

BRUNSWICK SUGGESTION CONSIDERED

Commissioners' Association May Ask Lawmakers For Separate School Funds Tax

BY ERIC CARLSON

Brunswick County's request to ask legislators to separate school funding from county budgets was warmly received by the N.C. Association of County Commissioners last week and will be considered for a lobbying effort next year, County Chairman Don Warren said Monday.

Warren was recently named to the statewide association's board of directors. At the Brunswick Commissioners' regular meeting Monday night, he said the group's governing board has agreed to ask its staff to come up with suggestions for alternative methods of funding schools in North Carolina.

The staff proposals will be considered by the directors at the association's Nov. 29 meeting in Asheville.

Earlier this month, the commissioners adopted a resolution asking the association to lobby state legislators for a change in school funding laws.

County boards of education currently submit annual budgets to county commissioners, who include school spending in the county budget that results in the local property-tax rate.

The commissioners feel the board of education would be "more accountable" for its spending if it levied its own taxes and had to justify its budget to voters every two years.

The current system often results in conflicts between the two boards. This year, the Brunswick County Board of Education took the county commissioners to court and were awarded a budget increase of nearly \$5 million. The decision is being appealed, but the county plans to raise property taxes by 10 cents to collect funds to pay for the award.

Warren said Green County is now involved in a similar battle with its board of education over a requested school funding increase that would add 16.5 cents to local taxes. That civil court trial was still in session Monday after more than three weeks of testimony, Warren said.

At its most recent meeting, the N.C. Association of County Commissioners modified its agenda to let Warren make a presentation about Brunswick County's school budget conflict. He said it "got their attention" and elicited "positive comments" from many of the other directors.

Each year, the association discusses its legislative goals at a November meeting and decides what issues to raise with state lawmakers during the next General Assembly. The final legislative agenda will be set in January, Warren said.

In another education-related matter Monday night, the board agreed to appropriate \$2,500 in "start-up money" for the Brunswick County Education Foundation to help fund its proposed Math-Science Education Center at Brunswick Community College. Another \$2,500 was designated to the foundation for its "teacher mini-grant" program, which helps fund individual education projects suggested by county teachers.

The board also:

- unanimously approved Commissioner Tom Rabon's nomination of Michael E. Royal of Boiling Spring Lakes as the District 4 representative on the zoning overlay study committee. Royal is director of the Small Business Center at Brunswick Community College.

- reappointed Julius Adams and George Evans to The Brunswick Hospital Board of Trustees.



PHOTO BY DEAN CHESSE

Oyster Bay Winners

Jessie and Steve Freitas are October "Yard of the Month" designees for the Oyster Bay section of Sea Trail Plantation. The neatly landscaped yard features colorful mums and is highlighted with a Halloween theme in one area.

BRUNSWICK COUNTY IS MODEL

Study Will Flag Damage-Prone Areas, Help Reduce Future Hurricane Losses

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County's coastline has become N.C. State University researcher John Fisher's guinea pig and it's all because of Hurricane Hugo.

Fisher, a professor and associate head of civil engineering at N.C. State, has developed a computer-based mapping system to identify coastal areas more likely to sustain flooding, erosion and structural damage when a hurricane strikes.

In a three-year, \$650,000 study launched last year, he and colleague Margery Overton, an associate professor of civil engineering, are using Brunswick County's shoreline as a model as they evaluate the utility of new digital photogrammetry—a process that uses aerial photography to produce accurate maps and charts by computer—developed by Intergraph Corp. of Huntsville, Ala. Their approach incorporates use of aerial photographs of the coast obtained from several state agencies with existing erosion rate data, water level prediction models and damage figures from Hurricane Hugo.

"We want to see if this is a better, more accurate way to determine historical erosion rates," said Fisher. He's predicting it will be.

Working in-house for now, they

"We want to see if this is a better, more accurate way to determine historical erosion rates."

—John Fisher

plan to survey the local shoreline in person later in the study. Their first preliminary results should be available in about 12 months, though the study will take the full three years to complete.

The information from the study can be used by a variety of agencies and groups to help prevent future damage from hurricanes.

For instance it could be used to better inform homeowners on the nature of their risk when investing in property in a hazard-prone area, to define safe hurricane evacuation routes, and to better define areas subject to flooding during storms so that more appropriate building setbacks can be established.

"It can be very, very, very useful information," said Fisher, who provides the data now used by the state Office of Coastal Management in establishing long-term erosion rates.

"If we can show them that it is cost effective, I think they will be interested in expanding this to other

counties beyond Brunswick," said Fisher. "They're always looking for better ways to identify risks and predict erosion rates and this may be of better quality."

Why Brunswick County as their model?

"Hurricane Hugo made the decision," Fisher said in a recent telephone interview.

Brunswick County was the hardest hit of any coastal area in North Carolina when Hurricane Hugo made landfall near McClellanville, S.C., on Sept. 12, 1989.

The study is being paid for with a \$350,000 grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), plus matching funds from N.C. State's College of Engineering Kenan Institute for Science, Engineering and Technology, and \$10,000 from the N.C. Division of Coastal Management.

As part of its hazard mitigation program, since 1988 FEMA has set aside 10 percent of the public assistance money given to areas struck by natural disasters for projects designed to reduce to eliminate the risk of future disasters. The money put in the pot after Hurricane Hugo could only be used to mitigate future risk in areas damaged by that specific storm.

It's Not Over Until It's Over, But Hurricane Season's Danger Is Past

BY SUSAN USHER

While the Atlantic hurricane season doesn't officially end until Nov. 30, Brunswick County residents can almost relax, for now at least.

"Our air and water temperatures have dropped past the danger point here," Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said Tuesday. "While a storm might develop, it is unlikely it can be sustained."

Hurricane season runs from June 1 through Nov. 30, with late August through early October the peak season for the North Carolina coast. The National Weather Service has documented tropical cyclones along the North Carolina coast as early as June 3 (1825) and as late as Dec. 1 (1925).

If the current inactivity holds, Canady said 1994 will become the season with the least hurricanes since 1925.

"We've had only one hurricane and it was at hurricane strength for only 24 hours," he said.

Based on the long-term average, nine or 10 storms typically reach at least tropical storm strength and are named in a given season. Six become hurricanes and three make landfall in the United States.

This year, University of Colorado professor Robert Gray, a consultant to the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables, Fla., predicted six named storms, including three on

the East Coast, and storms of higher intensities than generally seen in recent years, said Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan.

"This year, as happened last year, those predictions didn't hold up in the face of unusual atmospheric conditions."

Canady suggests this year's subdued season shouldn't be taken as an indication that Gray's predictions are way off course.

"It's still not fair to say that next year or the year after will be kind to us," said Canady. "I still believe the long-term pattern is moving more to the contrary. There's nothing to let our guard down on."

By Canady's estimation, one reason for the quiet hurricane season is the developing of an El Nino in the Pacific. He said he thinks that weather phenomenon has already made a difference.

"I would suggest it has already had an effect on this hurricane season. The west winds sheared the cloud tops off potential storm centers," he said.

The El Nino's influence may again translate into an "unusual" winter as one did several years ago. "It creates havoc in the atmospheric flow and that generally results in a very wet winter in the Southeast," said Canady. "We'll know by December how much effect it will

have."

This mild hurricane season also effects the overall energy budget for the planet, the patterns of heating and cooling. Hurricanes are cyclones that develop over the warm waters of the tropics and feed on water and heat energy. They are driven by the heat released by condensing water vapor and external mechanical forces.

"There will be a trade-off one way or the other with strong winter storms, or tornadoes or by some other means," warned Canady. "The energy budget has to be met."

Brunswick County hasn't ordered a hurricane evacuation of its coastal communities since Hurricane Hugo in September 1989, Logan said.

In the 1950s through mid-1960s, as many as three hurricanes a season threatened the North Carolina coast, the most memorable being Hurricane Hazel. The Category 4 storm made landfall in Brunswick County on Oct. 15, 1954.

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