

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

Health Department Needs Help Keeping Tabs On Septic Systems

BY ERIC CARLSON

Recent septic system failures at two county schools and at Brunswick Community College have pointed out the need for the county health department to hire more people to keep watch on small septic systems, a health board committee reported Monday night.

The county won't be able to keep track of the "thousands of systems that have to be inspected regularly" without additional manpower, Health Director Michael Rhodes told the board on health.

"Either we're going to have to hire somebody to help us catch up with the problems, or we're going to have more problems down the line," said health board member Bruce Quaintance, chairman of the group's environmental health committee.

Under state health guidelines that went into effect July 1, 1992, all low-pressure septic systems must have a qualified person designated as the system operator. That person is responsible for regular flushing, inspection and other maintenance of the system.

The county health department is required to check maintenance records and inspect the systems at regular intervals ranging from every six months to every two years or more, Rhodes said.

He estimated that there are "thousands" of small septic systems—originally permitted by the state—which were transferred to county jurisdiction by the rule change. The state has not provided money to pay for the required supervision.

"The only way we're going to be able to meet the inspection schedule set by the state is with more manpower," Rhodes said.

Each small sewer system owner is responsible for designating a qualified manager who should file regular maintenance reports. But because there were so many systems transferred to county oversight at one time, health officials have been unable to keep track of them or monitor their upkeep.

"There's no list of what's out there, so we're not able to check behind all the operators," Quaintance said. "Sometimes we don't even know about a system until it fails."

Health Board Chairman Patrick Newton questioned the need for hiring additional personnel to oversee the systems.

"Why do we care?" Newton asked. "What are we going to do, form a search party and go looking for them? We don't really care about the ones that don't fail. Do we?"

Quaintance cautioned that neglecting state rules might result in a pattern of repeated failures, which could lead the state to prohibit the county from issuing septic system permits.

"We need to look at this if we're going to keep having development," Quaintance said.

Some system owners probably aren't aware of the requirements, Quaintance said. If the systems don't get

inspected, the lines may become clogged and the system can fail. The owner might be saddled with the cost of finding new land and installing a new septic system, he said.

Rhodes said someone from the health department needs to go through the county's septic system permit files to determine which ones need inspections. These should be entered into a computer data base so health specialists can visit them regularly as required by state regulations.

The board took no action on the recommendation and agreed to discuss it at a future meeting.

In other business, Rhodes announced that the Brunswick County Health Department recently received a Glaxo Corp. Child Health Recognition Award for its child immunization program. The county was one of 25 to receive the award, which was presented at the N.C. Public Health Association's annual meeting in Asheville.

Varnamtown Aldermen Prohibit Parking Vehicles, Trailers Along Fisherman Road

BY DOUG RUTTER

For years, local fishermen have parked their pickup trucks and boat trailers beside the road leading to Varnamtown's boat landing while they fished and gathered oysters and clams in Lockwood Folly River.

Now that Varnamtown officials have completed work on a public parking lot to serve the people who use the boat ramp, they've decided to prohibit parking along the side of the road.

On a 3-1 vote Monday night, aldermen agreed to ban parking on both sides of Fisherman Road between the boat ramp parking lot and the driveways of the two fish houses that sit at the end of the road.

Aldermen Will Mumford and John David Dawson supported Mayor Pro Tem Ennis Swain's motion to enact the parking ban. Board member Ada McDonald opposed the move, and Tony Varnum was absent.

In prohibiting roadside parking, aldermen kept a promise made last year to Fisherman Road residents who complained that people using the public boat ramp were blocking their driveways and preventing mail delivery.

Mumford said the N.C. Department of Transportation has agreed to put up "No Parking" signs along Fisherman Road as soon as the town sends the state agency a copy of its ordinance.

"We need to do the ordinance and we need to do what we said we were going to do," Mumford said. "We said we were going to have no parking when we established a parking area and that's what we need to do."

However, McDonald suggested allowing parking on a vacant tract on the south side of Fisherman Road between Old River Road East and the boat landing. She said there's enough space there for three vehicles and boat trailers.

"Can we have too much parking as long as it's legitimate parking?" McDonald asked. "You all do what you want to, but I will not vote for cutting that out."

Said Swain, "It's a can of worms any way but one, and that's no parking from our lot to the end of the road."

Town officials said boaters have been using the new parking lot, but not as many as they'd like to see.

"I'm hoping oyster season they'll use it more. That's why we need to get on with this," Mayor Judy Galloway said.

Oyster season opens Saturday.

Other Business

In other business Monday, aldermen:

- Agreed to send a letter to the Brunswick County Planning Department declining a county request for the town to change street numbers on Sunrise and Lancaster roads. The

county says the odd numbers and even numbers are on the wrong side on the road. McDonald said she followed a grid provided by the county in establishing the street numbers.

- Voted to buy two road signs to be placed at the town limits identifying Varnamtown as a "community watch" area. Mayor Galloway said the community watch was organized at a recent meeting with Don Gates of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

- Voted to release \$85.17 in state money to Region O of the Cape Fear Council of Governments. If the town board had not released the money, it would have returned to the state's general fund.

- Heard from McDonald that the Varnamtown Planning Board will meet Monday at 7:30 p.m. Among the items up for discussion will be an adult entertainment ordinance and campground ordinance.

Seeing Is Believing For Visiting Delegation

BY SUSAN USHER

Seeing is believing—at least that was the case with a Brunswick County delegation visiting the Ruth Patrick Science Education Center in Aiken, S.C., last week.

The center is the model for a science/math education program the Brunswick County Educational Foundation has proposed to serve Brunswick County.

On Oct. 5 and 6 a delegation representing the Brunswick County Schools, Brunswick Community College and the Brunswick County Educational Foundation visited the center on the grounds of the University of South Carolina at Aiken.

"The team agreed unanimously that Brunswick County children and teachers deserve to have such a facility," said Slockett. "We plan to work hard to obtain the necessary support from the community, local industry and government."

Other participants included Ralph Johnston, superintendent of schools; Donna Baxter, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Education; Michael Reaves, president of Brunswick Community College; Lewis Stanley, vice chairman of the BCC Board of Trustees; and Bob Slockett and Frank Blackmon of the Brunswick County Educational Foundation.

"We were all really impressed with what they had done and are anxious to start the process of developing plans for a program here in

the county," said Michael Reaves. "Seeing it in person is much better than reading about it."

The center is a cooperative effort of USCA, local industry and public school districts in the Aiken area to offer a permanent program to enhance science and mathematics education in local schools. Its hands-on approach to teaching is designed to help people experience the beauty, order and power of science and math, as well as the interest and fun of discovery, according to the center brochure.

Johnston and Reaves said visiting the center made it much easier to comprehend the center's approach to learning and teaching and to appreciate the partnership that created it. The center was built with private funds and operates with support from the university and the schools.

Reaves said he believes a program like that of the center would be the "best way" to bolster math and science education in Brunswick County, and would also help the community college. As with the Aiken project, any project begun in Brunswick County would start without a facility of its own, offering programs for teachers and students in whatever space is available.

To help get it started, Reaves said BCC would be willing to "find" the space required, and would also be receptive to the possibility of a permanent facility on the BCC campus someday.

As their next step Johnston and

Reaves will meet soon to plan the next steps: a center staff demonstration to show local residents what the center's programming is about.

"We need to get people excited about the possibility of doing something like that here," said Reaves.

Johnston said the school system is also hoping to generate that same kind of excitement among its employees by sending math and science teachers to visit the Aiken center.

"We feel that it's important for our teachers to have some ownership in this, that they see how this would be beneficial," said Reaves.

"I can't imagine anyone who teaches who wouldn't want to be a better teacher, who wouldn't want to have more resources to make teaching more effective and fun."

By helping teachers do their job better, he said, the end result will be better math and science students, improved grades and test scores.

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