

## Proposed county budget includes tax increase

BY EARLINE WHITE  
Staff Writer

The Chowan County Board of Commissioners met in regular session Monday, June 7 to discuss the draft budget presentation for 2004-2005. Compiled by the Finance Committee and presented by Cliff Copeland, County Manager, the budget calls for a five-cent increase for county taxes. This would raise the cost to 74 cents. "These are issues we can't control," said Copeland. "We have seen four key areas in which expenses have risen. Medicaid has increased, the cost of living has grown, the schools need repair/replace their capital outlay, and the EMS needs to be put on a self-

sustained basis. I feel that these are services still need to be provided for the county. In order for that to happen we need an increase in taxes."

Commission Chairman Louis Belfield agreed with Copeland, noting that this is the first time since he began serving on the board that the county has increased taxes. Other commissioners held similar views; rather than using the reserve to make up the difference, increase taxes. This is the first increase in six years.

Capital outlay items for the county calls for three new sheriff's car, GIS system, software for the GIS system, and renovations to Old D. F. Walker gym. Copeland remarked that

the schools were a major obligation to be considered within the budget.

"The county is mandated by the state to address facilities, maintenance, software and technology in our schools. Our county ranks 69 out of the 100 counties in the state for ability to pay. However, our efforts to provide for the schools rank 17 out of 100. We have remarkable growth in each of our schools. It is necessary to take care of the future generations. A tax increase is needed to continue this trend."

This year's proposed budget includes a two and one-half percent increase in the school's current expense funding.

In addition to the increase in

county tax, there will also be an increase in the water fund. Copeland proposed that the initial two thousand gallons of water remain the same price but every gallon thereafter is increased to \$3.25. This money would help future long-range plans such as elevating the tanks and updating the treatment facility for storage, backwash and reservoirs.

Emergency Management was a major concern in developing this budget. Efforts after Isabel proved that EMS is necessary for survival. The event revealed a lot about the system the county has been using; primarily that it needs to be updated. The communications tower needs to be repaired and a new console purchased for

the main department. More staff is needed, especially at night.

"This was one of the most difficult issues to address in this year's budget - the need to maintain and grow our emergency medical services," Copeland stated in his draft budget message. Monies have been allotted for additional personnel and the path toward EMS self-sustainability.

The proposed draft of the budget will be posted online at the county's website this morning for the public to review. "This is a broad overview," Copeland said, "But I believe that it is easily understandable by the public." A public hearing for the budget is scheduled for June 21 at 6

p.m. in the Commissioners Room in the new courthouse. The budget can be seen at [www.chowancounty-nc.gov](http://www.chowancounty-nc.gov).

In other projects reported on during the Commissioners' meeting Monday night:

• Bill Deal, Town Engineer, has taken bids for generators at the Valhalla water plant. The project to reconfigure the electrical systems to be generator-ready will be completed by D. L. Teasley, who did all the previous work at the plant. The project will take 180 days to complete - from July to December. In the meanwhile, Gregory Poolé was contracted to have standby generators for the plant this hurricane season. A

See BUDGET On Page 3-A

## Lowe resigns elections post

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

Rebecca Lowe outlasted Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt. She's been through father and son Bush terms in the White House. Local politicians have also come and gone.

Now Lowe, after 14 years as Chowan County elections director, is preparing to leave her post. Friday is her last day at her East King Street Office. She'll assume new duties in Raleigh June 14 with the Wake County Board of Elections.

"It's been a good learning experience," Lowe said last week. "I've gotten to know people all over the state."

When she began as part-time elections director, the office was in the old Chowan County Courthouse. The pre-Revolutionary War site was often besieged by tourists. It has been undergoing improvements for several years.

"This was the last (county department) to move out prior to the renovations," Lowe said.

Before going to full-time, Lowe filled in with the county tax, water, and inspections department. With the influx of technological advances, Lowe — like many others —



Staff photo by Sean Jackson

Chowan County Board of Elections Supervisor Rebecca Lowe has resigned to accept a new position in Raleigh, NC. Her last day on the job in Edenton will be this Friday.

has grown proficient with computers.

There have also been new election laws and regulations to adapt to.

"(Those changes) have certainly made things different," she said.

Fortunately, voter turnout

hasn't changed much in recent years. It's still strong in Chowan County, she said.

"Our registration is higher than it's ever been," she said, adding that there were about 6,800 registered voters 14 years ago, compared to the roughly 9,000 currently on the rolls.

She has electioneering in her blood. The political process has shown her the benefits of democratic elections.

"It really makes you feel good to be an American," Lowe said.

See LOWE On Page 3-A

## Plans proceed for downtown beautification

BY REBECCA BUNCH  
Managing Editor

With lots of planning and a little luck, organizers of the Historic Edenton Streetscape Beautification Project hope they will soon be able to bring new beauty to downtown Edenton, courtesy of a North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) Enhancement Grant. The project is part of the Main Street Program, of which Edenton is a member. Phase one of the project calls for the installation of 62 new lampposts, 25 benches and 12 trash receptacles in the downtown area.

According to Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton, the grant process is "very competitive" for these funds, which are a mix of federal and state monies, with a local match required. Total estimated cost of the project is \$386,000 with a local funds match of \$77,360.

She said that over the years since the original lights and benches were installed, a lot of wear and tear has resulted. And, she noted, that "carpenter bees" which are a nuisance for locals and a cause of alarm

for tourists walking through the downtown area are very attracted to the current, wood-style benches. "We will definitely take that into consideration when choosing the new benches," she said. "We know that's a situation we need to address."

In fact, Knighton said, the town began working on some ideas for replacing those benches just prior to Hurricane Isabel last fall. With all the resulting damage to deal with, the town put that project on hold. But, Knighton said, she and the Main Street Board of Directors are aware of the keen interest people have in seeing some changes made. "I've been approached by so many people who've said they would be willing to donate money to buy streetlights or benches in memory of, or in honor of a loved one." She said she hoped those same folks would be willing to make donations to help the town raise matching funds for the project.

"Other communities have been very successful using that approach," agreed Ed-

See PLANS On Page 3-A

## Nicholls says tourism still strong

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

The cost of gas has soared recently, hitting record highs, and no one seems to know how to put the brakes on pump prices.

A pair of Edenton service stations charged over \$2 late last month for regular fuel, before dropping the price a

nickel by last week. Still, consumers don't have much hope that prices will fall by much any time soon.

According to AAA, the state's current average fuel price is \$1.956. It was \$1.736 last month and \$1.379 a year ago, or a nearly 60-cent spike in 12 months. Prices in Edenton averaged roughly \$1.97 for regular and as much

as \$2.17 for premium fuel.

Consumers at pumps in Edenton through the Memorial Day weekend bemoaned the high costs, but said they were travelling anyway. Nancy Nicholls, tourism director for the Edenton-Chowan Chamber of Commerce, doesn't expect the record prices to dampen tourism here.

"I really feel that we will have many visitors in spite of the rising prices," she said Tuesday. "The projections for the beaches around us — Outer Banks, Virginia Beach areas — are predicting a very strong season, the best since 9/11 in fact and many people will want to visit us on their way home."

## Edenton police bring end to 'one man crime wave'

BY SEAN JACKSON  
Staff Writer

What essentially was a one-man crime wave was stemmed by Edenton police late last month.

A Suffolk, Va. man was arrested May 19 on a host of charges for crimes he allegedly committed over several days last month. Cornelius Perkins, 19, is jailed at the Chowan County Detention Facility under \$745,000 in bonds.

Perkins has been charged with two counts of armed robbery, two counts of going armed to the terror of the people, assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill, first-degree burglary, possession of a stolen vehicle, hit-and-run, leaving the scene of an accident, and carrying a concealed weapon.

On May 14, Perkins allegedly robbed a local man at gunpoint who was in his parked car in the McDonald's parking

lot on Virginia Road. The victim told police that Perkins approached his car mumbling and then pulled out a chrome handgun and demanded money.

Perkins alleged took \$11 from the victim before fleeing across Virginia Road towards Pizza Hut.

On May 18, police Officer Rene Wilder responded to a gunpoint assault and shooting

See CRIME On Page 3-A



Staff photo by Sean Jackson

Gas stations in Edenton have followed the national trend with prices above \$2 a gallon. But local officials are optimistic tourism in our community won't be affected.

### INSIDE THIS WEEK

Chowan Seniors cruise to Bermuda ..... 1-C

Rail Trail connects to Roanoke River ..... 9-A

Williams tees off for Mt. Olive ..... 2-B

Habitat needs Volunteers ..... 3-C