

# Holden Officials Making Headway On Ground Level, Density Rules

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Mayor Gay Atkins says she can't remember a time when town officials weren't struggling with the issue of "ground level" as it relates to the island's building height limit.

It's been debated off and on since she was first elected to the board of commissioners in 1981. Now that the planning and zoning board has submitted a recommendation, it's up for discussion again.

Holden Beach's zoning code limits residential and commercial buildings to a maximum height of 35 feet, measured from ground level to the highest point of the structure.

The restriction sounds simple enough, but the code does not include a definition for "ground level" and it has been interpreted many different ways over the years.

Atkins and other town officials may finally have a handle on the problem. A public hearing will be held Sept. 21 on the planning board's proposed definition.

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It reads: "The average of the highest and lowest elevations on the perimeter of the building footprint, established by an official survey provided to the building inspector. If a lot is filled after the effective date of this provision, ground level shall not be construed to exceed an elevation more than 18 inches above the average elevation of the center crown of the designated street address of each specific lot."

Planning Board Chairman Roger Williams presented the proposal at Monday night's town meeting.

Williams said the definition should deter people from dumping excessive amounts of fill dirt on their lots before building, which has been a common practice in recent years.

Property owners who use a lot of fill dirt on their lots often cause problems for

their neighbors. Stormwater drains from the filled lots and floods the adjacent property.

Commissioners asked the planning board Monday to study a regulation that would require retaining walls on filled lots where stormwater runoff floods neighboring property.

## Density Proposal

Town commissioners also have scheduled a Sept. 21 public hearing on the planning board's recommended density regulations.

Under the proposal, the principal structure and all accessory structures could not cover more than 30 percent of the usable lot area.

To determine usable area, landowners would have to consider bulkheads, the first stable line of vegetation and setback lines established by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management and U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers.

The proposed rules would apply in the rural zoning district and the R-1 and R-2 residential districts. The planning board is still working on a density control plan for commercial areas.

The planning board does not propose counting driveways in determining lot coverage, but several commissioners said Monday they think driveways should be included.

## Other Business

In other business Monday, commissioners:

- Voted to raise the town's electrical inspection fee from \$22 to \$25 and increase the town's payment to electrical inspector Terry Willetts to \$25 per inspection. Willetts requested the increase. He said the other towns he works for charge \$25.
- Scheduled a special meeting Tuesday,

Sept. 13, at 11 a.m. Commissioners will discuss town hall renovations with a space planner and architect. Town officials are considering moving the meeting room to the old maintenance garage to create more office space.

■ Set a public hearing Oct. 26 on the proposed dredging of canals in the Harbor Acres subdivision. A majority of the 302 landowners signed a petition requesting the dredging. The town plans to coordinate the project, which will be funded by property owner assessments.

■ Asked Town Manager Gus Ulrich to write a letter to the Corps of Engineers requesting a hurricane and wave protection study similar to the one recently funded for Ocean Isle Beach.

■ Met for 20 minutes in executive session to discuss legal and personnel matters. The board authorized Town Attorney Elva Jess to write a letter to a complainant.

# Fire Chief Uses Forum To Vent Frustration, Seek Community Support

BY SUSAN USHER

What would Ocean Isle Beach people be willing to do to support their local fire department?

Chief David Harrell would like to know.

Harrell was one of 22 Ocean Isle Beach property owners who turned out Monday night for the town's first evening meeting, a workshop held to hear mainly from those unable to attend commissioners' regular meetings held the second Tuesday morning of each month. Mayor Pro-tem Bill Benton, moderator, said he was pleasantly surprised by the good attendance and pleased by the "positive tone" of the meeting. The next workshop meeting will be held Monday, Nov. 7, at 7 p.m., the night before the general election.

After eight years volunteering with the department, the fire chief, like some of the volunteers who work with him, is frustrated, tired and disillusioned.

"We get great help from the town and the property owners' association," said Harrell. "There's nothing we have asked of you that you haven't done. What we would like to see is greater interest and participation by the citizens."

The department could use more money, more cooperation and more volunteers, not just to respond to calls but to help behind the scenes. It would speed responses to emergency calls if all property owners affix required house numbers and rental companies inform renters of their street addresses. New street/canal signs erected by the town are already making a difference, he said.

Six volunteers handle 95 percent of all the emergency calls received by the fire department, responding to fires and serving as first responders for medical emergencies, water rescues and accidents, said Harrell. So far this year the department has responded to more than 200 calls.

Last fall one person unaffiliated with the department showed up for the annual meeting of the Ocean Isle Beach Fire Protection Association (and he was simply looking for Harrell), though every property owner received an invitation. The volunteer not-for-profit association, which an entire family can join for \$25 a year, contracts with the town to provide fire protection. Yet Harrell said less than 15 percent of all town property owners are members.

Firefighters' used turn-out gear was donated by departments upstate. The department is saving its own money to buy another truck, which will help lower the department's insurance rating, and in turn, lower property owners' fire insurance premiums. Harrell said the department is aiming to reduce its insurance rating from a 7 to a 5, but will be satisfied if it qualifies for a 6. To upgrade

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—David Harrell, Fire Chief OIB

requires more equipment, more training and ideally, more personnel.

Very few citizens assist the department in other ways, though Harrell recalls one time this year when three people washed the trucks.

The heavy load of responding to calls, training and maintaining equipment and paperwork is taking its toll on the handful of active volunteers.

"It's not fun anymore," Harrell said, because of the steadily increasing number of calls and their increasingly serious, life-threatening nature, the time and expense involved in volunteering during business hours, and "the lack of cooperation from the public."

"All we would like is the support of the community," he said.

Commissioner Ken Proctor suspects it might be a matter of educating the public. He's not sure Ocean Isle Beach property owners know all the work done by the fire department or that it could use their involvement.

He proposed asking property owners if they would be willing to return a portion of the fire insurance premiums they will save in the near future to the fire department.

Audience members had more radical suggestions. Gloria Hillenburg suggested a bake sale or an appreciation day. Jack Clements suggested the town use the \$20,000 due in back franchise fees from Vision Cable as a one-time "windfall" for fire and rescue services. Buddy Russell and Finley Boney each suggested an assessment of some sort.

"What would 1 cent on the property tax rate do?" asked Boney. "The tax rate is the ideal place to do it, because we should pay proportionate to the value of the property we have to be protected."

The town now gives the fire department association \$15,000, plus another \$5,000 for the first responders, and gives Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad \$5,000. The fire department receives county support as well, and in turn responds to mutual aid requests from departments in adjacent communities.

Recommitting himself to support of the department, Benton predicted

to Harrell, "I think after tonight you're going to see a difference."

## Drainage, Erosion, Yard Waste

In addition to fire and rescue, residents discussed drainage, yard waste disposal, separate water meters for yard use, east end erosion, and the health hazard posed by the island's growing population of rats (see related story) during the session, which lasted one and a quarter hours.

Town staff will refer a problem with standing water from the road to parking lot at Sand Dwellers II on 2nd Street to the N.C. Department of Transportation. Speaking for the property owners association, Gloria Hillenburg recommended for easing the problem had been followed, but that they were still parking cars in a foot of standing water.

Staff will try to solve a drainage problem on Richmond Street identified by Ray Delhamer, and will investigate problems with spring high tide back-flooding through a stormwater drain at the end of Monroe Street noted by Maurice Moore and similar seasonal overwash reported by Jimmy Harritt and Finley Boney over the ends of Driftwood Drive and Duneside dri-

ves up to Fourth Street. The latter problem may require gradually raising the level of the street pavement.

Monroe Street resident Maurice Moore said all he wants is to help beautify the town, but that he's not getting the town's cooperation. Moore doesn't understand why Ocean Isle Beach property owners can't install a second water meter for outdoor use only. "I'm not watering my yard; I can't afford it," he said. "All I want is to be able to water my lawn and wash my boat. I want to be able to buy the water at a profit to the town."

Presently all water use is measured through a single meter and is used as the basis for calculating sewer bills regardless of whether the water enters the sewer system.

Town commissioners are to review the policy, along with income generated by revamped water and sewer rates, at their October meeting to see if the town can afford to allow the change.

A handful of property owners have skirted the debate by installing water taps on vacant lots they own.

Commissioner Debbie Fox, who oversees trash collection and recycling, will look into the feasibility of adding a centrally-located yard waste disposal bin for the convenience of residents and non-resident property owners, a suggestion from Dennis Fancher of Richmond Street. Presently the town schedules intermittent yard waste collection days.

Proctor relayed an absent east-end resident's concern that the town had "abandoned" the area and wasn't addressing its erosion problem, but Mayor Williamson and Fox pointed out that the property owner wanted sandbags placed in front of his erosion-endangered house at town ex-



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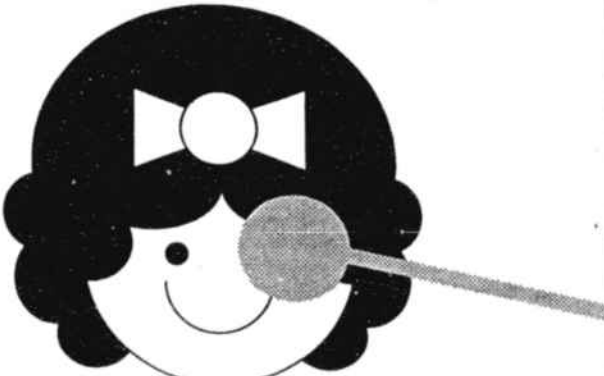
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**NOTICE**

Due to a scheduling error, the wrong Revco circular was inserted in last week's issue of *The Brunswick Beacon*.

The circular with sale dates of Sept. 4-10 was scheduled. Instead, the one with the sale dates of Sept. 11-17 was inserted by error.

The *Beacon* regrets this error and any inconvenience it has caused Revco and its customers.