

BOAT RAMP PARKING NEARLY FINISHED

Varnamtown Land Use Plan Heading For State, Federal Review

BY DOUG RUTTER

Stormwater runoff control, town provision of water and sewer service and maintenance of the Lockwood Folly River are among the key issues covered in Varnamtown's first land use plan.

Aldermen accepted a preliminary draft of the 50-page document Monday night. Final approval won't come until late 1994 or early 1995 following an extensive review by state and federal agencies.

Along with consultant Howard Capps of Wilmington, Varnamtown's planning board has been working several months on the plan. It includes data and policies that will help guide development for the next 10 years.

The Coastal Area Management Act requires land use plans for all local governments in the state's 20 coastal counties. They provide the basis for protection, preservation, orderly development and management of the coast.

The state and federal review of Varnamtown's plan will take about three months, according to Zoe Bruner, district planner with the N.C. Division of Coastal Management in Wilmington.

A public hearing will be held after town board members incorporate the various comments, corrections and suggestions into their plan and come up with a final draft.

After local adoption, the plan will go to the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission for final certification.

The plan includes information on population, local economy, existing land use, current regulations and constraints to development such as flood hazard areas, soil conditions, wetlands and water and sewer facilities.

Also included in the document are an existing land use map, land classification map, a hazards map showing areas susceptible to flooding and a sketch of the town park on Sabbath Home Road.

The most important part of the plan is the policy section town officials will use to guide the community's growth for the next five years, when an updated plan will be drafted.

Among the key policy statements is that officials will pursue extension of water and sewer service to the town if it can be done with state or federal grants and without increasing local taxes.

Based on the results of a questionnaire mailed to residents earlier this year, the community is evenly split over whether the town should provide water and sewer service.

Out of 69 people responding to the survey, 24 said the town should provide water through increased taxes and/or grants and 29 disagreed. Twenty-one said the town should

provide sewer service and 26 disagreed.

Stormwater runoff was identified in the plan as another primary concern in Varnamtown. Officials and residents are worried that development in the Lockwood Folly River basin could degrade water quality.

The approved policy calls for the town board to consider establishing an ordinance that would require runoff from development and agriculture be as near to natural conditions as possible.

Aldermen also plan to continue supporting maintenance of the Lockwood Folly River channel as a navigable stream for boating and fishing.

"The river is perhaps the single most important natural feature of the community, and there is considerable interest in seeing that the river is maintained in a useful and attractive condition," the plan says.

"If the river were to become un-navigable, commercial fishing and recreational boating and fishing would cease, and the overall quality of life for many residents would decline measurably."

Although town officials recognize development constraints along the river, they "question the accuracy" of existing floodplain maps used by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Some of the area shown in the floodplain is on a high bluff overlooking the river. The town plans to ask FEMA to review flood elevations along the bluff.

Most Varnamtown residents think the population should remain about the same over the next 10 years, according to the questionnaire results.

An overwhelming majority of respondents said future development must be planned. Residents also agreed that the community's appearance needs to be improved and natural resources and wildlife should be protected.

Residents were split on the issue of whether more residential and commercial development should be encouraged in Varnamtown.

Boat Ramp Parking

Preliminary work on the new boat ramp parking lot on Fisherman Road should be finished this week, Alderman Will Mumford said Monday.

Contractor Major White of Ash was nearing completion of the grading and fill work early this week.

Mumford said the town will have to pay about \$2,600 more than White's original bid of \$8,600.

The town underestimated the amount of dirt and marl that would be needed for the project. Mumford said the project required about 550 cubic yards of fill dirt and 325 tons of marl.

Aldermen gave approval Monday to spend approximately \$550 to add the finishing touches. They include

\$416 for 12 sections of 8-foot-by-6-foot stockade fence, \$60 for landscape timbers, \$50 for a sign and \$20 for cement.

The parking lot will serve the newly-reconstructed boat ramp on Lockwood Folly River.

The lot was built to keep vehicles and boat trailers from parking on the side of the road, where they block driveways and create a traffic hazard.

Town officials have decided not to mark off parking spaces in the lot

at this time. They want to see how much it is used before doing any further work.

"The thing that concerns me a little bit is it's 200 yards up the road (from the ramp). Let's see what kind of use it gets," Mumford said.

"I agree with Will," said board member Ennis Swain. "Hold back on it and see what happens for a while."

Mumford said one light will be installed at the boat ramp and another

at the parking lot.

Community Watch

Mayor Judy Galloway said residents have told her they're interested in establishing a community watch program in Varnamtown.

"One lady especially, she had

somebody go in her house and she wants to get this started," Galloway said.

The mayor is trying to set up a meeting with a representative from the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

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