J. Freeman, who owns the end property on both sides of the street, to close the foot of Driftwood Drive.

On Kendall Suh's motion, Freeman will receive a letter saying commissioners think granting his request would not be in "the best interest of all property owners." Closing the street end would block a traditional public access to Eastern Channel.

"You can pull a boat in there, go crabbing, watch the sun set. I don't think it's fair to close it off," said one Driftwood Drive property owner. "It's another example of land grabbing."

Before the town could close the street, a public hearing would have been required. If the street were closed, the public right of way would have reverted to the adjacent property owner(s), in this case, Freeman.

Other Business

In other business commissioners:
■ Appointed Commissioners Ken Proctor and Kendall Suh to meet with representatives of Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad and the Ocean Isle Beach Property Owners Association. With its current lease expired, the rescue squad is interested in relocating all or part of its operation from Shallotte to Ocean Isle Beach. The POA has been interested in having a substation or unit nearer the beach to speed response time. "It's worth looking into and exploring the pro's and con's," said Commissioner Debbie Sloane Fox.

■ Approved an agreement with the N.C. Department of Transportation to provide a required inspection of the Ocean Isle Bridge, with the federal government to pay 80 percent of the cost and the town, 20 percent. The town doesn't know the cost.

■ Heard from Building Inspector Duied Roberson that in April six building permits were issued in the extraterritorial area for construction valued at \$181,669 and 47 permits issued within town for construction

valued at \$815,287.

■ Set a budget workshop for 8:30 a.m. Thursday, May 26, at the town hall. Commissioners will also revisit the water rate schedule adopted in April, as the town was notified by the Brunswick County Utilities Dept. that the wholesale rate for water could go up as much as 15 cents per 1,000 gallons starting July 1. The town just adjusted its rates to reflect the county's last water rate increase two years ago, setting the rates based on meter size.

■ Heard from Verda Holder, who has a 1-inch water meter at her house on Hale Beach Road. She protested her rate increase from \$8 per month to \$30 per month under the new schedule since she typically uses less than 3,000 gallons of water monthly. Engineer Finley Boney recommended the town not change its water schedule, but swap out Holder's meter for a standard three-quarter inch residential meter so she would qualify for a lower rate. If higher water pressure is needed, Commissioner Ken Proctor suggested Holder install a "bladder tank" on her water line. Mayor Betty Williamson said she understands there are about four other homeowners in the same situation as Holder.

■ Heard from Police Chief Curt Pritchard that he had appointed officer Danny Hunter as detective. The change of duty was not a promotion.

■ Heard from Mayor Betty Williamson that the east-end dredging was cut short by the end of dredging season March 31 and that only about half the material expected was placed on the beach.

■ Voted to reconvene at 7:30 a.m. today (Thursday) to decide on a 26-street resurfacing contract, after town staff confers with the bidders. APAC was the low bidder at \$142,538, while MAC Construction bid \$145,080. Dickerson Construction submitted the high bid of \$150,834. The top two bids were

based on actual measurement of the areas to be paved; the low bid was based on the rough estimate included in the town's bid specifications.

■ Heard a recommendation from Commissioner Ken Proctor for the planning board to review the off-street parking ordinance. It requires

one space for each 150 square feet of business space, which Proctor said is more stringent than in some other towns.



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

Employee Book Drive

Carolina Power and Light employees and Supply Elementary School Principal Carolyn Williams examine some of the more than 1,500 books donated to the school through a book drive organized by workers at the Brunswick Nuclear Plant. The additional volumes will help the school library achieve the 7,000-book inventory needed to meet accreditation standards set by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Shown (from left) are senior CP&L specialist Katy Core, Williams, secretary Gwen Midyette and plant administrative specialist Margot Timberlake.

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From the bottom of my heart, thanks for your overwhelming vote of confidence!

I am grateful to all my friends and supporters for giving me the Democratic Party nomination



for Sheriff on the first ballot. I will always treasure that endorsement and will do my best to measure up to your expectations.

I also appreciate the way in which all the Democratic Party candidates for Sheriff ran aggressive but clean campaigns based on the issues.

It is my hope that the campaign for Sheriff in the general election this fall can be conducted with the same high standards.

Ronald E. Hewett

Ronald E. HEWETT

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