

PUBLIC HEARING TUESDAY

Shalotte Aldermen Eyeing \$1.6 Million Sewer Expansion

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shalotte residents and business owners get their chance next week to comment and ask questions about the town board's plan to more than triple the sewer system capacity.

Aldermen will conduct a public hearing Tuesday, Sept. 6, at 7 p.m. on a proposal to boost the wastewater treatment capacity to 750,000 gallons per day at a cost of \$1.63 million.

Shalotte sewer customers can expect to pay an extra \$7.55 per month, or \$90 per year, as a result of the expansion, according to the draft facilities plan for wastewater treatment plant expansion.

The facilities plan, written by engineer Street Lee of McKim & Creed of Wilmington, calls for the phased addition of 550,000 gallons of wastewater treatment capacity.

Based on residential and commercial growth projections, the additional 550,000 gallons would be enough to serve Shalotte for the next 20 years.

The existing facility, which has been operating since 1984, has a maximum capacity of 206,000 gallons per day (gpd).

Shalotte serves about 612 sewer customers and treats an average of 140,000 gpd, but the demand for sewer service is increasing due to the overall growth of the region.

It is projected that Shalotte's population will increase from 1,288 to 2,033 over the next 10 years. By the year 2014, the town will be home to 3,209 people.

In addition to residential growth, Shalotte officials anticipate that the number of acres developed for commercial use will nearly double in the next decade.

Of the 11,000 acres of land zoned for business and commercial use, only 477 acres have been developed. However, the number is expected to grow to 815 acres by the year 2004 and 1,391 acres by 2014.

Based on those projections, the town will be treating 400,000 gallons of wastewater per day within 10 years and 750,000 gpd by 2014, according to the facilities plan.

Expansion of the facility to accommodate the additional 550,000 gpd will include construction of a 24-acre lagoon, adding 170 acres of spray fields and a 1,500-gal-

lon-per-minute pump station and upgrading the chlorine feed system.

Town officials have proposed a phased approach to the expansion, with the first phase providing an additional 200,000 gpd of treatment capacity—enough to last the next 10 years.

Phase I, which will cost about \$1.05 million, includes construction of approximately half the 24-acre storage lagoon.

The pump station, chlorine contact chamber and chlorine feed systems will be designed for the full expansion, with the exception of the pumps, motors and electrical switch gear. This equipment will be sized for the first 10 years in order to reduce initial construction costs.

The spray irrigation system will be installed in phases, the first of which will provide a capacity of up to 200,000 gpd.

Town officials are considering leasing or buying two parcels of land for the additional spray fields.

They're looking at an 1,100-acre tract north of the sewer plant owned by International Paper Company and

a 210-acre site east of the plant owned by Federal Paper Board.

The \$1.63 million cost estimate does not include land. Town officials hope they can work out a long-term lease with International Paper that would allow the company to continue harvesting trees while the town uses the land for spray fields.

Expansion is not expected to significantly affect operation and maintenance costs, which were \$243,871 last fiscal year. Costs would increase about \$5,000 per year over the first several years.

The method of financing for the project will be based on the availability of loans under the Clean Water Bond Program administered by the N.C. Division of Environmental Management.

Shalotte officials have said there's a good chance loan funds will be available in January 1995 for the project.

Loans would be repaid with revenue generated from user charges as well as impact fees and acreage fees. Shalotte also has approximately \$110,000 in its capital reserve fund that could be used for the expansion.

Suicide Is Preceded By Notes, Threats, Gunshots From Porch

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Martin, who was upset and said she needed help with Roger.

"He never called me to say there were any problems. I didn't have a clue until last week," Mrs. Armbruster said. "We were all worried about him and thought we could get him some help. I think when she got the restraining order, it really bothered him. He just wanted to be around her."

Both Neller and one of Armbruster's brothers had been to visit him recently. They realized he had grown obsessive about Martin but said he was trying his best to keep it to himself. Neller said he told her he was "taking things one day at a time."

No one in the family was aware that Armbruster had purchased a pistol from a local pawn shop several weeks earlier.

"I knew it was bothering him, but not that bad," said his brother.

Court records indicate that Roger Armbruster's obsession had grown significantly worse in the past six weeks. On July 26, Margaret Martin found the note and the bullet on her car and swore out a warrant against Armbruster for trespassing. A judge agreed to grant her a court order prohibiting him from visiting Martin.

Last week, on Aug. 22, Martin went back to court for another domestic violence protective order. It claimed that Armbruster called her on the night of Aug. 14 and threatened suicide. Three nights later she got another call from him saying "if I did not drop the charges against him, that I would be sorry and he would kill himself and take me with him. I called 911," the court order says.

After another threatening call on the night of the 21st, Martin said Armbruster came to her home at about noon the next day and "threw a bag of hair that he shaved from his head and a note." Police say they believe he cut off his hair while drinking with friends at a local bar.

Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective Nancy Simpson said Martin had tried to get psychiatric commitment papers filed against Armbruster, but was unable to do so "because at the time, there was no evidence that he was a threat to himself or others."

After piecing together Armbruster's actions leading up to



ROGER ARMBRUSTER and his ex-wife Margaret Martin in happier times, before his obsession for her ended in suicide on a Long Beach dune Saturday morning.

his suicide, investigators agree that Armbruster's psychological condition must have deteriorated more seriously and rapidly than anyone realized.

Simpson said Armbruster wrote several letters and "made the rounds of all his friends" to say goodbye. On Friday, he placed his advertisement in the *Beacon* and wrote out a new will. He left it in a pickup truck owned by Martin's new boyfriend.

Shortly after midnight, Armbruster showed up on Martin's porch and began banging on the door. After she refused to answer he fired at least two shots from his pistol.

One of the bullets passed through the side of a neighboring trailer and lodged in a living room wall. The owner had been lying on the floor watching television while his wife and child slept in the adjoining bedroom. He immediately called 911 and reported the shooting.

Armed with a warrant, Simpson said she headed for Martin's trailer

and asked patrol officers to watch for Armbruster's white van. A deputy spotted the vehicle headed toward Holden Beach and began following him at speeds that never exceeded 45 miles per hour, the detective said.

The deputy followed the van to the east end of Holden Beach Boulevard and watched as it drove out onto the sand and stopped. Knowing Armbruster was armed, the deputy called for back-up before approaching the vehicle. But when officers reached the van, they found it empty.

Police speculate that Armbruster slipped out of the van, put the pistol in his pocket and swam across the inlet. Then, in the last hours of his life, he apparently removed the bullets and let them dry while scrawling one final message in the sand.

"At least he's at peace now," Rosemary Armbruster said on her son's porch Monday afternoon. "Nothing will ever bother him again."

Schools' Funding Arguments To Resume In Court Thursday

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resolved.

A second motion claims that there was not enough evidence presented at the trial to support the jury's award of \$14 million to run the county schools. It asks the judge to set aside the award and to grant the schools a lesser amount.

"At most, the evidence supported a judgment for the amount asked for in the continuation budget, or \$9.7 million," the motion states. Instead, it claims the jury awarded the amount requested in the school "expansion budget."

Such motions are standard procedure for the losing party in a civil suit and rarely result in a new trial. But County Attorney Mike Ramos said the county's third motion "will be argued strongly."

It claims that Judge Thompson made "an error in law" when he refused to let the county present evidence about its ability to collect and pay the \$14 million requested in the school board budget.

"Evidence of funding to other

An appeals court decision on the motion or the verdict could take a year or more.

agencies of the county could have aided the jury in deciding whether the Brunswick County Board of commissioners could have, consistently with their fiscal policy, paid \$14 million to the board of education," the motion states. It claims North Carolina law requires that the amount of money given to schools "be within the financial resources and consistent with the fiscal policies of the board of county commissioners."

The motion claims the judge was wrong in not allowing the jury to hear evidence about the county's "ability to pay" before deciding how much it should award to fund the

schools. Ramos said Judge Thompson specifically prohibited him from informing the jury about how their decision might affect county taxes.

"I think it is very relevant," Ramos said of the third motion. "I plan to argue strongly that (under state law, the amount budgeted) has to be within the county's financial resources and consistent with the fiscal policy of the board of commissioners. The judge had his own ideas about that."

If Judge Thompson allows the county's motion, he could set a new trial on the case. Otherwise, the motion could be appealed.

An appeals court decision on the motion or the verdict could take a year or more. If it decides to appeal, the county would continue to fund the schools at the same level used to operate them last year.

Commissioners say a tax increase would have to be instituted anyway, so the award could be paid immediately if the appeal is denied. If the courts rule in the county's favor, the additional tax money could be re-funded.

Brunswick Students' SAT Scores See 30-Point Drop

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white students. White students averaged 822 on the SAT, while black students averaged 678.

"The SAT is just one measure of student performance, yet it is perceived as a general indicator of the health of our schools," said Johnston in a prepared statement released last week. "Staff and administrators continue to believe that our students are getting a better education than the SAT scores indicate."

While Brunswick County's senior scores fell from an average score of 806 to 776, the statewide average increased one point, to 860, and the national average remained the same, at 902. While statewide average scores have showed a steady gain totaling 33 points over the past 12 years, local scores have seesawed.

This year's local scores are the lowest posted in at least four years, and came as a surprise and disappointment to local school officials after a 25-point gain from 1992, when the average score was 781, to 1993, when the average rose to 806. In 1991, the county average was 803.

North Carolina's one-point gain this year did not affect its ranking at 48th among the 50 states. New Hanover County Schools, with a total average score of 863, was the only school system in the 19-county southeastern educational regional to post an average score at or above the state average. System results across the region ranged from a drop of 62 points in the Clinton schools to a 76-point gain by Greene County seniors.

Assistant Superintendent of Schools Jan Calhoun, who is in charge of instructional services, said he believes local students will show gains on the SAT in the future because of changes that are occurring now. Students showed improvement this year in end-of-grade, end-of-course test results, indicating better alignment of the county's instructional program with the state's standardized curriculum and state testing program.

"Both initiatives require students to use higher order thinking skills and to apply what they have learned comparable to what is required by the SAT," said Calhoun. "These positive indicators should provide higher SAT scores in the future."

Meanwhile, Johnston and Calhoun are convinced part of the solution lies in setting higher expectations for performance and encouraging students to participate in more challenging courses, with a focus on core curriculum such as reading, writing, math, science, history and social studies.

Johnston also wants to focus in staff training and development and school-based planning on insuring that teachers use instructional approaches that allow for students' different styles of learning.

He said a break-down of score information from the SAT provided by the N.C. Department of Public Instruction will help educators identify areas where greater instructional emphasis or new approaches are most needed.

ABC Merger Would Allow Liquor Stores On U.S. 17

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in seven miles of Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach and Calafash.

If the merger happens, Ramsey said the likely spot for a new ABC store would be near the heavily traveled intersection of U.S. 17 and N.C. 211, about 6.2 miles north of Shalotte. Because of its central location, that area would also be an ideal spot for a warehouse to serve the entire system, he said.

Both the town of Shalotte and the county ABC board would benefit from the merger, Ramsey said. The town's ABC system, which saw its sales plummet after the county built its Holden Beach store, would join in the profits and the benefits of an "economy of scale" created by an expanded joint system, he said. Both systems would also share in the proceeds of a new store on U.S. 17.

"Right now we have thousands of people driving through Brunswick County every day from Wilmington to Myrtle Beach and we can't open an ABC store anywhere on that highway," Ramsey said.

Although the larger system would

simplify staffing, ordering and accounting, Ramsey said there would be no employee "firings, layoffs or salary cuts" if the two systems are merged. Any reductions in force would happen over time as existing workers retired or moved to different jobs, he said.

Ramsey said he could not say how the financial arrangements would be organized in a merger of the two systems.

Because five percent of every ABC system's profits are earmarked for law enforcement, Ramsey said savings from the joint system and increased profits from the opening of another store would probably provide enough revenue to hire a second county ABC enforcement officer. Detective Mike Speck of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department currently handles that job for the entire county in addition to his regular duties.

No firm date has been set for the joint ABC meeting, Ramsey said he hopes it can be held in late September or early October.

Enjoy First Hint Of Fall

South Brunswick Islands residents and visitors may get their first hint of autumn this weekend.

Shalotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said Tuesday he anticipates a cooling trend to reach the area around the weekend or the first of next week.

For the week he expects temperatures to average from the upper 60s at night into the upper 80s during the daytime, with about three quarters of an inch of rainfall.

For the period of Aug. 23-29, Canady recorded a high of 91 degrees on Aug. 27 and a nightly low of 58 degrees on Aug. 25.

A daily average high of 88 degrees and an average nightly low combined for a daily average temperature of 76 degrees, which Canady said was 2 degrees below the long-term average for this time of year.

He recorded only five-hundredths of an inch of rainfall for the period.

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