



CREW MEMBERS check the moorings of the MV Marsus at the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point docks in late September after it and a sister ship, the MV Maria, were allowed to unload their controversial cargo—109 spent nuclear fuel rods from European research reactors destined for a U.S. Department of Energy facility at Aiken, S.C.

PHOTO BY U.S. DEPT. OF ENERGY

# Health Board Faces Political Pressure, Septic System Issues

BY ERIC CARLSON

The Brunswick County Board of Health continued to feel political pressure and grew more polarized between health care providers and development interests as three-term member Maliston "Moe" Stanley was replaced as chairman in January by the board's newest appointee, engineer Patrick Newton.

Among those voting to unseat Stanley were county commissioners Chairman Don Warren and the three new members whose appointment to the health board he endorsed. The vote was divided between health care interests and at-large members. The board's nurse, dentist, pharmacist and veterinarian representatives all voted to re-appoint Stanley, who is an active advocate for minority health issues.

In a closed session at their February meeting, health board members heard a former health department employee accuse a county nurse of allowing a patient who tested positive for tuberculosis to leave a clinic without scheduling a more detailed examination. Her charges were later found to be largely true, but an investigation of the incident determined that there was no danger posed to public health, according to health Director Michael Rhodes. The patient was located and called in for further testing.

The following month the health board gave Rhodes the authority to declare a dog "dangerous" and to require its owner to keep the animal indoors or in a fenced enclosure. The move was intended to protect the county from legal liability by officially warning a pet owner about a vicious dog before it attacks anyone. "This allows us to take away the animal's chance for one free bite," Rhodes said.

Dr. Harry L. Johnson, the board of health's physician representative, resigned in March due to "increasing responsibilities and seemingly less time to carry out those responsibilities." Although Dr. Johnson recommended another physician willing to serve on the board, the county commissioners avoided making the appointment for nine months. At the first meeting after the November election, the new board of commissioners appointed Dr. Samuel Kirtley of Shallotte to the health board.

In April, the board of health agreed to allow animal control officers to use tranquilizer guns for subduing vicious animals. Under a 1985 policy the department was prohibited from using chemical immobilization, giving

officers no option but to shoot an animal that could not be safely captured. Animal control Supervisor Greg Thompson asked for the change, noting that tranquilizer equipment has become far more sophisticated and safer to use.

The health department in July stopped issuing permits for one of the most common types of household septic systems in response to a state rule that apparently prohibits their use on land that has been covered with fill material. Rhodes immediately began an in-house study of the "bed-in-fill" septic systems in an effort to convince state regulators that the process is no more likely to fail than a drain field build in undisturbed land. Rhodes estimated that a permanent prohibition on bed-

in-fill systems would prevent construction on hundreds, if not thousands, of undeveloped lots. After hearing the results of the study in September, the board voted to resume issuing permits. But the ban was put back in place the following month when state environmental officials said they weren't convinced that the systems are safe.

Brunswick County Schools officials were warned by the health board in August that Supply Elementary School might not be allowed to open unless efforts were made to repair a septic tank system that was found to be in a "complete state of failure" five months earlier. The school was eventually allowed to open under a strict timetable for repairs.

The head of the health board's environmental health committee in October recommended that another state licensed specialist be hired to help the department catch up on a backlog of inspections on low pressure septic systems. The N.C. Division of Environmental Management, which used to do the inspections, turned over responsibility for their upkeep to county health departments in 1992. The board of commissioners later approved the hiring of another environmental health specialist.

The following month, another health board committee began work on a plan to require all dogs and cats to be spayed or neutered and inoculated against common animal diseases before adoption from the county animal shelter. The program would allow those who adopt a pet to get the veterinary services at a reduced rate. The board is expected to consider enacting the rules early next year.



## '94 YEAR IN REVIEW

### Nuclear Rod Shipment Sparks Resistance

A shipment of 153 spent nuclear fuel elements from research reactors in four European countries arrived at the Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point near Southport in late September, and on Sept. 29 were shipped 333 miles by secured rail to the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site near Aiken, S.C.

As two ships waited at the mouth of the Cape Fear River to deliver their controversial cargo, South Carolina took its efforts to block delivery of the rods all the

way to the U.S. Supreme Court, saying a more thorough environmental impact study was needed.

The United States government successfully pushed for "urgent relief" acceptance of the rods to honor its commitment to take weapons-grade nuclear material off the world market. State officials were hoping South Carolina's civil suit pending in federal district court in Columbia would be resolved before shipment in early 1995 of up to 326 more rods.

## Board Members Focused On Preparing For Future Growth

BY DOUG RUTTER

If Shallotte officials see significant growth in their business district and residential population over the next decade, they will be able to look back on 1994 as the year in which many of the seeds were planted.

Town aldermen focused much of their attention this year on preparing for growth they are anticipating over the next 10 to 20 years.

The town board's top priority in 1994 was planning to more than triple the sewer system's treatment capacity to 750,000 gallons per day, a project they hope to begin next year.

Shallotte Aldermen heard nothing but favorable comments for their plan at a public hearing in September, even though the \$1.9 million project is expected to increase minimum monthly sewer charges more than \$4 per household.

Officials plan to expand the system in two phases, with the first phase adding about 200,000 gallons

per day (gpd) of capacity to the system at a cost of \$1.1 million.

The existing system, which was expanded once since it began operating in 1984, has a permitted capacity of 206,000 gpd. It presently serves about 612 customers and treats about 140,000 gpd.

McKim & Creed of Wilmington, one of four engineering firms considered for designing the expansion, projects the additional 550,000 gpd of capacity will be enough to serve Shallotte for the next 20 years.

Town officials have applied for a low-interest loan through the State Revolving Fund to help pay for the project.

Besides planning for sewer system expansion in 1994, Shallotte aldermen took other steps to create an atmosphere for growth.

The board did away with a \$2,500-per-acre fee for industry requesting town water or sewer service.

Aldermen also stopped doubling acreage fees for landowners outside the town who requested water or sewer service if they also requested annexation as part of the deal.

In efforts to beautify the community, aldermen passed an ordinance prohibiting "junked, nuisance and abandoned" vehicles inside the town limits as well as the one-mile extraterritorial area.

Aldermen also established a Committee for the Improvement of Shallotte to address beautification, and the planning board is working on new regulations to eliminate most street vendors.

In June, the mayor and aldermen visited state officials in Raleigh in an effort to improve the town's chances of receiving the loan for sewer expansion and to light a fire under the N.C. Department of Transportation.

Town officials accused the DOT of dragging its feet on plans to build

an overpass at the intersection of U.S. 17 Bypass and N.C. 130.

State transportation officials originally announced that the overpass would be finished by mid-1995, but the latest plan calls for the 18-month construction process to begin late next year.

The overpass was only one transportation issue town officials faced in 1994. After much debate, aldermen approved a thoroughfare plan in November featuring about a dozen potential road projects for the future.

Identified as the top priorities were a short connector between Holden Beach Road and Smith Avenue through the Wal-Mart parking lot and an extension of N.C. 179 from its intersection with Hale Swamp Road across U.S. 17 Business to N.C. 130 West near Bridger Road.

Objections from area residents forced the town board to delete two proposals from the original thoroughfare plan—two additional entrances into Brierwood Estates and a

Bluff Drive extension across Shallotte River.

In February, aldermen voted to dip into bank accounts, garnish wages and foreclose if necessary to collect unpaid taxes and overdue water and sewer bills. By December, the town had collected about \$19,000 of the \$27,000 in taxes that had gone unpaid over the last 10 years.

Nothing was decided, but Shallotte officials met twice in 1994 with Brunswick County leaders concerning the possible merger of their ABC systems.

The merger discussion started when the county ABC board proposed opening a new store in Ash. Shallotte officials opposed the plan, fearing it would cut revenues at the town store.



### Lockwood Folly Access Top Issue In Varnamtown

BY DOUG RUTTER

Improving access to the Lockwood Folly River for local boaters and fishermen was the major issue of 1994 in Varnamtown.

Using \$25,000 supplied by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission plus town funds, aldermen hired contractors to build a new public ramp at the end of Fisherman Road and a parking lot.

The plan had drawn some criticism in 1993 from residents who live near the ramp. They said building a new ramp would attract more boaters and only add to existing problems caused by people parking on the side of the road.

Town officials promised to solve the parking dilemma, and work on the 1150-square-foot concrete boat ramp began in January when aldermen agreed to pay \$19,500 to

Varnam's Docks and Bulkheads.

In March, the town board ditched its original plan to lease property for boat ramp parking near the waterfront.

Aldermen decided instead to pay \$30,000 to Larry and Mary Knowles for approximately 1.5 acres of land on Fisherman Road about 800 feet from the ramp for a permanent public parking lot.

Contractor Major White of Ash was hired in August to prepare the land for parking at a cost of about \$11,200.

With the new ramp and parking lot both completed in early fall, aldermen kept their promise to residents and voted to prohibit parking on both sides of Fisherman Road from the parking lot to the riverfront. Varnamtown officials also spent

much of the year developing the town's first land use plan, a 50-page document containing information and policies that will help guide development for the next 10 years.

The town board accepted a preliminary draft of the plan in September. Final approval is expected early next year, following an extensive review by state and federal agencies.

Major issues in the plan include



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