

Water Pressure Among Questions Raised By Holden Beach Fire

BY ERIC CARLSON

What if? It's a question local firefighters and officials don't like to consider when they think about battling a major, multi-structure blaze in one of Brunswick County's tightly packed beach communities.

What if a house caught fire during a gale-force wind? What could be done if the fire started spreading to neighboring structures? What if the intense heat and flaming debris prevented firefighters from moving their equipment close enough to battle the blaze?

What if there weren't enough water pressure? All those questions—especially the last one—were being asked last week in the wake of an early morning fire that leveled two oceanfront homes and scorched two others on Holden Beach Oct. 21.

"At one point, they were down to zero residual pressure in those lines," said County Fire Marshall Cecil Logan. "If they had pumped any harder, they would have been sucking the pipes out of the ground."

More than 40 volunteers from six area fire departments responded quickly to the fire with numerous pieces of fire fighting equipment. But their most powerful pumps could not be used because there wasn't enough water pressure.

"We had the capacity to pump 2,250 gallons per minute," said Tri-Beach Volunteer Fire Chief Doug Todd. "We were only getting 800 gallons per minute out of the hydrants."

Area firefighters say it's not an uncommon problem in Brunswick County, especially in island beach communities where water systems often have long dead-end lines, Todd said. A system that has water flowing out through one pipe and back through another provides much better flow, especially in an emergency.

On Holden Beach, the last loop in the water line ends at High Point Street, near the Holden Beach Fishing Pier. From there to the west end of the system, it's a



A RAGING FIRE consumes a vacation home owned by Bill Mickey of Garner. The loss of two houses on the Holden Beach oceanfront Oct. 21 has raised concerns about whether there is enough water pressure on the island to fight a major fire.

dead-end line. So the farther you are from the water tank, the lower the water pressure.

Other parts of the county also have problems with

dead-end lines. But even in the Shallotte area, there are limits to the amount of water that can be moved through its older waterlines, which are smaller than those com-

monly installed today. Tanker trucks full of water were needed to provide firefighters with additional flow during a fire last summer that destroyed a commercial building in downtown Shallotte.

Bill Mickey of Garner, who owned one of the two homes destroyed in Holden Beach fire, has questioned the town's practice of lowering the level in its water tank during off-season months. He has expressed concern to local officials that reducing the amount of water in the tank also reduces the pressure in the lines.

The 300,000-gallon tank is lowered to about 225,000 gallons in the fall to circulate the water more often, which prevents treatment chemicals from building up in the system, said Town Manager Gus Ulrich.

Todd said the lowered tank level may reduce the pressure somewhat, but it isn't a major contributor to the problem of fighting a fire at that end of the island. He said whenever there is a major fire, the county water system pump station immediately begins flooding the tank to maintain its level.

"I don't think there would have been a significant difference if the tank was 100-percent full," Todd said. "The main problem is the dead-end line from High Point Street to the end of the island. The further you get, the less pressure you're going to have."

Todd is more concerned about the other "What if?" questions raised by the recent Holden Beach fire. He said firefighters were extremely lucky that there was only a mild north wind blowing at the time of the blaze. The light breeze directed most of the flames, heat and flying debris harmlessly over the oceanfront dune.

"When I got on the scene—before the first piece of equipment arrived—one house was fully involved and the other was half involved," Todd said. "I made the decision to write those two off and try to minimize the danger of losing more houses."

"I would have done the same thing if I had all the equipment in the world out there," he said.

Three Seeking Election To Conservation Board

Three candidates, including two incumbents with more than 60 combined years of service, will seek election Tuesday to the two available seats on the Brunswick Soil & Water Conservation District Board.

Incumbents are James D. Bellamy Jr. of Shallotte and Harold C. Robinson of Supply. R.C. (Ray) Gilbert of Southport is a first-time candidate.

Bellamy has served on the board for 45 years and Robinson has more than 20 years of service.

Terms on the five-member, non-partisan board are for four years. The board sets policies for the county's soil and water conservation office in Bolivia.

The office works with local farmers to help them maintain environmental standards on their farms through the use of Best Management Practices. The conservation office also promotes natural resource education in the schools.

Other current board members are Mary Earp of Winnabow and Bryan Smith of Longwood. Worth Mercer of Bolivia recently resigned from the board, and Gene Ward of Winnabow is expected to be appointed in his place.

Shallotte Tapping In To JOBS Program

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte officials have agreed to participate in a program that will provide free labor for the town while giving welfare recipients valuable job experience and skills.

Aldermen voted unanimously Tuesday night to take part in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) program, which is administered by the Brunswick County Department of Social Services.

Jenny Britt of the local DSS office said the program enables people on welfare to earn some of their monthly benefits by working at least 16 hours per week for a public, non-profit organization such as a local government.

Britt said the town would not incur any cost and could use the workers for everything from clerical work to cleaning streets.

Shallotte officials said Tuesday they probably have the most need for laborers in the maintenance department.

Britt said town officials would be given the opportunity to interview prospective workers in advance and would not have to retain any worker they do not want.

The object of the program is to allow someone on welfare to provide a community service for six to nine months while learning job skills and getting a reference that could lead to a real job.

"It's a lot like a student intern would do in school," Britt said.

By participating in the program, Shallotte will be required to keep a monthly timecard for each worker and evaluate each one's performance.

Shallotte officials were considering participating in the program earlier this year, but they were concerned at that time about insurance coverage for the workers.

Britt said the N.C. Department of Social Services provides worker's compensation insurance. Aldermen also learned Tuesday that the town's

insurance policy would cover liability.

"I think the concept of this is trying to get people back in employment and off welfare. I'd like to see us work with them," Alderman Carson Durham said. "By working for the town 16 or 20 hours a week they're earning part of that check."

Committee Members Needed
Apparently there aren't many residents or business owners in Shallotte who have ideas on how the community can be improved.

After more than a month of advertising in local newspapers and on cable television, only three people have volunteered to serve on the "Committee For The Improvement Of Shallotte."

Aldermen voted to establish the committee on Sept. 20, but town officials have had a hard time finding people willing to work.

The committee will consider issues such as downtown beautification, the Shallotte River area, the availability of grants and ways to

encourage businesses to locate in town.

Anyone interested in serving on the committee is asked to contact town hall.

Other Business
In other business Tuesday, aldermen:

■ Agreed to spend up to \$1,500 for an appraisal of approximately 300 acres of timberland owned by International Paper Company. Town officials may purchase the property for additional spray fields as part of the planned sewer system expansion.

■ Voted to purchase a police patrol car to replace one that was totaled in an accident Friday night. Lt. Chuck Yager was driving a 1987 Chevrolet that was destroyed when it collided with a deer.

■ Changed the date of the next town board meeting from Nov. 15 to Nov. 16. Town officials plan to attend an N.C. Department of Transportation public hearing in Wilmington on the 15th.

Candidates Spend \$80,000 In Race To Succeed Sheriff

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Brown listed a total of 14 contributions on his latest report, totalling \$2,394. He reported making a personal loan of \$10,000 to his election campaign.

The largest donors to Brown's campaign so far have been former N.C. Secretary of Transportation Thomas Harrelson and his wife Julia of Raleigh, and Basil and Gretna Watts of Southport. A \$500 contribution was listed from each couple.

In the race for Brunswick County Commissioner, District 3 Republican challenger Leslie Collier leads spending in the campaign with a total outlay of \$4,153. Her opponent, incumbent Commissioner Wayland Vereen has spent \$1,289 so far.

Collier's largest contributor was listed as the "Brunswick County Committee," which donated \$200, and Clayton and Ruth Collier of Pembroke Pines, Fla., who gave \$200. Vereen's largest donation came from Loretta Price, who gave \$200.

District 5 Democratic Party challenger W.M. (Bill) Sue was the second biggest spender in the commis-

sioner's race, with a total outlay of \$2,182. His largest contributors were S.A. Sue Jr. of Greensboro, who gave \$600, and the Tidewater Political Action Committee, which donated \$500 to his election effort.

Incumbent county commissioner Chairman Don Warren (D-District 1) also received a \$500 contribution from the Tidewater PAC, which is registered with the N.C. Board of Elections in Raleigh under the name of Robert Mauney of Bald Head Island.

Sue's financing report lists the name of Thomas I. Stores of Bald Head Island with his Tidewater PAC donation.

Total campaign expenditures so far for other commissioners candidates were listed on their reports as follows: Warren, \$1,819; Commissioner Tom Rabon (D-Dist. 4), \$1,821; challenger W.A. (Alfonza) Roach (D-Dist. 2), \$1,003.85; challenger Douglas Simmons (R-Dist. 1), \$641; Commissioner Donald Shaw (R-Dist. 5), \$403; Commissioner Jerry Jones (R-Dist. 2), \$286; and challenger Theron (Woody) Leonard (R-Dist. 4), \$37.

OIB Berm Plan Not Enough, Homeowner Says

(Continued From Page 1-A)

pay 65 percent of the cost and the town and other non-federal sources would pay the remaining 35 percent, roughly \$3.58 million.

If the town chooses to extend the length or location of the project, it might have to pick up a greater percentage of the tab. According to Tom Jarrett of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Wilmington District Office, 65 percent of the cost of the preferred option generally sets the maximum amount of money the Corps would contribute to any project that's approved.

"We look up and down the beach where the investment would reap the greatest return, then come up with a proposal to optimize the investment," he said. "That becomes the National Economic Development (NED) Plan."

If the town chooses another option it is forwarded through Corps channels as the "preferred local plan." If the costs exceeds the NED plan, local sources pay the difference.

The Corps plans to complete its study by January or February for review by the Atlanta regional office staff.

Corps, Town Eye Compromise

Before the town commits to any option, Mayor Betty Williamson said the alternatives will be discussed at another workshop open to property owners so that Corps representatives can answer technical questions.

"The town can't always please everyone," she said. "We always listen, but the decision will be the board's."

Both town and Corps officials are optimistic about reaching an affordable compromise that will help the east end.

"It's all tentative," said Jarrett, "but we may be able to build a project and the east end area get some benefit from sand wash from the project area, a secondary benefit, without affecting the project cost. The bottom line is, it looks like we can work out something."

Mayor Williamson said the town is "leaning toward" a variation on the Corps' recommendation, a shorter version that would increase the dune height to 12.5 feet and shift the project eastward, running 7,750 feet

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—Mayor Betty Williamson

from Winnabow to Concord streets. The estimated cost would be \$10.2 million, of which non-federal sources would pay \$3.6 million.

"A town couldn't afford to do this without federal funds," said Williamson. "If we don't go with what they recommend there may not be any federal participation."

East End Alternative Costly
Another recently added alternative that would shift the project toward the east end, extending 10,000 feet from Whiteville Street to Union Street, would use a 10-foot dune elevation and would cost more to build and maintain. Of the total \$11.3 million construction price, non-federal sources would have to come up with roughly \$8 million of the total.

Maintaining this alternative would cost an estimated \$2.4 million every three years, compared to \$585,000 for the town's preferred option. The average annual return of benefits would be an estimated \$807,000, compared to \$2 million for either the original Corps plan or the alternative eyed by the town.

"It's a more unpredictable area. To put fill in an area like that we would need a terminal jetty or groin and we've had that battle with the state before. It wouldn't be cost effective otherwise."

Jarrett said that as part of the dune and berm project, the channel to Shallotte Inlet would be straightened, re-oriented and widened from 500 feet up to 1,500 feet at the bar to the ocean and dredged to a depth of 15 feet. Maintenance dredging every three years would provide an estimated 1.5 million cubic yards of high-quality dredge spoil that could be used to replenish the project; additional material may be taken from offshore.

Widening Channel Adds Bonus

The wider navigation channel "would be a big incidental benefit to fishermen," he said, and might also have some shoreline benefits.

Commissioner Ken Proctor said

the inlet now migrates westward at about 18 feet to 20 feet annually, with shoreline erosion of up to feet.

After Hurricane Hazel, said Jarrett, the channel was straight and the beaches more stable. It appears that when the channel began to migrate west and align with Holden Beach was when the east end situation began to deteriorate. Based on experience with projects elsewhere, the Corps is convinced that when the channel is widened and moved the shoal on the east end of Ocean Isle would reform more like a delta, creating more of a buffer.

Also, he predicted, "material should migrate onto the west end of Holden Beach without our having to pump it there; it would be driven by wave action."

The project as proposed "isn't an east end project," Tocyski said, but rather "a project by Corps standards that says the berm and dune go here because it's most cost effective."

In a telephone interview from his home at Lake Zurich, Ill., he said, "I think the ultimate solution won't come from a soft structure. It will be hard structure."

Seeks More Aggressive Solution

Tocyski wants east end property owners to have an active role in the

decision-making process and for the town to stake out its position.

"What I've asked the town to do is to take a pro-active stand, to say what it's willing to do," he said in a telephone interview from his home at Zurich Lake, Ill., referring to both short- and long-term actions.

"The town might have to be more aggressive in collecting revenues. It could pursue a change in regulations to allow a hardened structure. It could hold a workshop with east end property owners to explain the options."

"Unless the town and residents really work together for a pro-active solution and even try to pursue a possible change in state regulations, there may not be a 100 percent solution for saving the east end," he predicted.

Proctor shares the property owner's frustration.

"What disturbs me no end is for the Corps of Engineers to say that for \$5 million we can solve your erosion problem by hardening the inlet," he said. "CAMA regulations won't even look at a hard structure and what they can do."

Since the town requested the Corps' assistance in 1989, it has been building a beach renourishment and erosion protection fund to pay its share, using revenues from 3 cents of the property tax levy matched with an equal sum of accommodations or room tax revenues. By next July 1, the fund will have grown to approximately \$575,000. Still, the mayor said the town may have to increase its contribution to help cover the cost though it also plans to seek state funds.

Expect Highs In Upper 60s

Typical early November weather's in the forecast for the South Brunswick Islands after an unusually wet October.

Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said Tuesday he expects temperatures to range from the upper 40s at night into the upper 60s during the daytime, with not more than a half inch of rainfall.

For the period of October 25-31, Canady recorded a high of 81 degrees on Oct. 30 and a low of 39 degrees the night of Oct. 28. A daily average high of 74 degrees and a nightly average low of 54 degrees resulted in a daily average temperature of 64 degrees, which is about 5 degrees above the long-term average for that time of year.

Canady measured one and six-tenths inches of rainfall on his gauge for the period, bringing total rainfall for the month of October to a whopping 10 and two-thirds inches.

"That's three times the normal accumulation for the month," he said.

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON
Established Nov. 1, 1962
Telephone 754-6890
Published Every Thursday
At 4709 Main Street
Shallotte, N.C. 28459

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