

**BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT**

## WAL★MART IN MERRY HILL

**What:** Bertie County officials have invited Wal-Mart to build a store 10 minutes from downtown Edenton.  
**Where:** In Merry Hill, beside the Black Rock Deli.  
**When:** Developers are expected to decide in the next few months whether to purchase the property.

### THE HISTORY

- A decade ago, rumors spread that Wal-Mart was coming to Edenton. Wal-Mart officials denied the claims, as they do now for Bertie County.
- Five years ago, Bertie officials began talks with developers about bringing Wal-Mart to the site in Merry Hill.
- In March, Bertie officials sent letters to Wal-Mart formally welcoming the mega-retailer to Mimosa Plantation.

### WHAT IT COULD MEAN

- Some Edenton residents say Wal-Mart could close local stores and result in lost county revenues.
- Others say the downtown business district would survive.

### TO LEARN MORE

For — <http://www.walmartfacts.com/>  
Against — <http://www.sprawl-busters.com/>



Cliff Copeland  
County Manager

"I am sure Bertie, like Chowan, will pursue any economic development activities that benefit the citizens of their respective counties."



Bessie Bazemore  
N.C. Highway 32

"I shop there. I think [having a Wal-Mart in Merry Hill] is a good thing. We need somewhere else to shop. I'd like to see one closer."



Roland Vaughan  
Edenton Mayor

"I know we have a lot of Wal-Mart customers in Edenton already. If it's located [at Mimosa Plantation], it would just mean a shorter ride."



Susie Owens  
Macedonia Road

"I want it [in Merry Hill]. I think it would be good for development, stores and stuff. I think [downtown Edenton] would survive."



Alton Elmore  
Edenton Furniture

"It will wipe out small businesses [in Edenton's downtown business district] over a period of time. That's the thing that bothers me, really."



Richard Bunch  
Chamber Director

"In the years to come, Wal-Mart will do like every other franchise — they will be in smaller communities. I am sure our time will come."



Steve Brown  
Byrum Hardware

"I am afraid it would mean a lot of empty storefronts [in downtown Edenton]. That would have an affect on all of Chowan County."

By Sean Jackson  
Staff Writer

A Bertie County official says the developer of a Merry Hill property proposed for a Wal-Mart could own the site within the next few months.

Steve Biggs, Bertie's economic developer and Edenton town councilman, said California-based development company Vicinages has spent time and money on its Mimosa Plantation project.

The 841-acre development could likely include a Wal-Mart Supercenter, Biggs said.

"They are seriously interested enough that the developer has spent thousands of dollars on it," he added.

The project — including the Wal-Mart — has been in the works for about five years, Biggs said.

Bertie County Manager Zee Lamb and commissioners Chairman Rick Harrell both sent letters to developers in March welcoming Wal-Mart to Merry Hill.

Both said Wal-Mart was a good match for the county.

#### Chowan, Edenton react

While Bertie County officials are embracing a Wal-Mart in their county, some Chowan officials are taking a cautious stance.

The site is on U.S. Highway 17, about 10 minutes from downtown Edenton and its thriving business district.

Some veteran businessmen recall talk of a Wal-Mart coming to Edenton a decade ago.

That rumor spurred outcries from some residents, while others applauded the potential.

A survey by the owner of that property found that 75 percent of the respondents wanted a Wal-Mart here.

Byrum Hardware manager Steve Brown knows that local residents already shop at Wal-Mart stores in the region.

But having one so close, he says, could pose a threat to his and other South Broad Street stores.

"They try to put out of business everything you can put out of business," he said. "That wouldn't be good for Chowan."

Edenton Furniture's Alton Elmore agreed.

"They don't care anything about small communities," Elmore said of Wal-Mart.

"They don't want competition, they want total domination."

A Wal-Mart spokesperson contacted by The Chowan Herald did not immediately respond for comment Tuesday.

Chowan County Manager Cliff Copeland declined to comment specifically about Bertie's efforts to bring Wal-Mart to Merry Hill.

"As to whether Wal-Mart plans to build in Bertie," he said, "I only know what I read in *The Chowan Herald*."

"Chowan County and Edenton will continue to seek to enlarge our commercial base."

But Brown is worried that a Wal-Mart in Bertie would siphon more retail-sales tax revenues from Chowan coffers.

"You're looking at taking sales tax revenues from Chowan County and giving it to Bertie County," he said.

"That would be worse than locating a Wal-Mart in Chowan County."

Edenton Mayor Roland Vaughan feels the downtown would survive a potential Wal-Mart within minutes of Broad Street.

Vaughan and his wife co-own a downtown jewelry store.

"A lot of people are still going to come to Edenton to shop because of the distinct retail opportunities," he said.

"It's not cookie-cutter shopping here."

#### Having doubts

Richard Bunch, Edenton-Chowan Chamber of Commerce executive director, isn't certain that Wal-Mart will build in Merry Hill.

"Do you really believe that Wal-Mart is going to place a building in a field where there are no major population numbers to pull from?" Bunch said.

Elmore also has his doubts. Like Bunch, Elmore noted that Wal-Mart Supercenters are already located — or being built — in Ahoskie, Elizabeth City and

See WAL-MART, Page A2 >

## Subdivision boasts two-day sellout

Project expected to bring 400 to 500 people to Chowan County.

By Rebecca Bunch  
Staff Writer

Over 200 available lots at the new RiverSound development were snatched up last weekend during a marathon grand opening sales event.

The subdivision consists of 224 lots.

The new homes are expected to add significantly to the community's population base.

Over the past six years, Chowan County's population has grown by 169 people, officials said. RiverSound is expected to bring an additional 400 to 500 people to the community.

"As a 29-year manager, I believe history will treat (those sales) as a defining moment in the transition of the economic base of this county," County Manager Cliff Copeland said.

Lots at the development, located on Drummonds Point Road, began selling at about \$40,000; waterfront lots, at around \$100,000.

Infrastructure at the site, where an average lot covers one-and-a-third acres, is expected to be completed within the next 90 to 120 days, so that construction at the site can begin, according to Peter Rascoe, director of special projects for the county.

Developer Larry Bragg, of the Waterfront Development Group, described the sales activity experienced by the company so far as "remarkably

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### Chowan-Edenton Optimist Club FABULOUS 4<sup>TH</sup>

**What:** Over-the-water fireworks show & party in the park

**Where:** Colonial Park

**When:** 4 p.m., fireworks after dark

**How much:** FREE

**Details:** Page A2

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## Electric rates continue to rise with Town budget

By Sean Jackson  
Staff Writer

Edenton town councilors passed their new fiscal-year budget, but not without some dissent.

During a meeting Monday night, council split 8-2 to approve the budget drafted by Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton.

The budget, which takes effect Sunday, includes increases in electric and water/sewer rates. It does not include a real estate hike.

Councilors Steve Biggs and Willis Privott voted against the budget. Councilors Jimmy Stallings, Jerry Parks and Phyllis Britton voted in favor. Councilman Sambo Dixon was unable to attend the meeting.

"We feel that we held the line," Knighton said of the \$17.9 million budget.

The electric increase will add

roughly \$2 to a customer's monthly bill, she said.

The water/sewer hike will add an additional \$2.25 to a utility bill, she added.

It's the first town-imposed electric hike not spurred by a rate increase passed down from the electric-service provider, Knighton said.

Biggs and Privott questioned the plan to opt for a 2.5-percent pay boost for town employees instead of an across-the-board increase.

Biggs said the second option would give all town employees a \$777 pay raise. He said that plan — which failed to garner a motion Monday night — was more fair to the town's lowest-paid employees.

"We used to go with that (pay-raise option) once in a while, years ago."

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Biggs



Knighton

## Alleged gunman captured at OBX

By Earline White  
Managing Editor

Nearly 72 hours after James Earl Freeman, 46, of Columbia allegedly shot his wife at the American Legion fairgrounds, he was arrested in Kill Devil Hills.

Freeman is charged with first-degree murder and is awaiting trial at Raleigh Central Prison under no bond, Sheriff Dwayne Goodwin said Monday.

Freeman was spotted around 6:30 p.m. Thursday night in the KMart parking lot by Lt. Mark Evans of the Kill Devil Hills Police Department.

"I was just in the right place at the right time," Evans told an Outer Banks newspaper.

Freeman was first seen asking for money outside Holiday Inn Express at Kitty Hawk, Goodwin said. Before officers could arrive, Freeman was gone.

Alerts went out in the Kill Devil Hills and Kitty Hawk area.

Evans followed his instincts, he said, and pulled into KMart's parking lot where he spotted the



Freeman

Plymouth Voyager Freeman had been driving. Evans waited for Freeman to get out of the crowded parking lot and down the street before turning on his blue

lights. Freeman's first appearance on the first-degree murder charge was Friday in Dare County, where he asked for a court-appointed attorney, Goodwin said.

Freeman's probable cause hearing is set for July 10 in Chowan County.

Goodwin said that the gun used in Sharlene Freeman's death has not been recovered but is believed to be a 22-caliber rifle. Authorities remain unsure as to the motive.

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Because the post office will be closed for the Fourth of July holiday, mail delivery of The Chowan Herald will not take place until Thursday. The Herald office will also be closed July 4.