

PRICE TAG APPROACHING \$8 MILLION

Nov. 21 Hearing Set On Financing New Elementary School

BY SUSAN USHER

Since planning began for a new Leland area school 16 months ago, building costs have climbed, school design requirements have changed, and the north Brunswick area has continued to grow.

Left with the choice of a project that might take eight to 10 years to pay off instead of five, or a smaller school that would be crowded when it opens in fall 1996, Brunswick County school board members and commissioners are eyeing a project that will cost nearly \$8 million.

Meeting briefly Monday, Brunswick County Commissioners scheduled a public hearing for Monday, Nov. 21, on the proposed installment financing of up to \$8 million to build and equip a new elementary school in northern Brunswick County. The hearing will begin at 5:45 p.m. in the commissioners' chambers at the Brunswick County Government Center.

County and school officials had tentatively agreed to finance a \$6 million to \$6.5 million project over five years on an installment purchase plan, based on an expected cost of \$65 per square foot. The cost was to be repaid from state sales tax revenues designated for school construction or equipment purchase, with no local funds used.

The new school, to be built on River Road in Belville, is intended to relieve existing overcrowding at Lincoln Primary and Leland Middle schools, and to accommodate anticipated growth in the northern part of the county. Actual enrollment in grades kindergarten through five at the two schools is 1,168.

The school board wants to put out for bid a 94,675

square foot, 27-classroom school that would serve 650 to 700 students. If built today, the school would have room for only 80 new students.

Architect Charles Boney Jr. estimates construction would cost \$6.6 million to \$7.1 million, at \$70 to \$75 per square foot. The size and cost increases reflect additional cafeteria space required by the state and projected state reductions in class size for grades kindergarten through third grades.

Boney said that the N.C. Division of School Planning estimates school building costs have increased 8.93 percent over the past year, from \$68.45 to \$74.56 per square foot on average statewide.

School board members considered, but didn't like, an alternative plan for a 19-classroom school that would serve 456 to 513 students. With no built-in gym seating or loading/unloading canopies, it would cost between \$5.6 million and \$6 million but would be already overcrowded when it opened in fall 1996.

"I can't believe we would even consider building a school that size," said District 5 board member Yvonne Bright. "It would be ridiculous even to build one that we would have to add on to two years after it was built."

The figure to be financed will also include the school board's repayment of money advanced by the county for the project. And, strapped for capital funds, the school board decided last Wednesday to ask commissioners to borrow \$600,000 to furnish the new school and wire it for a computer network.

Supply Elementary School was built entirely with state half-cent sales tax money, but there wasn't enough

money on hand to buy adequate library books or to wire the school for computers before it opened, mistakes the school board doesn't care to repeat.

"We're still buying library books for that school because we didn't have enough money two years ago," said Chairman Donna Baxter.

Also last Wednesday the school board delayed advertising for construction bids until the county officially names the school board its agent for the project. The board also wants Superintendent Ralph Johnston to further discuss with county officials the latest cost estimates as well as several other questions. Architects Boney & Associates had wanted to begin advertising for bids Nov. 3 and to accept them Nov. 30.

Finding the site presently "unsuitable for school use," a legal formality, the board voted unanimously to transfer the deed to the county for the sum of \$10, subject to four provisions recommended by Peterson. These include the county naming the school board as agent for the construction project, leasing it to the school board to operate during the financing period, conveying the school and site to the school board for the sum of \$10 once the loan is repaid, and general agreement by the two boards on the installment purchase plan.

Under the financing instrument chosen by the county, the commissioners must hold title to the school until the loan is repaid because, as with a mortgage, the school would serve as the only security for the loan.

Janice Burke of the Local Government Commission, which supervises financing by local governments, said last Friday that increasing the amount to be borrowed to

\$8 million probably would not affect Brunswick County's plans for private placement of the debt.

"Even with \$8 million they should be able to place it directly," she said. "If you have to issue certificates of participation it would be more expensive than a bond issue."

Under installment purchase agreements, local governments have two options. They can place the debt privately, borrowing (up to \$15 million) through a financial institution after "shopping" for the best terms. If the interest rates obtained are extremely close to those available on a general obligation bond issue, the county can save money by private placement because the associated costs are lower. The second installment alternative is to issue certificates of participation (up to \$20 million) in the public market, but the cost is much higher.

Plans for the new school must still receive clearance from several state agencies. The school system is also waiting for a written commitment from Belville for the town's new sewer system to serve the school. Without that commitment, construction cannot begin. The site is not suitable for a septic system.

Belville Mayor Ken Messer said Friday that by the time the new "Belville Elementary School" is built, sewer service will be available.

"Tell them, yeah, they can have that," he said. "We can work it out. We should be in reach of them by December."

Messer said the town expects to soon begin installing sewer lines to serve both Brunswick Cove nursing home and the new park on the Brunswick River.

Brunswick County Beach Officials Meet To Discuss Menhaden

BY DOUG RUTTER

Representatives of five Brunswick County beach towns met Tuesday at Holden Beach to discuss how their communities should deal with the sticky menhaden fishing issue.

Holden Beach Mayor Gay Atkins said the town officials reviewed a proposed agreement between six beach municipalities, three menhaden fishing companies and the N.C. Fisheries Association.

Atkins said each town board will consider the agreement, which is designed to resolve an ongoing conflict between the tourist-dependent towns and commercial fishing boats that operate close to shore.

Holden Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach, Long Beach and Caswell Beach were represented at Tuesday afternoon's meeting. The proposed agreement also would affect Yaupon Beach.

The town officials are concerned about menhaden fishing boats working close to shore and accidentally spilling fish that wash up on the strand. They see menhaden fishing as a threat to the county's biggest industry—tourism.

Earlier this year, beach towns asked the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission to require menhaden boats to stay at least 1.5 miles offshore between May 1 and Sept. 30

and at least one-half mile offshore Oct. 1 through Dec. 31.

The state commission never considered the request. Instead, a committee of local officials and the three menhaden companies that work off the Brunswick County coast was established in hopes of drafting an agreement.

The proposed agreement reviewed Tuesday sets forth procedures for the N.C. Fisheries Association to notify local beach towns when menhaden boats are working off Brunswick County.

The agreement, slated to take effect Jan. 1, also addresses reimbursing towns for cleanup of menhaden

spills and the use of anti-foaming agents to reduce oily discharge from the fishing vessels.

Atkins said the town officials who met Tuesday decided to change some wording in the agreement.

"We reviewed it and will be making some changes. Then it will be presented to each town's board," she said. "Each board will look at it, review it, then probably we will sign the agreement."

The N.C. Fisheries Assoc. has proposed setting up a meeting within

the next two weeks for the purpose of signing the two-page document.

Atkins said the beach towns have "geared this agreement to accommodate what's important to us."

"Our concern is the protection of the Brunswick County beaches and the tourist industry that we have, and of course the citizens and any spillage that would cause them problems," she said.

"The ones that met today were comfortable with what we came up with, but we have to take it back to

our boards for their review."

There are three menhaden fishing companies that work off the Brunswick County coast. Beaufort Fisheries Inc. is based in Carteret County and the other two are based in Virginia.

"The representatives of the municipalities, their concerns are the citizens on the beaches and what's happening to their beaches more than the menhaden fishing industry," Atkins said. "Economically we really don't receive any benefits."

One Man Shot, One Arrested

A fight over a woman resulted in a shooting that sent one man to the hospital and another to jail outside the old International Longshoremen's hall in Southport Tuesday afternoon, according to a Brunswick County Sheriff's Detective.

The victim's name had not been released at press time. He was taken by ambulance to Doshier Hospital after the incident, which occurred at about 2:30 p.m., Detective Steve Mason said.

The man was later sent to New Hanover Regional Medical Center in Wilmington, where Mason said he was in serious condition with a bullet wound to the upper chest.

By 3 p.m., a suspect was in custody and was undergoing questioning at the Southport Police Department Tuesday night, Mason said. A spokesman there said

Southport Police Chief Bob Gray was busy with the follow-up investigation and was available for comment Tuesday evening.

Several sheriff's deputies were asked to respond to the hospital, where a crowd of the victim's "so-called friends" got into a shoving match with emergency personnel, resulting in an unknown injury to a nurse, Mason said. A warrant for assault is expected to be issued against the suspect in that incident.

"It appears the victim got into an altercation over somebody catching somebody with somebody's girlfriend," said Mason, who arrived after both men were taken from the scene. One of the two men apparently pulled out a gun, possibly a 9mm autoloading pistol, and fired one time, Mason said.

The investigation is being handled by Southport Police.

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