

Chowan County joins AREA, waits to see about NCNG action

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

Whether North Carolina Natural Gas will seek to provide natural gas services to Chowan and surrounding counties remains to be seen, said Chowan County Manager Cliff Copeland on Monday.

After more than three decades of holding exclusive franchise rights to natural gas service in northeast North Carolina, NCNG has yet to make a move to provide gas to the region, he said.

"In 35 years, they (NCNG) have done nothing to bring natural gas into our area," Copeland said.

In the meantime, Chowan County has banded together with other counties and municipalities in northeast North Carolina to ensure that the region receives natural gas services.

At Monday morning's regu-

lar monthly meeting of the Chowan County Board of Commissioners, the commissioners adopted a resolution for the county to join the Albemarle Regional Energy Authority (AREA).

The authority is comprised of representatives from Chowan, Camden, Currituck, Pasquotank, Perquimans counties, as well as Edenton, Elizabeth City, Hertford, and Winfall.

When NCNG's deadline for using natural gas service franchise rights expired on July 1, doors were opened to other natural gas providers to render service to the northeast. Regarding "Use It or Lose It" legislation introduced by state Rep. Bill Owens, a Pasquotank County Democrat, NCNG had until June 30 to move forward with providing gas service to the region.

A State Utilities Commission official said Monday afternoon

that NCNG has not officially lost its exclusive franchise rights to the northeast. A "complicated" process in which the State Utilities Commission determines whether or not NCNG adequately served the area prior to July 1 must be completed before NCNG loses its exclusive franchise rights, said Giselle Rankin.

Although the July 1 deadline has come and gone, NCNG could still be awarded exclusive franchise rights by the Utilities Commission, she said. Those decisions will most likely be made in upcoming months, she said.

In an effort to speed up the delivery process, AREA was formed to collaborate with state Sen. President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight's office to bring gas services to the northeast.

"The bottom line is, and I have discussed this with (Pasquotank County Commissioner and AREA's board chairman)

Jimmie Dixon, is that we need to move ahead to develop (natural gas service in) this district," Copeland said. "This authority can do any of those things that they (NCNG) could do, including providing gas service and pipeline construction. The authority's mission is to provide natural gas to the northeast."

Last week, NCNG's vice president of government relations, Stuart Dixon, said that the company is close to laying the groundwork for a natural gas line from Virginia to Elizabeth City. The project, which calls for a natural gas line along U.S. 17's right of way from the Virginia border to Elizabeth City, would be funded entirely by NCNG, he said.

According to Dixon, NCNG officials have met with State Utilities Commission staff in Raleigh to discuss his company's ongoing proposal to bring natural gas to Elizabeth

City. NCNG has yet to file any documents with the State Utilities Commission.

"I really think this is the latest ploy by them. It's nothing other than them wanting to convince the Utilities Commission that they want to keep their franchise rights," said Copeland of NCNG's latest proposal.

If voters pass a \$950 million bond referendum in November, \$150 million would be appropriated for the expansion of gas services into the 22 counties currently without natural gas service. The bond, spearheaded by Basnight, would help pay for construction costs to bring gas lines into the state's non-served counties.

"That \$150 million would offset the construction and delivery costs in those areas," a member of Basnight's Raleigh office, Julia White, said last week.

The bond bill has already been passed in the state Senate, White said.

"There seems to be some willingness in the House to pass the water and gas bonds (for the November ballot)," she said.

Copeland said that if the bond wins approval, the local authority will seek state funding for the construction of gas lines which would bring natural gas service to the northeast:

Forum

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to be affected by the proposed Wal-Mart store. The coalition said the one-hour tour, scheduled to begin at 3 p.m., is expected to get broad coverage by area television stations.

Tourists

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low-impact industry that brings travelers in to sample our natural scenic beauty and our heritage. Tourism is economic development in its purest form."

The North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development has released its 1997 county-by-county tourism economic impact results. The annual study, prepared by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), tracks tourism expenditures, payroll, employment, and state and local tax receipts for each of North Carolina's 100 counties.

Foundation makes \$10,000 gift to the MOA campaign

Officials from the Museum of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City have announced that Kannapolis-based Cannon Foundation, Inc. has made a \$10,000 commitment to the Museum's capital campaign.

With this new gift, the campaign has now passed the \$1.5 million mark, organizers said.

Races

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tion.

Registration will begin early Saturday morning and Saturday's racing will begin at noon. Sunday's racing, to include just Thistle and Tanzer classes, will begin at 9 a.m.

Saturday's Sunfish class will include divisions for both senior and junior participants. "We want to encourage all

the kids who would like to race, to come out this weekend," said Jim Elliott, one of several coordinators involved in bringing the races to Edenton. Each entrant will receive a dinner ticket, Elliott said.

Registration costs are as follows: Thistle, \$50; Tanzer, \$40; all other classes, \$15.

"One reason we're having this regatta is that it will be an opportunity for the Thistle sailors to come to Edenton and see the area before the town hosts the Thistle Nationals in August

of 1999," said Elliott.

Boating enthusiasts are encouraged to make a trip down to the Edenton waterfront this weekend to view the racing action. The Sunfish, Moth and open classes will race on a course fairly close to shore, said Elliott, while the Thistle and Tanzer boats will race further out in the bay.

For more information or to register, call Elliott at 482-2121, or Nancy Nicholls at the Edenton-Chowan Chamber of Commerce at 482-3400.

HRD classes set for this summer

The Human Resources Development program at College of the Albemarle will offer free classes in July and August.

• Unlocking Test Taking Skills will be held Monday through Thursday from July 6-

16 from 8-10 a.m. in room B-209 at COA's Elizabeth City campus.

• Transition to College Reading and English will be held Monday through Friday, Aug. 24 through Dec. 4, from 8-8:50

a.m. in room B-209 at COA's Elizabeth City campus.

HRD classes are free for all participants. For more information or to register for any of these classes, contact the Human Resources Development program at College of the Albemarle at 335-0821, ext. 2242.

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taught to recognize the position and brightness of a traffic light rather than its color.

There is also promising work being done with colored filters to improve the ability to distinguish colors. For example, red tinted contact lenses are being used in some cases to aid persons with certain color deficiencies; and there is the promise of breakthrough to come.

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