

Sunset Proposes 14.5¢ Tax Rate; Most Bills Would Rise 40%

BY SUSAN USHER

A proposed 14.5-cent tax rate for Sunset Beach would raise property taxes for most residents about 40 percent while allowing the town to meet its current needs, provide for the possibility of several hinged-at-lawsuits, and continue to set aside reserves for future needs.

After hours of discussion spread over three work sessions, council members tentatively agreed Tuesday afternoon on a proposed \$1.3 million operating budget that would raise approximately \$461,600 in property tax revenues and cut the tax rate from 16.7 cents to 14.5 cents per \$100 valuation of real property.

At their regular June 6 meeting council will set the date for a public hearing on the proposed spending plan for 1994-95. Council members may also discuss two possible changes that could affect budget revenues. Sunset Beach is investigating collection of franchise fees from Atlantic Cable TV on its profits from the Sunset Beach area, and

having businesses pay for their trash collection costs in excess of standard residential service. Taxes collected from businesses aren't covering their share of sanitation fees, members were told in May.

After two workshops on the budget, council members had tentatively compromised on a 14-cent per \$100 valuation rate, only to learn from Town Administrator Linda Fluegel that wouldn't cover several needs of the town. A half-cent increase tacked on Tuesday will allow \$10,000 in overtime pay for police officers in addition to pay raises, and offset the anticipated loss of \$6,000 in state intangibles tax revenues.

The budget includes money for two more dune crossovers on the east end, additional street lighting, benches at Twin Lakes, portable toilets for use by beach visitors and monthly collection of yard debris, all items Town Administrator Linda Fluegel said local residents have sought.

Finance officer Julia Thomas ini-

tially advocated no reduction in the tax rate following revaluation, citing the town's current and long-term needs and uncertainties relating to the sewer system. The budget is based on an estimated property tax base of \$329 million, up \$111 million or 31.5 percent from a year ago and reflecting the county's revaluation of property as well as growth.

"I don't see any need in reducing it when we don't know what to expect this year," she said. "I don't believe in choking our town for \$100 apiece."

Councilman Herb Klinker, who was absent from Tuesday's final budget workshop, had initially advocated a 12.5 cents tax rate, which he estimated would have most property owners paying about the same amount in Sunset Beach property taxes next year as they do now.

Fellow council members agreed some reduction was in order, but that the town should not neglect its future capital outlay needs, includ-

ing reserve funds for a new town hall, beach erosion protection, beach accessways, public restrooms and sidewalks, or the potential for increased expenses related to the sewer system or Bird Island.

"It will be a lot easier if we end up with a lot of money we don't know what to do with to drop the tax rate next year," Mary Katherine Griffith suggested at a meeting last week.

Mayor Pro-tem Ed Gore also counseled that the town should begin setting aside funds for protection of the eastern tip of the island along Tubbs Inlet. A reclamation project by the Gore family in 1970 restored the beach, but a final cap of armor-type rock is still needed to protect the shoreline from future shifting of the inlet that would result in destruction of town property tax base.

"Some day, historically, the need will arise and there will be no developer around because I have sold all of that property," he said.

The revised budget reflects employee pay increases of up to 6 percent in some instances, \$12,000 for disaster clean-up and repairs, \$50,000 for legal defense funds should the town be sued over the zoning of Bird Island and/or the town's participation in a regional sewer system, \$50,000 for a possible stormwater system study and \$75,000 for an environmental impact statement, in the event those are required for the sewer system; contributions of \$12,000 to the South Brunswick Island Chamber of Commerce for economic development; and \$650 total to four charities: the Brunswick County Chapter-North Carolina Symphony Society, Brunswick County Literacy Council, Hope Harbor Home and Brunswick Volunteer and Information Center.

The largest single department is police, budgeted at \$233,812, of which \$156,000 goes toward wages for full- and part-time employees.

Should the contingency funds in-

cluded for legal defense and sewer-related studies not be needed, the separate enterprise (water and sewer) budget of \$751,926 will cover the higher rate the town will pay for county water next year without raising retail rates, and provide \$80,000 for water tank painting and line maintenance and repair; \$75,000 to cover engineering work already obligated for the sewer system; \$50,000 for possible legal expenses; and \$66,500 set aside in a capital reserve fund.

The town already has approximately \$400,000 each in unappropriated funds set aside from the general and enterprise funds. That doesn't preclude the need to continue setting aside additional reserves, said Town Administrator Linda Fluegel.

"If we had to fight a legal battle or if we had a disaster, that would only be a drop in the bucket," she said. "We would still have to get money somewhere else."

Gilley Gets Maximum Term For Minimum Conviction

BY ERIC CARLSON

After a two-week trial that ended last Wednesday (May 26), a Brunswick County jury was unable to find accused murderer David Dwain Gilley guilty of that offense and instead convicted him on the lesser charge of involuntary manslaughter.

But the judge who heard the case had no difficulty imposing the maximum sentence allowable for the conviction—10 years in prison.

Which means that under current department of correction policies,

Gilley is likely to serve about three years behind bars for shooting 28-year-old Juan Hernandez to death in an Ash tavern last year.

"If I had it in my power, you would serve every last minute of it," Judge Knox Jenkins said in sentencing Gilley.

Witnesses to the shooting testified that Gilley intentionally confronted Hernandez at the Junction Lounge on the night of Jan. 30, 1993. They said Gilley pulled his .380-caliber pistol out of his pants and shot Her-

nandez in the chest. Hernandez died in the back of a pickup truck on the way to the hospital.

Others who saw Gilley earlier on the night of the shooting testified they heard him say he was "going to kill a Mexican" as he and two friends headed for the night spot, which was a popular gathering place for Hispanics.

Taking the stand in his defense, Gilley denied making the remark and insisted that he harbored no ill will toward Mexicans. He said he

thought Hernandez was coming at him with a knife when he took out the gun to protect himself. Gilley said his finger was not on the trigger when his pistol "discharged" while he struggled with Hernandez and his wife.

Gilley also testified that he was not fleeing prosecution when he drove to Texas in a rented truck the day after the shooting. He said he went to Houston so he could arrange to sell a car and raise money "to pay some bills."

Coast Guard Aids Sailboat Aground At Shallotte Inlet

A sailboat ran aground near Shallotte Inlet Monday evening and was assisted by the U.S. Coast Guard and a marine salvage company, according to a weekly activity report from BMCS J.D. Arndt, chief of Coast Guard Station Oak Island.

At about 6 p.m., the station received a call from the sailing vessel *Priscilla* saying that the boat was aground in near the inlet, Arndt said.

Because the situation was not deemed to be an emergency, the station issued a Marine Assistance Radio Broadcast (MARB) to give local commercial salvors an opportunity to respond. A salvage operator was located and agreed to assist

the vessel, Arndt said.

However, due to the age of the *Priscilla's* crew and the approaching darkness, the station also launched its 21-foot fast-response inflatable boat to help the boat set its anchor while awaiting assistance. The sailboat was safely refloated a short time later.

About two hours earlier, the Oak Island station was called to aid a capsized sailboat that was reported about 300 yards off the Long Beach pier, Arndt said. The 21-footer was already under way and was diverted to assist.

Upon arrival, the boat's crew learned that the sailboarder had

made his way to shore, with Long Beach Police standing by.

Last Thursday at about 3:30 p.m., the Oak Island station was called by USCG Station Wrightsville, reporting two people in the water on the west side of the Carolina Beach bridge.

Both stations launched rescue boats, with Wrightsville's 21-footer arriving on scene first. Its crew recovered the two people safely from the water and began towing their vessel ashore while Oak Island personnel assisted in recovering the boat's extra gear, which remained floating in the waterway, Arndt said.

On May 21 at about 9 p.m., the Oak Island station was called by the sailboat *Bon Accord* reporting itself disabled about two miles west of Buoy 2 at Fryling Pan Shoals.

Because it was a non-emergency situation, a MARB was issued.

When no radio response was received and with the weather worsening, the station launched its 44-foot patrol boat to assist. The Coast Guard boat found the *Bon Accord* still disabled in six-to-eight-foot seas with winds blowing at 25 to 30 knots, Arndt said.

The 44-footer took the sailboat in tow and brought it to the nearest safe haven in Southport.

Earlier that morning, the station was called by a passing vessel reporting that a small catamaran had almost capsized, lowered its sails and was drifting across Jaybird Shoals toward the open sea. The station launched its 21-footer, which located the catamaran and towed it back to Southport.

Routine School Personnel Actions Approved By Board

Several routine personnel actions were approved last Friday by the Brunswick County Board of Education following a closed door session called to discuss several issues.

The board:
 ■ approved the hiring of Connie Russ of Ash as an interim therapeutic assistant and Vickie Powell as an interim special education teacher at Waccamaw Elementary;
 ■ accepted resignations from Tracy Smithson, school psychologist; and Charles Alexander, a mid-

dle grades teacher at Leland Middle;
 ■ approved leaves of absence (educational, parental) for Kathy Rublein, Leland Middle elementary teacher; Denise Minton, Waccamaw Elementary special education teacher; Icelean Bellamy, Waccamaw Elementary cafeteria assistant; and Romia Davis, exceptional children's program secretary;
 ■ approved four new substitute teachers.

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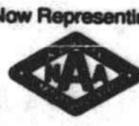
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