

# County Nixes Authority Purchase Of Carolina Blythe

**BY ERIC CARLSON**

The owner of Carolina Blythe Utility Company ran into another setback in his effort to sell the Carolina Shores sewer system Monday night when the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners refused to allow its purchase by the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority.

Brunswick County has four appointed representatives on the LCFWSA, which provides the county with its raw water, and three seats on the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority, which is developing a sewer system to serve Sunset Beach and Calabash.

At the county board's regular meeting Monday, the commissioners unanimously agreed that they should not authorize one of those authorities to make a purchase that might conflict with plans of the other.

Calabash is also a member of the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority. But the town is continuing to study the possibility of purchasing Carolina Blythe, which already serves a large portion of the town. Utility owner Billy Burnett has tried unsuccessfully to sell his sewer system to the town of Calabash at a "non-negotiable" price of \$4.5 million.

After the town did not comply with his recent ultimatum demanding a firm purchase offer by Aug. 10, Burnett said he would "pursue the sale of our utilities to others."

In August, Burnett approached the Lower Cape Fear Water and

Sewer Authority and asked it to consider buying his company. In his agenda report for the authority's August meeting, Executive Director Kurt Taube said he had advised Burnett of several things that would have to happen before purchase negotiations could begin.

Taube told Burnett that the authority was not in a position to discuss the purchase unless negotiations between Carolina Blythe and Calabash reached a "no deal" conclusion "without possibilities of reconciliation."

He also informed Burnett that "any further consideration by the authority to purchase his utility would be subject to the approval of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners as well as the discretion of the authority board."

In a memorandum to the commissioners last week, County Manager Wyman Yelton advised against authorizing the purchase.

"This board has recently made appointments to the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority, which certainly has jurisdiction in the area where Carolina Blythe's sewer plant exists," Yelton wrote. "I recommend that this board not consent to the purchase...in view of our other authority becoming active."

Commissioners Chairman Don Warren agreed Monday night, saying "it doesn't make sense" for the county to create a possible conflict between two authorities on which it has appointed members.

# Board Seeks To Change School Budgeting Law

**(Continued From Page 1-A)**

In asking the board to support a new way of funding North Carolina schools, Commissioner Donald Shaw said allowing school boards to campaign for re-election on their own spending records would make them "more accountable" to citizens.

Under current state law, county boards of commissioners are required to appropriate enough money to allow school boards to operate an adequate system of education. Throughout the state, commissioners and school board frequently differ on how much money is "adequate." Several county boards are being sued by their school boards for more money.

Shaw said allowing the board of education to make its own case for more tax money would keep the board of commissioners from "getting caught in the middle" of funding disputes.

"It's one way to stop the fighting," Shaw said. "The way it is now makes us look like we're anti-education when we're not. We have a lot of things to consider in our budget besides schools. We have to justify our spending. We can't always fund everything they say they need. We don't operate on a free credit card that daddy gave us."

"Now we can't even get an audit out of them," Shaw said. "This might be a way to make them more accountable to the voters. We've got to start somewhere. We've got to do something besides butting heads every year."

Warren said several states, especially in the Northeast, allow school boards to operate independently by setting their own tax rate, which is added to the county tax levy. He said the idea "has been talked about be-

fore" and is likely to get "real strong consideration" from the state commissioners group "because of all the lawsuits pending."

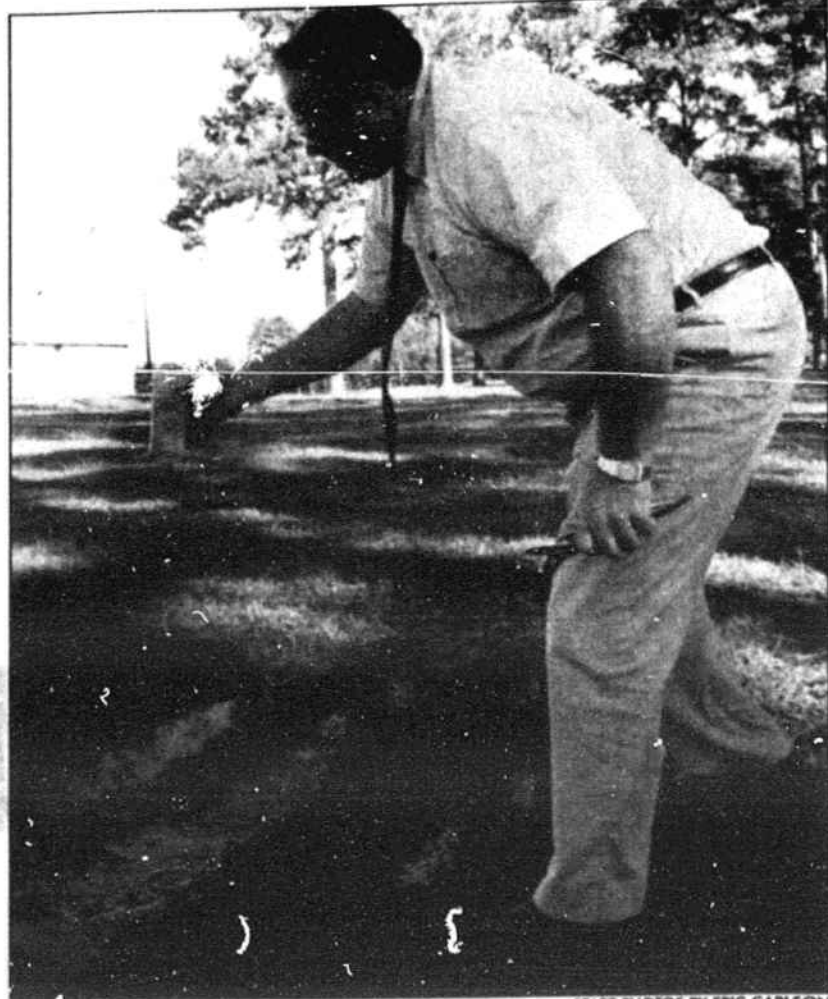
Seven of Brunswick County's ten board of education candidates who appeared at a forum in Calabash last week said they would oppose the idea of submitting school budgets directly to voters.

In an unrelated matter, the commissioners:

- Heard a report from Yelton that the American Refuse Co. is interested in submitting a proposal and is "eager to compete" for a contract to dispose of Brunswick County's solid waste in a regional Columbus County landfill. Brunswick is currently negotiating with a Fayetteville firm that proposes to transport the county's garbage to a facility where recyclable materials will be removed while the remainder of the waste is burned to generate electricity.
- Appointed Seaside surveyor Ricky Tompkins to the Brunswick County Planning Board to fill the unexpired term of James Russ, who resigned Sept. 19.
- Appointed Shallotte Mayor Sarah Tripp to the Brunswick County Hospital Authority to fill the unexpired term of Shirley Clemmons. She resigned Sept. 10, saying she has moved out of her appointed district.
- Appointed Brunswick County Planning Director Wade Horne to the N.C. Coastal Resources Advisory Council to fill a vacancy caused by the recent death of Robert Maultsby. Commissioner Wayland Vereen asked that a letter be sent to Maultsby's family, expressing the county's appreciation for his service on the council.
- Appointed John Bellamy to the Nursing Home Advisory Committee.



**SCHOOL** system maintenance director Dennis Carr (in photo at right) takes a water sample from one of the large puddles standing between Waccamaw Elementary School's playground and its septic field Thursday afternoon. The play area (in photo at left) was closed after treated effluent was found pooling under the swing set. The school is the third in the county to experience a failed septic system this year.



STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

## FUDDLES IN THE PLAYGROUND

# Waccamaw Septic System Shut Down After Failure

**BY ERIC CARLSON**

It's not as bad as Supply Elementary School. But it's not good.

That's how Bruce Withrow, environmental health specialist for the Brunswick County Health Department, described the failed sewage treatment system discovered at Waccamaw Elementary School last week.

Alerted by a concerned citizen, Health Director Michael Rhodes visited the school Thursday morning and found large puddles at the base of a septic field and what was "obviously sewage effluent" streaming under a swing set and into the nearby playground.

School officials were immediately ordered to keep children away from the area, Rhodes said. The septic field was shut down. A pump truck was called in to remove effluent from the holding tank and haul it away for treatment, a process that will have to be repeated at least twice a day until the problem is fixed.

A formal health violation notice was issued Tuesday, giving the school 30 days to come up with a plan to renovate or replace the treatment system, Withrow said. The school may be granted an extension

if it appears that officials are working diligently to resolve the problem.

"We're going to keep them on a shorter leash than we did in the past," Withrow said. "There will be no more of those games like there was with the other one."

The "other one" to which Withrow referred is at Supply Elementary School, where officials were notified in March that the septic system was in a state of "complete failure." The school operated for the rest of the school year by pumping and hauling away its waste water.

When August arrived, and there were still no plans approved for repairing Supply system, the health department threatened to keep the school closed. Eventually the school was given 90 days to make some progress toward repair. Strict health guidelines were issued for operating temporarily until it gets fixed.

Last month, Brunswick Community College was given 30 days to come up with plans to devise a plan for a failed septic system there. Withrow said problems at the college were less severe, because the overflowing nitrification field was in a wooded area away from student

traffic.

For similar reasons, Rhodes said the problem at Waccamaw Elementary doesn't pose as severe a health risk as was encountered at Supply.

"First of all, there is another level of treatment here," Rhodes said. "And secondly, you don't have effluent running back toward the school like you did at Supply."

The septic drain field at Waccamaw was installed about four years ago to replace an older system that disposed of pre-treated effluent into a ditch. The system uses a sand filter to remove most solids and some bacteria from the waste water before disposal. So the liquid running into the drain field—which used to flow into the ditch—is not raw sewage.

Still, Rhodes said standing puddles of effluent could pose a health risk to children, so the playground area near the septic field has been closed. Once the liquid recedes, natural processes will eliminate any excess bacteria and eventually make the area safe for use again, he said.

Withrow said the school system's maintenance director Dennis Carr is inspecting the sewage treatment facility but has yet to make a final determination about what caused it to

fail. A preliminary report was scheduled to be submitted to the health department Wednesday (Sept. 5).

Knowing some of the system's history, Withrow said he has a few suspicions about the cause of the problem. He called the drain field site "very marginal." And it appears ground water is seeping into the system, overloading its treatment capacity.

Both health officials said they have doubts about the possibility of repairing the old system. It may need to be replaced with a more sophisticated treatment process producing a cleaner effluent that can be disposed of by surface discharge.

Neither Rhodes nor Withrow would speculate about the possible cost or time involved in repairing or replacing the system.

# Cool Autumn Nights Ahead

Look for cool fall temperatures and average rainfall for the next few days, advises Jackson Canady, Shallotte Point weatherman.

Temperatures will dip to the crisp mid-50s at night with averages in the mid-70s during the daytime, he said. Expect less than a half-inch of rainfall.

For the period Sept. 27 to Oct. 3, Canady recorded a maximum high of 85 degrees on Sept. 28, Sept. 29 and Oct. 2. Low for the period, on Oct. 1, was 53. He measured 3/8 inch of rainfall.

# Candidates Speak Out In Calabash

**(Continued From Page 1-A)**

"Why is the superintendent driving around in a new Crown Victoria talking on his car phone when there are kids in school who don't have desks?" Warren remarked.

Roach was the only other commissioner candidate to respond with a "yes" when asked if the board was right to appeal. Although none of the others said they opposed the county's decision, all claimed they would have found a way to avoid a courtroom battle.

School board candidate Thorsen said he thought it was "wonderful" to see the schools awarded the additional money.

"But it will be up to the incoming board to determine how that money is spent," Thorsen said. "I intend to get a lot of that money into the classroom. I don't believe throwing money at education is the answer. It has to be spent wisely."

All the school board candidates applauded the jury award, but insisted that the school board needs to pay close attention to how the money is spent.

"I don't think it needs to go to a Crown Victoria for the superinten-

dent to ride around in," Carter said. "It needs to go to students."

The board of education candidates also were unanimous in their opposition to the idea of submitting the school board budget directly to the voters for approval. All seven voiced the opinion that more parental involvement and stricter discipline is needed in the schools, a sentiment likewise expressed by several of the commissioners candidates.

In the sheriff's race, Brown said he was "not one of the good old boys" and promised to take politics out of the sheriff's department. He said his "life experiences" as a decorated Vietnam veteran, a military police officer and a business owner had prepared him for the office.

Lt. Hewett emphasized his crime-fighting experience in Brunswick County as his primary qualification for the job. He described his 11 years in local law enforcement, from patrol deputy to head of the sheriff's department's Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program. He noted that police administrators across the country selected him as United States DARE Officer of the Year in 1993.

Both Lt. Hewett and Brown promised to keep the sheriff's de-

partment office open and manned 24-hours a day. Both said they would seek state funding for new deputies through the Sheriff's Alcohol Enforcement (SAFE) program recently adopted by the N.C. legislature in an effort to increase the involvement of local police in drunk driving enforcement.

The two candidates also agreed that because of population growth in southwestern Brunswick County, a satellite sheriff's department office and additional deputies are needed to patrol the area. The town of Calabash and the county commissioners would have to approve the idea, which would be funded mostly by the town.

Brown estimated that Calabash would need to spend about \$91,718 a year for five officers and five patrol cars, an amount he said was significantly cheaper than having the town fund its own police department. Lt. Hewett said those costs could be reduced by transferring vehicles already in use by the sheriff's department deputies who were already trained.

## Clarifications

The N.C. Motor Vehicle License Plate Agency in Shallotte closed, but only for one day.

An article in the Sept. 29 *Beacon* stated that the office would close on Oct. 5 for a mandatory Department of Motor Vehicles workshop.

"People are coming in thinking we're closing for good," a spokesman for the office said.

In an article in the Sept. 29 *Beacon* we covered Library Director Maurice Tate's report to the Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees about the summer reading program.

Ellen King, child services coordinator, said the report should not have stated certain numbers of children "completed" the branch's programs, but that they "chose to complete."

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# Memorial Service Saturday For Murdered Ash Woman

**(Continued From Page 1-A)**

travels during the past three years, but they were not surprised when he turned up near Charlotte. Last spring, authorities learned that Keeler applied for a drivers license, giving the address of a Charlotte mobile home park.

Investigators from Brunswick County, the Charlotte Police Department and the FBI searched the trailer park, but were unable to locate Keeler.

Keeler is being held without bond in Brunswick County Jail. A trial date has not been set in the case.

Noting that Brunswick detectives have invested "a lot of man hours" in the Keeler case, Lt. Marlowe said he looked forward to seeing the investigation resolved.

"For the family's sake, I'm glad we were able to locate her body," he said. "Now maybe they can finally put her to rest."

Mrs. Keeler's survivors include two sons, her mother and stepfather, a sister and two brothers. A memorial service will be held Saturday, Oct. 8, at 2 p.m. at Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

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