

SEWAGE DISPOSAL, REPAIR BILLS

Tough Questions Tackled By New School Board

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County Board of Education members took no action Monday on a request to reimburse two companies for expenses associated with repair of a failed septic system at Supply Elementary School, and learned award of contracts to build a new school at the north end of the county may be delayed because there's no guarantee yet from the Town of Belville to provide sewer service.

Board members spent 45 minutes of the 2½-hour meeting, its first business session, behind closed doors with school board attorney Glen Peterson, seeking his legal advice regarding the request for reimbursement from architect Charles Boney of Boney & Associates.

Boney asked board members to consider compensating Boney & Associates and Talbert and Bright engineering firm an estimated \$47,000 in professional time and expenses for designing and overseeing repair of the Supply Elementary septic system that failed in March.

He estimated costs at \$22,000 for the architectural firm and \$25,000 for Talbert and Bright. The repair permit issued by the Brunswick County Health Department requires daily monitoring of the work by the engineering firm.

The school board is paying Pipeline Utilities of Wilmington, which installed the original field, \$179,130 to build the new drainage field and make other system repairs. Until the system is fixed a contractor is pumping and hauling away the sewage at a cost of \$1,600 to \$1,800 per week.

School board members took no action on Boney's request following the closed session. Peterson said the board hasn't decided whether to pay the companies. Like the five board members they replaced earlier this month, the new board is trying to find out why the two-year-old system failed and whether anyone is liable for that failure.

"We've run into problems in getting the information we need," said Peterson. "Is it a benign cause or is there liability? We've looked at about 90 percent of it, but we need to pin down some things. We want to make a full evaluation. No actual recommendation with regard to a lawsuit can be made until then."

Peterson said he has asked experts to examine the system's design and installation and to look at other potential factors, such as seasonally heavy rainfalls and fluctuating water table levels. Itemized records will also be examined to certify the companies' costs for the repairs.

Boney said he doesn't think the architectural or engineering firms were at a fault. "I've looked through it. I don't know anything we could have done differently," he said.

The septic system design and installation were approved by the state Division of Environmental Management (DEM) before the school opened, but would not meet current Division of Health standards.

The repair area under construction is located where designers had first planned to locate the original septic drain field. The field location was moved at the direction of DEM, which at that time permitted such systems.

DEM was concerned about treated effluent migrating through the water table off of the school property because a drinking water well was in use at a nearby residence.

"But the well was on the school's property and the school system had arranged for them to connect to the

county water system," said Boney.

Since then permitting for large septic systems has shifted to the state Division of Health. State health officials disagree with the dosing rate or rate of application of effluent to the field DEM approved, saying it was too high for the type of soil and size of the field.

Monday the school board granted Pipeline Utilities an 18-day extension on its contract because of rainy conditions. Boney said the contractor has been instructed not to work on the field when wet to avoid damaging the field.

Bids Due Thursday

Bids for construction of the new Leland area elementary school are due to the Brunswick County Board of Education offices today (Dec. 15).

However, Peterson told school board members Monday bids cannot be awarded and construction permits received until provision of sewer service is guaranteed.

"(The Town of) Belville could give us a conditional letter of agreement now," he said, "But you can't award contracts on that basis."

Peterson said Belville is having problems getting its sewer system "up and going," but that he expects those problems to be resolved soon.

At a special meeting on Nov. 30 Brunswick County Commissioners approved financing the school's construction through placement of an installment purchase agreement with NationsBank, to be repaid with state funds.

Meeting at Lincoln Elementary School in Leland Monday, the school board also accepted an unqualified audit report presented by auditor Charles Flowers, along with several minor recommendations for improving internal controls.

"You are not impoverished," said Flowers. "You are in sound financial condition."

As of June 30, the school board had a fund balance of \$599,000 with \$189,000 of that available for use. The fund balance fell from a year earlier because the school system budgeted \$237,000 of its operating reserves in setting its 1993-94 budget.

At the recommendation of bond counsel, the new board also approved a packet of documents, similar to those approved by the previous board, governing the issuance of certificates of participation to finance construction the new northern district elementary school.

The board also turned down a Job Training Partnership Act grant of \$35,861 for helping drop-outs complete their education and get a job. Assistant Superintendent Oscar Blanks said the grant offer would have required at least 10 technical revisions in the school system's proposal, changes that would have made compliance difficult. "I think we would have been setting ourselves up for failure," he said, suggesting he might reapply later for a year-long grant for the 1995-96 school year.

Safe Schools Coordinator Linda Shaddix asked for board members' suggestions regarding a proposed Jan. 26 safe schools conference as a follow-up to the 1994 Children in Crisis conference. While lauding efforts to involve parents and the community at large in reducing violence and improving school safety, board members took a results-oriented approach. Noting Shaddix's already heavy workload, member Pat Brown said, "We don't want to do anything just to check off a square and make us look good."

"We want to make a full evaluation. No actual recommendation with regard to a lawsuit can be made until then."

Glen Peterson, School Board Attorney



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

HEALTH BOARD clerk Kay Moore administers the oath of office to board members Benny Ludlum (left) and Tom Pope Monday night. Ludlum was first appointed in November, 1993, to fill an unexpired term on the board and was re-named to the position last month by the county commissioners, who also appointed Pope to a three-year term.

Septic Permitters Told To Help Solve Perk Problems

BY ERIC CARLSON

A new environmental health supervisor was welcomed by the Brunswick County Board of Health Monday, with members urging him to increase the department's emphasis on helping applicants obtain permits for new septic systems.

Bob Odette, a retired U.S. Navy environmental health officer, has taken over leadership of the department formerly headed by Andrew Robinson, who resigned from the post last summer.

Also attending his first health board meeting Monday night was new member Tom Pope, who quickly declared his intent to scrutinize the department that determines whether property is environmentally suitable for a septic system.

Pope, a South Brunswick area builder, described himself as "very conservative" and "a little to the right of Rush Limbaugh." He said land owners have "a vested right to use their property" and urged the county's environmental health inspectors to "go the last inch to find a solution" when they determine a lot does not have the proper soil conditions for a septic system.

He characterized the environmental health department as "a big cork in the bottle" that places unnecessary burdens on the Brunswick County's resort and construction industries.

Pope's feelings were echoed by board member Bruce Quaintance, who is also a South Brunswick area builder. He expressed the hope that Odette would "get our environmentalists moving in the right direction" to help property owners solve problems that prevent them from obtaining a septic tank permit.

"We've done our job," Quaintance said. "Now it's time for the employees to do their jobs. Or else it's time for the supervisor to find new employees. We give, and we give, and we give, and we're not receiving."

Board member Benny Ludlum agreed. He said the county health department should make use of its recently acquired soil scientist "to offer second opinions whenever a

lot is turned down," thereby saving landowners the expense of hiring a private engineer to do the work.

Health Director Michael Rhodes said the department does not have the manpower to provide follow-up soil analysis of every lot denied a septic permit due to a failed percolation test.

"We would need three soil scientists to do that," Rhodes said. "At some point they need to go to the private sector."

Rhodes admitted there may be cases where an environmental health inspector "didn't make the extra effort" to help those whose property does not pass an initial "perk" test.

"I think what were asking is that the staff use their knowledge to help find a solution," said board Chair-

man Patrick Newton.

The discussion followed a closed session in which the board voted to compensate a Sunset Beach property owner \$950 "to rectify an improperly administered septic permit." The expense came as a result of an environmental health inspector's improper denial of a permit. The employee no longer works for the health department, Rhodes said.

In other business the board agreed to reclassify one of the department's clinical nursing assistant positions to that of a licensed practical nurse posts and to increase another nursing position from part-time to full-time. The change will be made using existing funds this year, but will require approval of a \$13,000 increase in next year's budget.

New School Administration Program Approved For UNCW, Six More Sites

A new program approved at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and only six other campuses statewide offers a new opportunity for educators who would like to become school principals, assistant principals and superintendents, but need financial assistance.

The Donald R. Watson School of Education at UNCW has been named one of seven sites authorized to offer a new master's degree in school administration, with support available through Principal Fellows Scholarship Loans.

Diane Healy, the Union Elementary School kindergarten teacher named Brunswick County Teacher of the Year this past spring, was in the first group of Principal Fellows selected statewide. She is enrolled at UNCW.

A panel of out-of-state educators reviewed program proposals from 12 schools in the UNC system before making recommendations to the UNC Board of Governors. Dean Robert E. Tyndall said the UNCW proposal ranked as one of the top five submissions.

"It will provide students with a rigorous preparation program that is unique in North Carolina," he said.

"It is a radical departure from existing models."

Associate Dean E. Conrad Sloan said he expects the loan program to help UNCW attract top applicants who are "highly committed to quality public schools" and to recruit candidates from previously under-represented groups such as women and minorities.

The master's program consists of 142 hours of study with rigorous classroom work and field experiences in the first year and a full-year internship with accompanying coursework in the second year.

An interdisciplinary approach will be taken, with faculty in education, the humanities and business offering a wide range of courses, according to Andrew Hayes, chair of the Department of Specialty Studies.

Principal Fellows receive an annual loan of \$20,000, which will be forgiven in full if the graduates are employed as full-time administrators at an approved site in North Carolina for two years for each year of funding. Graduates must complete the work requirement within six years after completing the master's degree. The alternative to loan forgiveness through employment is payback of the loan and interest charges.

Fellows candidates must hold or qualify for a North Carolina Class "A" teacher certification and have at least three years of successful teaching experience. Selection is based upon the applicant's academic record, writing samples, interview performance and admission to an approved degree program.

At UNCW, applications must be received by the school by Jan. 15, 1995, for admission to the master's degree program in school administration. The program expects to admit 25 to 30 students each fall.

Those seeking a Principal Fellows Scholarship Loan must submit a separate application no later than Feb. 28 to the Principal Fellows Program, The University of North Carolina, General Administration, P.O. Box 2688, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27515-2688, Attn.: Karen Geringer. Principal Fellows Program administrators will announce 200 loan recipients statewide in April.

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