

OPPONENTS WORRIED ABOUT TRAFFIC

'Hilton Head' Golf Proposal Clears Hurdle

BY SUSAN USHER

A proposal to bring "Hilton Head-style" miniature golf to the island of Sunset Beach cleared a major hurdle Monday night.

Sunset Beach Town Council voted 3-1, with Herb Klinker casting the "no" vote, to amend the town zoning ordinance to allow for miniature golf courses in the Beach Business District (BB-1) as a specially permitted use. Council granted Mayor Pro tem Ed Gore an abstention from voting, because of a conflict of interest. Sunset Beach and Twin Lakes Inc., a family-owned business, is the applicant.

Council's action clears the way for application to the Board of Adjustment for a special use permit to build a miniature golf course on four lots, an estimated 1.4 acres, at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and North Shore Drive.

The vote came after an hour-long hearing and lengthy discussion, much of it about plans for the course and concerns about traffic congestion on the island.

Twelve speakers questioned the impact of the course on the community, while complimenting its attractive appearance. They also expressed concern about lights, noise and litter, and decreased property values for nearby residential properties. Kate Westhausen questioned whether the project would be harmonious with the island lifestyle, noting the 11 p.m. closing time, and suggested a community center be built on the site instead.

Several speakers questioned profit as a motive for constructing the course, drawing audience applause and a warning from Mayor Mason Barber that he would "clear the room" if the clapping continued. A town police officer was on stand-by outside the Maples Clubhouse meeting site at Sea Trail Plantation.

Most council members prefaced their vote with formal remarks to the audience of about 60 people, many of them island property owners.

Saying he was in a "Catch-22 situation" given the two options, Klinker attempted to delay Monday's vote with a series of parliamentary maneuvers, from a motion to table to a motion to adjourn, that failed for lack of a second. An ear-

lier motion, to delay the vote until gaining a season's experience with a miniature golf course under construction on the mainland, also failed for lack of a second. He also asked for time to investigate the town attorney's recommendation.

"I'm fresh out of motions," said Klinker, who had received 40 letters opposing the project, as Councilwoman Cheri Cheek's motion to amend the ordinance came to a vote.

Cheek said that in making her decision on the amendment she tried "to be objective and fair, and to apply the Golden Rule. That's the only way I know to do it."

More Traffic Congestion?

Councilwoman Julia Thomas reminded listeners that any type of business would bring increased traffic. Member Mary Katherine Griffith, a resident of the island for 23 years, said change, while constant, isn't always welcome, and that every person who moves to the island "contributes to our traffic problem."

While traffic blocks on Sunset Boulevard are caused by stop-and-go traffic at the bridge, Gore said the course was intended to help ease the traffic problem by providing activity for people on the island.

"I believe we will demonstrate it was not a mistake. If it were, I am the one who would feel it the most," he said.

Requirements Must Be Met

Property on both sides of Sunset Boulevard has been zoned BB-1 since 1972. The district does allow single- and multiple-family dwellings and businesses such as hotels, restaurants and retail sales.

It also allows "establishments that provide entertainment such as bingo, dancing and games of skill." After consulting with Town Attorney Michael Isenberg, the planning board concluded that the applicants could probably make a case for miniature golf as a "game of skill," and the course be built "without any controls whatsoever," said Chairman Richard Good.

The planning board considered the proposal the better of the two options.

"We think it made a good first impression as

you approach the island," said Good. "We hope the quality will encourage upscale development of the remaining Beach Business-1 property. We think what is proposed is quality family-oriented entertainment and we think it will serve a need. We question whether you will get anything as attractive for the island as this."

Before the course receives a special permit the board of adjustment must find that it meets a series of general and specific requirements, as well as any "reasonable" special conditions the board establishes.

The board of adjustment must determine that the course would not adversely affect the town's safety, health, morals or welfare; not substantially affect the value of adjacent property; conform to the town land use plan; and more specifically, meets town requirements for miniature golf: two offstreet parking spaces per hole; landscaped course and parking lot; 16-foot height limit; no emissions or animation; an approved traffic plan; use of only lifesize replicas of birds and animals indigenous to area. It would operate from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. and would be separated from nearby residential property by a vegetative buffer.

Tim Cate would design the course after Island Putt Putt at Hilton Head, which he presented in slides Monday. Designed by golf course architects, that course has par 3, par 4 and par 5 holes of inlaid carpet with sand traps and water hazards, each a replica of a famous hole on a revily landscaped with palms and indigenous shrubs such as live oak, yaupon and wax myrtle, with limited visibility between holes, landscaping visible from the roadside, and inobtrusive lighting.

"It's too elaborate a design and it's too great an investment for it to be a temporary use of the site," said Cate.

Mayor Mason Barber closed Monday's meeting by reciting quotes from letters that advocated not making the island more attractive to visitors and referenced the growing rift among town property owners.

"Until we can get together and attempt to heal," he said, "this is going to go on."

CRC Votes To Pursue Study That Could Result In More Protection Of Bird Island

BY SUSAN USHER

An effort by the Bird Island Preservation Society to gain added state protection for the undeveloped barrier island near Sunset Beach narrowly avoided derailment last week.

Over a staff recommendation to the contrary, a committee and then the full N.C. Coastal Resources Commission voted to continue studying the island's resources over the next 90 days to determine if it warrants designation as a "coastal complex natural area of environmental concern."

Initially the Division of Coastal Management staff concluded the label sought by the Bird Island Preservation Society would "provide no significant additional protection" of the island's natural assets over that provided by existing state, local and federal measures. It recommended the CRC not pursue the nomination further.

The same study noted, however, that preservation was the only alternative that would provide full protection. If the island is not acquired for preservation, the study recommends the society and the landowner work together to devise a voluntary management plan that "will preserve, to the maximum extent possible, the educational and scientific values and aesthetic qualities" associated with undeveloped barrier islands.

The report from Evan Brunson, a program supervisor, concluded that if the Town of Sunset Beach chose to honor a request from the property owner to rezone the island to allow a higher density use, then DCM would recommend taking a second look at the nomination.

"They thought the island's six existing AECs and the Sunset Beach zoning and land use plan were sufficient," said society president Bill

Ducker. "But there are no AECs that provide protection for the habitat that probably would be destroyed with the island's development. And zoning isn't a permanent source of protection. It can be changed."

Ducker said that the goal of the nomination is not to prohibit development on the island, but to make sure that development allowed on the island is compatible with its fragile environment.

If the island wins the designation, the state would establish guidelines on what could be built on the island and what could and should be done to protect the species and habitat found there. Developers would have to submit a management plan to the state indicating how they would protect unique plant and animal communities and habitat on the island before building could begin.

Standards for several of the AECs, such as those covering the oceanfront and Mad Inlet are written with the protection of life and property in mind, not protection of natural resources, Ducker said.

Comments from Ducker, N.C. Coastal Federation Director Todd Miller and Regional Coordinator Loren Kolodij helped convince the issues committee to continue the nomination process because the new status could afford some additional protection.

"The critical thing is that the island does fall under two natural and cultural resource area of environmental concern categories," said Ducker. "It is a coastal complex natural area and it is a coastal area that contains remnant (endangered or threatened) species."

"Most of the protections provided by this AEC are not contained specifically in any other AEC," said Ducker. "They decided it wasn't expendable based on the protection available.

"I don't think the CRC wanted to go on record saying that shouldn't be preserved. If in fact it is a coastal complex area it does have the right to become an AEC."

Natural and cultural resource AECs are defined by the agency as "areas containing environmental, natural or cultural resources of more than local significance in which uncontrolled or incompatible development could result in major or irreversible damage to natural systems or cultural resources, scientific, educational or associative values, or aesthetic qualities."

While the Bird Island Pres-

ervation Society continues raising money to buy the island, which has a tax book value of about \$1.44 million, representatives of owner Janie Pace Price of Greensboro haven't indicated an interest in selling the island.

Price and her son, Rees Poag, are applying for the state and federal permits needed to build a bridge to the island and to develop it. Current zoning would allow about 31 single-family homes. Price's agents have said they plan to ask Sunset Beach to amend the coastal reserve district zoning to allow higher density use so they can build up to 50 homes.

CARD OF THANKS

Thank you to everyone for the flowers, telephone calls, get well cards and Masses. A special thanks to EMT's Tammy Brown and Allen Howard, Brunswick Hospital personnel, St. Brendan's sharing and caring volunteers, ladies of VFW Post 7288, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Kirby and employees of Sizzlin' Sirloin Steakhouse and friends who offered their assistance to me following my recent accident.

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