



# The Chowan Herald

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## Council looks at planner and joint services

### Concerns raised about liability and other situations

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

With increased growth comes increased workloads for local government officials, and Chowan County's and Edenton's building inspectors are in a state of constant motion as development levels rise.

According to Edenton Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton, a merger between the town and county inspections departments is a logical choice to provide quality service and save precious tax dollars.

During the Edenton Town Council's Committee Meetings Monday night, Knighton unveiled a merger that would make allies of Edenton Building Inspector Chris Brabble and Chowan County Code Enforcement Officer Holly Colombo.

The town-county planning and inspection department may also enlist a full-time planner to serve all Chowan residents. The planner would oversee the new town-county department.

In memorandum to the Council, Knighton outlined the burdens currently placed upon the separate agencies. The commercial growth in Edenton at US 17 and NC 32 highways, a

proposed assisted-living development near Chowan Hospital, 37 subdivisions in Chowan County since 1996, and three major subdivisions in Edenton in the past three years were just some of the developments she said are stretching the town's and county's departments too thin.

"With all of these planning issues facing us, it seems that the time has come for the Town and County to employ a full-time, professional planner," Knighton stated in the memo. "By combining our inspections department, we will provide more coordinated and more efficient services to our customers."

During Monday night's Council meeting, Knighton said that the town's population could grow from 5,300 to 7,200 in the next decade - a projected increase of nearly 30 percent. Knighton said that Brabble and Colombo would join the planner as official county employees, though the town would fund the department an estimated \$27,000 annually. The county is expected to provide an additional \$73,000 to the town-county department.

However, several councilmen expressed concerns about the merger, citing liability issues, certification, and financial justification of a planner position as issues that need to be addressed before the Council votes on the matter on Feb. 9.

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(From left) Elton Anthony, Sarah Leggett, Jonathan Smith, and Tanner Leggett picked up 4-H Extension awards during last week's 4-H Achievement Awards in Edenton. Looking on is 4-H Extension Agent Bonita Williams (back, at left) and NC Secretary of State Elaine Marshall (seated at right).

## Secretary of State honors local 4-H'ers, pays tribute to program's place in her life

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

According to North Carolina Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, a person's experience in 4-H activities is something that will be cherished while providing a solid foundation for character throughout adulthood.

Marshall was in town last Thursday night as the keynote speaker at the Chowan County 4-H Annual Achievement Presentation held at the Chowan

County Senior Center. Marshall told the more than 100 guests on hand that her own stint in 4-H paved the way for what has turned out to be a remarkable career for a Maryland farm girl.

"It allowed me to be of service to others," said Marshall, who is currently serving her first term as Secretary of State, a post she was elected to in 1996. "My 4-H experience didn't happen in a vacuum," she added, noting that her mother helped her throughout

her years in 4-H which included a seven-month stay in Brazil. "So, without a doubt, all that makes me the person I am today."

Marshall said she was the first person in her family to attend college, and that 4-H motivated her to continue public service after receiving her law degree from Campbell University. Marshall later served as a state Senator (15th District) from Harnett County.

"There is a place for everyone to serve... and give of them-

selves," Marshall said. "All it takes is an investment ... of time and energy."

She also told the crowd that Achievement Award nights are perhaps the most important nights for 4-Hers as well as the communities they reside in.

"It (achievement awards) might be the most important thing done in Chowan County all day today ... all month ... maybe even the best thing done in Chowan County all year."

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## School superintendents encouraged to form community groups

It's not a cure-all for rural school districts, but supplemental funding for low-wealth schools is a necessary step to help level the playing field for a majority of North Carolina students, says Gerry Hancock.

Hancock, General Counsel for the Low Wealth Schools Consortium, met with more than 30 local school officials at John A. Holmes High School's auditorium Monday night to discuss funding plans for the next fiscal year.

"We're addressing a problem that's almost as old as the state itself," said Hancock. "Wealth is not spread evenly. Unfortunately, the gap is not narrowing, it's widening. And that's one of the great challenges our state faces."

Hancock noted that the state's top 10 wealthiest coun-



General Counsel Gerry Hancock

ties (including Mecklenburg and Wake counties) annually spend more than \$2,400 per student, while poorer counties spend less than \$700 per child. Most school funding is provided by county tax collections, he said, noting that urban areas have a larger tax base than rural areas - including northeast North Carolina.

"That's (a difference of) \$46,000 per class, per year, year in and year out," he said, basing those figures on a 26-student classroom.

Currently, more than half of North Carolina's students live in the 73 counties designated "low wealth" by the General Assembly. In FY 1998-1999, legislators approved more than \$63 million in supplemental funding for low-wealth schools, but \$100 million is needed for

the next school year, he said. The state initiated the supplemental funding program (including funding for small-school districts) in 1991.

A finance study conducted by the Consortium showed a drastic difference in student achievement based on funding from local coffers. In Dare County (spends nearly \$1,700 per student), 70 percent of all high school students performed at grade level, while in Tyrrell County (spends \$738 per student), high school students achieved just a 50 percent at-grade-level rate.

Even if that \$100 million in funding for low-wealth school systems is approved in upcoming budget talks, all school systems will not be equal, Hancock said.

"But at least the low-wealth

systems will be better off," he said. "They'll be brought up to the state average."

The Consortium's latest figures put Chowan County in the bottom tier of the state's 100 counties based on tax value, putting the county 74th place between Cleveland and Duplin counties. The county school system received slightly more than \$300,000 in low-wealth funding for the current school year.

Edenton-Chowan School Supt. Dr. Allan Smith said that his school system uses that funding for a host of programs, including exceptional children programming, honors classes, technology, and for increasing staff.

"Without those funds, we'd

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## Quota reduction could spell the end for Chowan herring industry

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

In what they view as an effort to stop alleged declines in herring stock in the Chowan River, state Marine Fisheries officials have proposed a sizable cut in the allowable herring catches this spring.

But many local commercial fishermen think the nearly 40 percent proposed reduction in quota will bring an end to their livelihood.

In Raleigh last Thursday (Jan. 21), the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission proposed to reduce pound net harvests of blueback river herring in the Albemarle Sound Management Area from 400,000 pounds to 250,000

pounds. The Commission is expected to vote on the proposal within 30 days.

For commercial fisherman Herbert Byrum, an approval of a 150,000-pound drop will push many local pound net fishermen out of the water since the majority of herring landed in this management area are caught in the Chowan River.

"What they're doing is putting us out of business," Byrum said in a telephone interview last Friday morning. Byrum attended the meeting in Raleigh with 11 other Bertie and Chowan County fishermen to plead their case that the 400,000-pound quota for pound netters is the "break-even point" for commercial fishermen.

At a public meeting in Edenton on Jan. 12, state Division of Marine Fisheries Stock Assessment Scientist John Carmichael told the Commission, and nearly 200 fishermen, that over-fishing has essentially reduced herring recruitment (spawning numbers) to a dangerously low level. Carmichael even suggested that a moratorium be placed on pound net fishing in the Chowan River to increase recruitment.

Fishermen balked at Carmichael's findings then, and still are not convinced that his figures are correct now, Byrum said.

"My feelings are that you

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OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER IS CHOSEN  
Edenton Historical Commission Chair Susan Creighton, left, congratulates Mary Rhea Jones, Volunteer of the Year for the Barker House. Jones was honored at a tea last week.