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Board looks at options for Holmes

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

With John A. Holmes High School not getting any younger, Edenton-Chowan Schools know a new high school will have to be built — and soon.

There are currently about 770 students enrolled at Holmes. Teaching methods and curriculum have changed drastically since the school was built five decades ago. Classrooms are cramped, some teachers scramble from room to room.

"Space is the issue," Superintendent Allan Smith told the 15 school officials and parents on hand for an information meeting Monday night at Chowan Middle School.

The Board of Education is considering three plans to expand the confines, new construction at the existing site, buying new land for a new school, or renovating the current school. They range in cost from a projected low of about \$15 million to renovate the existing high school, to a high of \$28 million to build a new school at a new location.

Since construction or renovation work is expected to start until at least 2006, those estimates could likely rise, Smith said.

Over the past several years, the county has already spent \$1.3 million in repairs, mostly for roofing projects, at Holmes.

The school board hopes to select an option by the end of the year, Smith said. School officials have been working with the architectural firm M.B. Kahn — which designed the new D.F. Walker and White Oak elementary schools — on plans for a new or renovated high school.

The proposed options are:

- New school, same site: \$18 million for an 800-student capacity school, \$21 million for a 1,000-student school;
- New school, new site: \$25 million for an 800-student school, \$28 million for a 1,000-student school;
- Renovated school: \$15-\$16 million for a 1,000-student school.

The renovation plans include everything from a new, state-of-the-art media center to a new gym. Much-needed classrooms, as many as 10, would also be added.

To build a new school on county-owned property at the current North Broad Street site it would take roughly two to three years to tear down the existing school, Smith said.

When asked if the county has targeted land it could buy to build a new school, Smith said a new site hasn't been identified.

"We haven't gotten to that place yet," he said. "That would have to be one of the first steps we'd have to take, choosing an appropriate site."

Smith also said enrollment hasn't increased in the past decade and isn't expected to rise any time soon.

"But it something new comes into town," he said, "all bets are off."

A public hearing on the proposed plans will be held March 23 at 6:30 p.m. in Holmes' auditorium.

"The (school) board want input from the public," Smith said.

Input can be emailed to: hotline@ecps.k12.nc.us.



Staff photo by Sean Jackson
Dr. Allan Smith speaks at Monday night's meeting.

Six months after Isabel, recovery continues



Steve Brown, foreground, and Woody Coppess put down new shingles on a storm-damaged home on Sandy Ridge Road last week. The pair was part of a crew from Asheville that was in town last week helping with repairs to homes damaged during Hurricane Isabel last September. Isabel has cost residents of Chowan County and Edenton nearly \$200 million, with much recovery work still to be done six months after the storm.

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

It's been called a broken paradise and the land of "blue-tarp houses."

But this county of 14,400 just wants to mend its wounds. Leaky roofs, drafty walls, and plywood-covered windows still exist, six months after Hurricane Isabel ripped through Chowan County and Edenton in September.

"It's just almost overwhelming that we've been able to recover as quickly as we have," Edenton Town Councilman Jerry Parks said during a March 9 meeting.

The storm pounded the town and county in September, toppling trees, flooding waterfront homes, peeling roofs from homes — from Cape Colony to Rocky Hock. Many residents were without water for several days. All lost power. Only a handful had working telephone lines.

Nearly \$200,000 million in property damage was caused by the hurricane, which stove in off the Atlantic shortly after sunrise and departed just before sunset on Sept. 18. The Federal Emergency Management Agency poured nearly \$3.5 million into Edenton and Chowan in the weeks after Isabel.

Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said Edenton expects to spend nearly \$2.5 million to repair damage to public properties and infrastructure. FEMA has agreed to cover 75 of those costs. The state

has said it would cover the rest.

In the meantime, the town is paying its bills.

"It could be six months before we see that," money from the state, Knighton said Tuesday.

County Manager Cliff Copeland has said residents here could face a recovery time similar to what it took for Down East residents to rebound from Hurricane Floyd. That 1999 storm's publicly funded recovery has only recently been closed out. Copeland has indicated Chowan and Edenton could also face a 5-year recovery window.

Knighton has said Edenton continues to find new storm damage, nearly every day. A utility crew is still tweaking the town's power system.

Both town cemeteries — Beaver Hill and Vine Oak — remain scarred.

Residents toil, as do public workers and officials. Both Knighton and Copeland have estimated they spend the bulk of their workweeks dealing with recovery from Isabel. But the day-to-day operations of their respective local governments — including drafting budgets for the next fiscal year — continue.

"I think I'm suffering from 'Post Hurricane Isabel Stress Syndrome,'" Knighton said jokingly.

More than \$155.2 million was doled out by FEMA to storm-ravaged counties in North Carolina

through mid-Dec. Volunteers may be around for a while, hammering away at the scars Isabel left behind.

The Chowan County Interfaith Disaster Recovery group has helped homeowners' repair dozens of storm-damaged properties. Last week, a crew from Asheville worked on several homes — roofing during the day, bunking at Edenton Baptist Church at night. Woody Coppess, a member of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Asheville, said Edenton and Chowan had a different type of damage than he saw south and west of the county after Floyd in 1999. Floyd has massive floods, Isabel was a wind destroyer.

But like the residents of Rocky Mount flooded by Floyd, Chowan and Edenton residents have appreciated the volunteer work.

"Everyone we meet," Coppess said, "they're enthusiastic toward us."

With the next hurricane season just a little more than two months away, plans are in place to bolster Edenton against another blow. A grant from the N.C. Rural Center has allowed the town to purchase two permanent generators for the sewer system, and three portable generators.

"I just feel that we are beyond being prepared," Knighton said. "Since September we have just learned so much about what we need in terms of resources," to withstand another Atlantic tropical storm.

Staff photo by Sean Jackson



Staff photo by Earline White

Getting acquainted

Chamber Director Richard Bunch, right, talks with Bruce Beasley, President of the Wilson Chamber during a March 11 planning session. (See related story on Page 3-A)

Town reluctantly raises rates

BY SEAN JACKSON
Staff Writer

Saying they had run out of options to avoid raising electric rates, the Edenton Town Council agreed last week to a 1-percent hike effective April 1.

Utility-related fees will also go up April 1.

"We have tried every avenue we could to keep from doing this," Willis Privott, chairman of council's Utilities Committee, said of the increase during the March 9 meeting. "It just had to be done," he added.

The increase stemmed from

a 1.3 wholesale electric-rate hike passed down by the town's power supplier, ElectricCities, last October. The town had absorbed the increased rate as long as it could, officials have said.

In addition, a number of fees — including reconnection costs and meter-testing charges — are also going up.

Knighton said the town is forced to disconnect an average of 20 to 25 customers each month. Of those, about 15 are "repeat offenders," she said.

Council considered how to address the increase in after-hours reconnection. Most cus-

tomers who have their lights turned off, Knighton said, are aware in advance of the disconnection potential. Cutoff notices are sent out days in advance of the disconnect date, she said.

Privott asked town officials if consideration was still being given to alert residents who rely on power for health needs that a disconnection date is approaching. Public Works Director Hawk Crumrey said the town ensures that people who use oxygen machines are given every chance to avoid disconnection.

Foundation helps fund technology

Chowan Hospital is in the process of standardizing to the Biphasic Defibrillator technology, which will allow clinicians to achieve the same results as before, but with less energy, resulting in less trauma to the patient. Seven (7) biphasic defibrillators will be purchased (total cost \$70,000) and located in the Emergency Room, Intensive Care and other areas of the hospital permitting immediate response to in-hospital sudden cardiac arrest. Defibrillation is the most important factor affecting survival from sudden cardiac arrest due to ventricular fibrillation. For every minute of defibrillation delay, chances of survival decrease by 7% to 10%.

"Using the Biphasic Defibrillator technology will make the hospital 'state-of-the-art' for emergent cardiac conditions," stated Chowan Hospital President, Jeff Sackrison. "Although we prefer that the patient will not need this new technology, we are very happy that it will be available to the patient when the patient needs it most."

Cindy Coker, Vice President of Patient Care Services, further clarified that "Access to Biphasic Defibrillation will improve the patient's outcome because the biphasic technology has proven to be effective and to minimize post-defibrillation heart dysfunction. Why this technology is so effective is because the biphasic technology delivers a lower energy charge, as the name suggests, in two phases."

Proceeds from the Chowan Regional Health Care Foundation's annual fund-raising event, "Mardi Gras Madness" on March 20th at the National Guard Armory, have been designated for the purchase of the Biphasic defibrillators for Chowan Hospital.

NASCAR enthusiasts are in for a real treat as 4 exclusive VIP NASCAR tickets for the September 2004 Richmond, Virginia venue will be auctioned off. "These exclusive VIP tickets are not available to the general public. We are very fortunate to have generous donors like Charlie Creighton of Colony Tires, who donated the tickets to the Foundation," stated Helena Szczesny.

"The successful bidder of the Goodyear VIP NASCAR tickets, will get a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get the full VIP treatment of food, fun and festivities at the Goodyear Hospitality tent, including drinks, food, pit tours, garage tours and visit with the drivers," said Mrs. Szczesny.

For Mardi Gras Madness tickets, please call the Foundation of office: 252-482-6440.

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BBQ & FRIED CHICKEN
FRIDAY, MARCH 19TH, 2004
LUNCH 11AM - 1PM
DINNER 4PM - 7PM

Leon Nixon Catering
Auction - 7 p.m. until
Donation: \$6.00 per plate

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