

Waldmiller Ends 5-Year Stint As Leader Of Controversial SBTA

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BY SUSAN USHER

Clete Waldmiller presided for the last time Saturday at a meeting of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association after five years at the helm of the often controversial organization.

As he had pledged two years ago, Waldmiller is retiring from the board of directors after six years. The former IBM manager said he and his wife, Betty, plan to enjoy retirement and grandparenting, and have several trips scheduled for next year. "I'll be 70 in January. It's time to slow down a little bit," he said. "But I still plan to stay involved in some fashion."

Waldmiller has helped steer the SBTA as it completed legal action to block construction of a high-rise bridge to the Sunset Beach island, forcing a full environmental study by the state now under way, and to prove public ownership of "Lot 1-A," the oceanfront lot at the foot of Sunset Boulevard and adjacent to the pier. The town of Sunset Beach has developed the public access area with motor vehicle and bicycle parking, a gazebo seating area and a crossover to the beach.

His retirement comes as the SBTA contemplates legal action a third time, to force the state to require a full en-

vironmental impact statement concerning sewer system development plans of the South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority. The state issued a "finding of no significant impact," which the SBTA is questioning. As of Saturday an SBTA poll had received only 20 votes against pursuing legal action, but the deadline for replies was still several days off, reported Minnie Hunt.

Under SBTA bylaws no response to a mail polling of the membership is counted as a "yes". If 33 percent of the membership does not send in "no" responses, the board will pursue legal action and will ask the membership will to contribute to a special legal fund, since dues cannot be used for that purpose.

"Is there no interest in this group in cleaning up our waters?" asked resident property owner Carl Bazemore. "Are we interested only in stopping growth?" Fielding his and other questions about the proposed sewer system, Hunt said the SBTA is concerned that runoff from denser development supported by the proposed system

will do more harm than good to local waters. "We're not against central sewer," she said. "We are against central sewer without documented plans for a concurrent stormwater runoff system. At this point we don't have that."

The approximately 85 members at the SBTA meeting Saturday morning at the Sunset Beach Fire Station honored Waldmiller with a standing ovation and a resolution saluting his "genuine commitment to the real public good" and the Waldmillers' support of the organization's goals and objectives.

The SBTA Board of Directors will elect new officers in January, said Secretary-Treasurer Minnie Hunt. At Saturday's meeting the membership elected three board members by acclamation, Joe Brandel, Warren Knapp Jr. and Barry Lentz.

Poll Respondents Favor Secession

Lentz said of the 1,317 island property owners who have responded to two mailings, 1,139 favor establishment of a separate island government, while on 178 oppose it. "That's about as clear a statement of support as you could expect, and more than we expected," he said.

The SBTA plans to cross-check the confidential responses against new town tax rolls to make sure all respondents are property owners, then use the survey results to seek special legislation to establish a separate town—a move the Sunset Beach Town Council opposes. Advocates of secession say islanders' viewpoints aren't given adequate consideration by the town, though their property and accommodations taxes make up a large portion of the town budget.

"When all is said and done, we lose," said one unidentified full-time resident Saturday during the sewer discussion. "Island residents don't have enough representation to offset the rest of the community."

If legislators challenge the validity of the results, said Lentz, an independent auditor will be hired to validate the results rather than break the confidentiality of the survey.

At its Labor Day weekend the SBTA voted to explore the possible split from the mainland at the request of island property owners, with Raymond Zetts heading the committee. Surveys were mailed out in September and October.



WALDMILLER

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