

# Opinions Still Split On Sunset Span

BY SUSAN USHER

Between 125 and 150 people milled through the Jones/Byrd Pavilion Tuesday evening, asking questions, jotting comments and studying computer-enhanced photographs of the Sunset Beach Bridge and three alternatives for replacing the link between the Sunset Beach mainland and island.

Photos and schematics displayed at the second in a series of informational workshops held by the N.C. Department of Transportation and consulting engineers Greiner, Inc., depicted three "reasonable and feasible" build alternatives to keeping the existing bridge as is, or rehabilitating it. Those are a 65-foot fixed-span bridge built along either the center corridor or on a more western route, and a 35-foot mid-level bascule (draw) bridge built along the center corridor. Six other alternatives presented earlier have been dropped.

No single proposal garnered widespread support Tuesday.

"You name an opinion, we've had it," said David Peterson of Greiner, Inc. "There's no consensus and some people have mentioned they're saddened by that."

"I'd be trying to explain something and people would start arguing. There would be one person for something and someone else against it."

Peterson said he's encountered "some skepticism" and wants to encourage greater participation in the process. "Some people believe the state has already decided, but the state hasn't made up its mind," he said. "Any of the three can be built."

Faith and Richard Plyler of Hickory Avenue took a close look Tuesday at the high-rise center corridor span, which would bring a three-lane accessway across their property overlooking the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The route would do more than invade their privacy, the Plylers said. It would cross the Slough Canal at four feet above sea level, blocking access by all but the small-

est boats to the docks at Bill's Seafood now used by commercial fishermen.

"I want a bridge, but not there," said Richard Plyler.

Agusta Mylroie said she and her husband, Robert, prefer the bascule to a high-rise. "You can't cross a high-rise in a hurricane once the winds increase," she said, noting the 45 mph safety cap on the bridges that serve Holden Beach and Ocean Isle Beach.

Route and height don't matter to Lois Vander Poel, so long as the existing pontoon bridge is replaced. "I just want a bridge," said the mainland Sunset Beach resident.

Sometime next summer, after a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared, Greiner, Inc. and the DOT will conduct a third informational workshop. The same options will be presented to the public, but in much greater detail, said Julie Hunkins, DOT project manager. Soon afterward a formal public

hearing to receive oral comments on the EIS will be held.

The entire package, which may or may not include a recommendation from the planning group, will then go to the state Board of Transportation for consideration. Once the board chooses an alternative, a final draft of the EIS will be prepared and reviewed by a federal judge to determine the adequacy of the state's environmental evaluation.

Construction permits had been obtained and bids for a high-rise western corridor bridge had been let in 1990 when a federal judge stopped construction in a suit brought by the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association. U.S. District Judge Earl Britt declared the environmental assessment study by DOT and resulting finding of no significant impact inadequate. He voided the permits and directed the state to do a full environmental impact statement taking into account the impact of a new bridge on the human as well as natural environment.

# Hearings Set On Beach Lot Coverage

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach officials have been talking about "lot coverage" and "ground level" for so long, it only seems appropriate that the discussion drag into the new year.

Commissioners voted Monday to hold what they hope will be the final public hearings on the definitions of lot coverage and ground level at their Jan. 9 meeting.

The proposed restrictions on lot coverage were revised following a recent meeting between town officials and a representative from the N.C. Division of Coastal Management.

The latest version would prohibit landowners from covering more than 30 percent of the "usable area" of their lots with structures and other "impermeable surfaces" such as driveways.

Usable area, which in many cases is less than the deeded lot area, would be determined by taking into consideration bulkheads, marsh areas and the first line of stable natural vegetation along the oceanfront.

Holden Beach currently limits lot coverage to 30 percent of the platted area, which can be significantly greater than usable lot area on beachfront and waterfront lots.

Although the town board conducted one public hearing on the lot coverage proposal and invited public input at two other meetings, Town Attorney Elva Jess recommended that commissioners hold another hearing because the original draft has been changed several times.

"It would probably be in our best interest to have another public hearing. However, I don't think we're going to hear anything new," Jess said at Monday night's board meeting.

Holden Beach developer Alan Holden asked

commissioners to provide a grace period of 60 or 90 days between the time they approve the lot coverage rules and the time they take effect.

The definition of ground level, which is needed in order to enforce the town's 35-foot building height limit, has not been changed significantly in the last few months.

In most cases, ground level would be "the average of the highest and lowest elevations on the perimeter of the building footprint..."

On lots that are filled, ground level would not "exceed an elevation of more than 18 inches above the average elevation of the center crown of the street..."

### Term Limits

The town board will hold another public hearing Jan. 25 on a proposal to limit the number of terms that the mayor and commissioners may serve.

Board members are trying to gauge public opinion on a plan that would prohibit elected officials from serving more than eight years in one office.

A resolution approved Monday night indicates that the town may need to hold a referendum before it requests state legislation to amend the town charter and impose term limits.

Holden Beach already has limits on the number of terms residents may serve on the planning board and board of adjustment.

### Other Business

In other business Monday, commissioners:

■ Decided to wait until Jan. 9 to appoint an alternate member to the planning board. The seat became vacant when Myra Burke resigned, and the term expires in July 1995. Commissioner Sid Swarts nominated Harold Gibhardt and David

Sandifer nominated Beverle Weller.

■ Voted to spend \$4,700 for a new mosquito sprayer. Town Manager Sean Anderson said the old one is out of commission and beyond repair.

■ Presented a letter of commendation to police officer Dexter Ludlum for his actions during the Oct. 21 fire that destroyed two homes in the 900 block of Ocean Boulevard West.

■ Met in executive session to discuss a legal matter. After the session, commissioners voted to delete a section of the town code that requires outdoor lights to be shielded in residential areas. On a 3-2 vote, the board rejected acceptance of deed for a beach accessway between 106 and 108 Ocean Boulevard East. Board members said they need more information before accepting it.

■ Voted to spend \$900 to hire a consultant to perform a mock Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspection. Anderson said OSHA plans to visit every town in the state by the end of 1995. He said the consultant, a former OSHA inspector, will tell the town what it needs to do to avoid fines. "I know that (\$900) sounds expensive, but when you're talking about a couple hundred thousand in fines it's minimal," Anderson said.

■ Agreed to accept a free bicycle rack from the N.C. Department of Transportation. It will be placed at the regional beach access on Jordan Boulevard.

■ Heard from Anderson that Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. (BEMC) plans to temporarily discontinue its underground wiring work on the island at the end of the year. Work is expected to resume next fall. Anderson said BEMC officials told him the work stoppage is needed for financial reasons.

# Holden Beach Commissioners Eye Third Sewer Study

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners, uncertain if hundreds of septic tank systems buried on the island are damaging the environment, might hire an engineer to investigate.

When the town board meets Jan. 9, commissioners and a representative from Central Carolina Engineering (CCE) of Monroe will discuss a proposed study to determine if septic systems are polluting the groundwater.

Town Manager Sean Anderson and board members Jim Fournier and David Sandifer met last week with CCE engineer Gray Walls, who has offered to perform the study for \$25,500.

If commissioners decide to hire CCE or another engineering firm, it would be the town's third wastewater study in seven years.

A state grant paid for a 1987 study by McKim & Creed Engineers

of Wilmington. Two years later, the town paid \$42,500 for a similar study by Houston & Associates of Shallotte.

Anderson, who's been working at Holden Beach for three weeks, said Monday that the previous two studies did not give town officials the information they needed to make an informed decision about the need for a sewer system.

"I believe this will lead Holden Beach to the answer it's looking for concerning sewer," Anderson said of the CCE offer.

Central Carolina Engineering proposes establishing monitoring wells at various locations on Holden Beach to track the flow of septic tank pollution as well as monitor canals for pollution attributable to septic systems.

The estimated cost of \$25,500 includes \$10,000 for lab testing, \$500

for monitoring well materials and \$15,000 for engineering costs.

Anderson said the study would determine if septic systems are polluting the environment and let town officials and residents know whether Holden Beach needs a sewer system.

The question of whether the island needs a sewer system has been debated for years, and residents are pretty evenly split on the issue.

"If that puts to bed once and for all if we do need a sewer system it's money well spent," Sandifer said of the study.

Said Fournier, "This is an honest effort to get facts about where we are, what we're doing and what we need."

Anderson said the proposed CCE study would produce results after one year and the town would have the option of continuing to monitor pollution levels in the future.

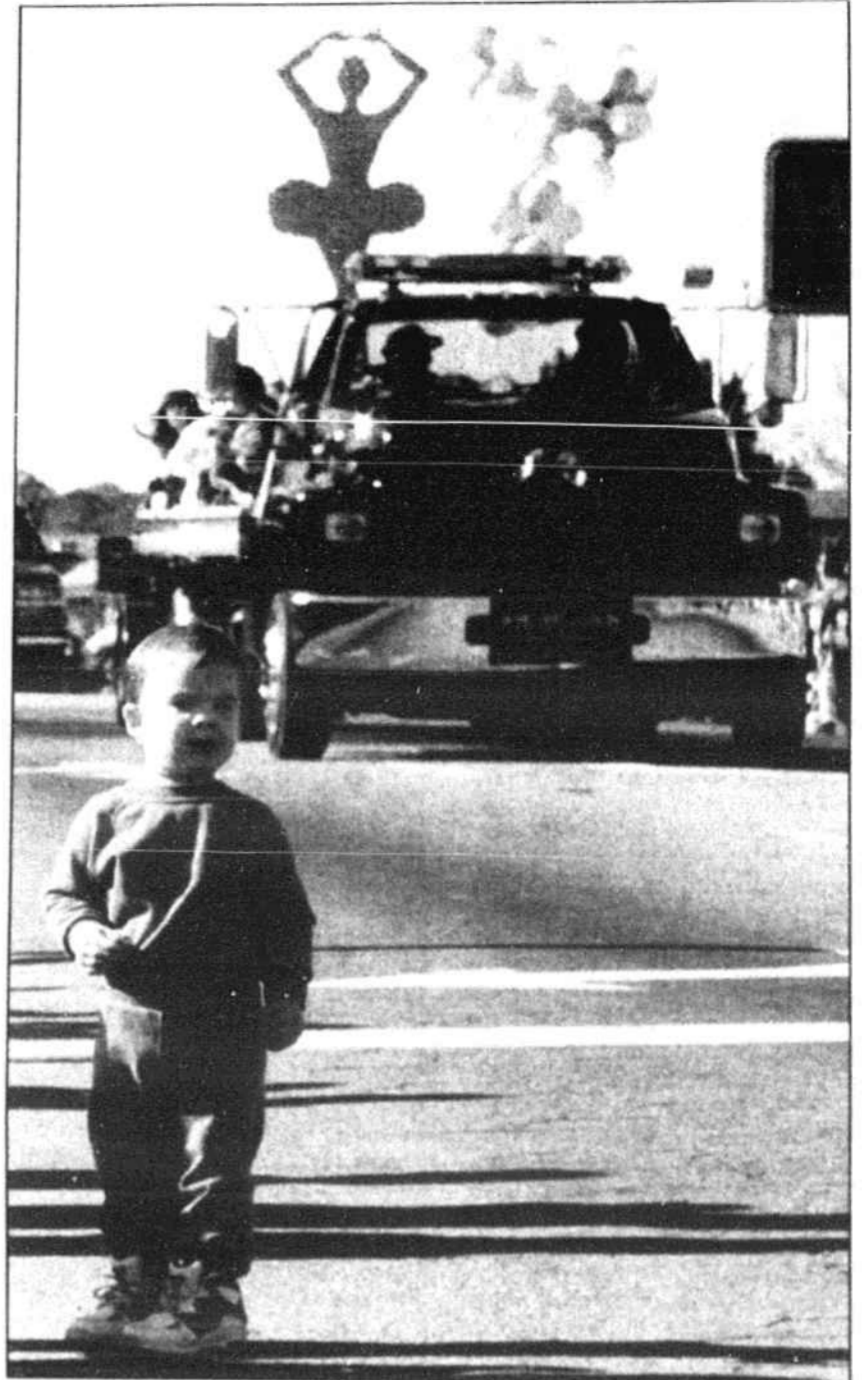
Any study looking at groundwater pollution would have to last at least one year, he said, because of the seasonal population changes at Holden Beach.

Commissioners Marlaine Thomas and Sid Swarts indicated Monday that they are in favor of authorizing the study.

"You have people who say we don't need it (sewer system) and people who say we do need it. Let's try to find out what we do need and start to work toward what we need," Thomas said.

Said Swarts, "I think we need to put it to bed once and for all...We would at least have enough information to make a decision. Whereas now we're a bunch of amateurs speaking as professionals."

Commissioners also said they like the idea of hiring an engineering firm such as CCE that does not design sewer systems.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## Waiting For Santa

Joshua Wayne Hewett awaits the arrival of Santa Claus during the Shallotte Christmas Parade on Saturday. Approaching is the Dance Connection float.

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