

Shalotte Aldermen Tinkering With \$1.5 Million Budget Proposal

BY DOUG RUTTER

Oodles of ideas have been kicked around during four hours worth of budget workshops in the past week, but Shalotte officials haven't made any decisions yet on the spending plan they must approve before July 1.

Aldermen met for two hours Tuesday and two hours last Wednesday to discuss the \$1.5 million budget proposed for fiscal year 1994-95.

A decrease in the current town tax rate of 47 cents per \$100 of property seems likely, although board members have not agreed on an exact figure.

Town Clerk Mary Etta Hewett balanced the proposed budget using a tax rate of 40 cents.

The tax rate cut is possible because Shalotte's tax base jumped from \$73 million to nearly \$107 million as a result of the recent property revaluation in Brunswick County.

While the town tax rate may be heading down, water and sewer rates for Shalotte's 600 customers may be on the rise.

Town officials have proposed an increase of 15 cents per 1,000 gallons of water to offset an anticipated

increase from Brunswick County. Sewer fees will go up 25 cents per 1,000 gallons to help meet operational costs.

If the rate hikes are approved, the basic monthly rate for water will jump from \$10.02 to \$10.47 and the current flat rate for sewer will increase from \$9 to \$9.75.

The police department's proposed budget of \$311,707 accounts for 37 percent of the \$842,856 general fund.

Police Chief Rodney Gause has requested 5-percent salary increases for officers as well as a new position for a full-time secretary to answer phones, dispatch calls and help with paperwork during the day.

The proposed police budget also includes \$28,100 for two new patrol cars. In the past, the town has purchased used Highway Patrol cars.

Other major general fund expenses include \$177,620 for streets, \$137,798 for administration and approximately \$50,000 each for the inspections and fire departments. Two new positions have been requested in public works.

The proposed budget includes \$18,000 in ABC store revenue—a source of income that has declined

in the last several years since Brunswick County opened an ABC store on Holden Beach Road.

"That is nowhere near where it was years ago," Alderman Roney Cheers said of the ABC funds.

"Holden Beach knocked us in the head completely," added board member David Gause.

Shalotte expects to receive \$1,300 next fiscal year for providing the local magistrate's office.

The board voted last week to send letters to Brunswick County Clerk of Court Diana Morgan and Chief District Court Judge Jerry Jolly requesting that magistrate Cheryl Hughes be assigned full-time to the Shalotte office.

"If we're going to reserve a space for her the county should leave her down here," Mayor Sarah Tripp said. "I think we ought to put a little pressure on the county to keep her here. There ain't no sense in having an office here if the county is going to put her in Timbuktu."

Some board members said last week they would like to increase a proposed \$2,000 donation to the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce.

Chamber President Joe Stanley

recently talked to the town board about helping with economic development efforts and the possibility of bringing the N.C. Oyster Festival to Shalotte.

Cheers said the chamber focused too much attention on real estate and the beaches in the past. "I want some action from them concerning the town of Shalotte," he said.

"I think you're going to see a turnaround," Tripp said. "I would like to see our monies increased to them because Joe is really fighting and working for Shalotte."

Town officials also said they want to include several thousand dollars in the budget for the relocation of Sunnyside School to a permanent site behind the chamber building.

A copy of the proposed budget can be reviewed at town hall. A public hearing has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 21, at 7:20 p.m.

Firefighters Unhappy

At Tuesday afternoon's workshop, things heated up momentarily when board members asked Fire Chief Tim Carter to explain a proposed \$2,500 expense for departmental repairs.

Carter took exception to the ques-

tion and said some department members do not like the town aldermen.

"I put my volunteer time into it. Y'all cut us \$3,000 last year for a computer. If our time is not important you need to find somebody else to run the fire department," Carter said. "If you're going to cut the budget, cut it somewhere else."

"We're not questioning you personally," Mayor Tripp said. "We have to account to the taxpayers."

"It's like this," Carter said. "There's some people involved in this fire department who do not like you all."

"No person other than you in the fire department knows who I am," Alderman Bill Allen said.

Tripp said the town board gives the fire department money if special equipment is requested and if the

town can afford it.

"It's not that we as a board are cutting you off from anything. If the money's not there we can't fund it," she said.

Carter said the \$2,500 was needed for a drop ceiling in the office.

"I bet you all volunteer fire departments in this county would like to have this financial help right here," Alderman Carson Durham said of the \$50,608 proposed budget.

Allen offered to meet with the fire department members if they want to discuss any problems. "I don't want an unhappy fire department in our town," he said.

"This is the first I've heard of people in the fire department being unhappy with the town board," Alderman Morris Hall said.

"That's because it has never come out," Carter replied.

'What-If' Budget Could Push Sunset Beach Property Taxes Up Substantially Next Year

BY SUSAN USHER

A series of "what-if" scenarios could help push the 1994-95 operations budget for the town of Sunset Beach over \$1.15 million and have property owners paying 40 percent more in ad valorem taxes than this year.

The proposed budget is based on keeping the tax rate at 16.7 cents per \$100 valuation of real property, even though property values in the town increased by 51.5 percent after the Brunswick County revaluation. Last year the valuation was almost \$217.3 million and it's now almost \$329.2 million—a difference of nearly \$111.9 million.

Projected property tax revenues of \$531,574 represent 46 percent of the revenue, with an estimated \$350,000 in accommodations tax revenues accounting for another 30.3 percent.

The preliminary budget includes \$1.15 million for operations; \$615,556, water; and \$40,000, sewer.

"We've got a long way to go on this budget," said Mayor Mason Barber during a budget workshop Tuesday. "We will have a budget increase this year. I personally think we should have an increase if that's what it's going to take to do what needs to be done."

Barber said the budget includes more than \$200,000 in line items the town isn't certain it will need, plus \$76,000 for existing engineering contracts related to the sewer system.

It sets aside \$50,000 in case the town has to begin work on a stormwater management study; \$75,000 in case an environmental impact statement (EIS) is needed for the sewer project; and \$40,000 in a new sewer budget for legal "technical assistance" if needed in preparing a stormwater study.

The funds address the possibility of two lawsuits against the town by

either the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association and/or the owner of Bird Island.

The SBTA board has been authorized to investigate the possibility of filing suit if the town participates in a sewer project that does not include a stormwater management system.

The budget includes \$50,000 for legal fees in the event Bird Island owner Jamie P. Price sues the town over its zoning of her property. Price's agents claim the zoning should allow denser development of the island's uplands.

Looking at the budget Tuesday, Councilman Herb Klinker questioned the figures before him.

"This is telling me every Sunset Beach resident will get a 40 percent tax increase next year," he said. "We need to try to hold as close as possible to the taxes they have been paying to Sunset Beach."

Mayor pro tem Ed Gore suggested the town assess its needs and revenue sources, then set the tax rate at whatever level is necessary to meet those needs.

Finance Officer Julia Thomas said extra expenses are needed if the town is to "upgrade itself."

"I think we deserve that," she said.

Other new or major items in the proposed budget include \$150,000 for the new town hall and another \$70,000 for furnishing it; \$50,000 to build two new walkways at the east end of the island; \$6,000 each for post-disaster clean up and repair and public beach clean up; and \$6,000 for placing port-a-johns near the gazebo beach access area should the Brunswick County Health Department issue a permit.

The water department budget of \$615,556 includes \$40,000 each to paint the water tank and water line repairs and maintenance. Even if Brunswick County does increase its wholesale price for water, Town

Administrator Linda Fluegel said she doesn't anticipate Sunset Beach needing to increase its water rate for the next several years.

The overall budget reflects some salary adjustments as well as the equivalent of 5 percent of all employees' salaries to use in granting pay increases. Board sentiment Tuesday was to set the sum aside for bonuses and merit pay rather than give an across-the-board increase.

They agreed with Fluegel that the latter "doesn't give any incentive" for workers to be productive.

At its next meeting the board will also consider using some of the revenue left at the end of this fiscal year to re-establish several capital reserve funds the town once maintained to save for new facilities, public access and other long-term projects that require money be set aside over a period of years.

By department, expenditures proposed in the preliminary 1994-95 budget are as follows: police, \$236,045, including one new vehicle; governing body, \$6,250; administration, \$124,168; finance, \$22,175; tax, \$650; legal, \$56,700; public buildings, \$12,800; \$26,804, Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department;

\$8,000, Calabash Emergency Medical Services; \$90,200, sanitation, including the port-a-johns; \$7,380, planning and zoning; \$12,000, economic development (contribution to South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce; \$2,080, conservation (beach renourishment and the shared-cost Twin Lakes management project); \$15,204, mosquito control;

Also, \$55,200, recreation for the east end beach walkways and two concrete benches to be placed at the Twin Lakes; \$170,000 toward construction and furnishing of the new town hall; \$84,925, drainage/environmental protection; \$58,475 for street and bulkhead repairs using Powell Bill state gas tax revenues; \$50,100 non-Powell Bill, including street lights, lot clearance and the underground utility project.

If the town decides to take over maintenance of street lights in the annexed areas of Sea Trail, that will cost an additional \$10,000.

At its second budget workshop Wednesday, May 25, at 4 p.m. at the town hall, council will look at the budget in greater detail, discussing any adjustments or additions they think are needed.

Congratulations Captain Jack L. Tuesdale



Our congratulations go out to Captain Jack L. Tuesdale who has just completed intensive training program at Houston Marine Training Center in New Orleans, LA. He has just returned home with his 100-ton masters license. He has been with Atkinson's Dredging Co., Chesapeake, VA for the past 2 years.

Our best wishes to him and continued success in the future.

From his wife, Sophie, and parents John & Sara Tuesdale

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