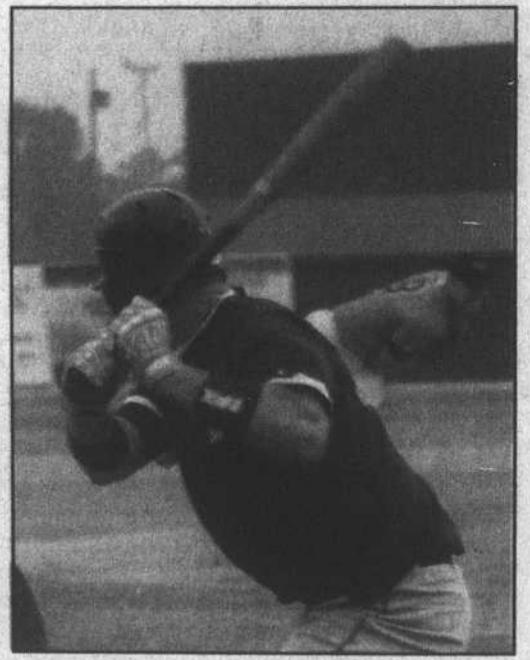


CHOWAN HERALD

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Town's realty tax rate increase nixed

By Earline White
Managing Editor

There was applause Monday night as the Edenton Town Council voted to hold the line on realty taxes for the upcoming year.

The decision to further tighten belts came two weeks after Town Manager Anne Marie Knighton originally proposed a 3-cent real estate tax rate increase to pay for the debt owed on the new public safety center.

One week later the town's finance committee proposed only a 1.5 cent rate increase.

Residents continued to voice concerns about the effect of a tax increase during the current strain on the

economy. In order to balance the budget and have no tax rate increase, Knighton recommended freezing a fourth vacant position with the Edenton Police.

"We want, need and will fill the three vacancies we have now and in January after some revenue comes in, look at hiring a fourth,"

Knighton said.

Among other areas to be cut were travel funds for the council members to attend the Electricities conference in Myrtle Beach and funding for a new vehicle, diagnostic software, a garage emissions tester and tire changer.

"I don't want us to get caught short," Councilman

Jerry Parks said. "The tire changer, for example, has been on the budget for several years ... either we need it, or really need it."

Councilman Steve Biggs also voiced his concerns over having such a tight budget.

"I just don't feel comfortable cutting police protection," Biggs said.

Parks continued, "I remember the year the county had to increase taxes 8-cents — we're cutting into the meat [of the budget]; some things have to suffer, but it's a sad day when you talk about cutting police officers."

The budget was unanimously approved Monday.

Library opening postponed

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

As construction crews applied the finishing touches to Edenton's Shepard-Pruden Memorial Library, librarian Rosalie Miller was saddened that the June 24 opening date was missed.

Miller had hoped the library would be finished before the architect's original estimates of late June.

She had also hoped to have the grand re-opening before the departure of outgoing county manager Cliff Copeland, whose diligence pushed the library renovation project forward.

Miller had speculated the library would be open in May, but that date has come and gone.

Still, Miller did not feel the opening would be too far in the future.

"It will be very soon," Miller said. "I don't want to promise something that can't be done."

The library's enlargement has involved doubling the size of the library, adding a two-story wing on to the back of the building, and extensive landscaping work.

The project began in November 2006 and had an estimated completion date of March 2008.

The \$2.6-million project is partially funded by a low-interest loan from the USDA.

MAKING NEW FRIENDS



An unidentified boy gets a good luck pat from Sam the Clam prior to the plunger race held between innings.

Vernon Fueston

Police nears staffing capacity

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

After a long, dry spell, Chief Gregory Bonner is close to having a full staff.

With only two openings left of the five he once had, one position has been deferred by the town council until December. The other is in negotiation.

It all started eleven months ago when an officer was arrested for evidence tampering.

Since then, three other Edenton officers were dismissed. And during that time officers still came and went as part of the frequent turnover common to small town departments.

"Two officers went to Elizabeth City," Bonner said. "Officers going to other agencies, that's the biggest problem for turnover. It's nothing personal with Edenton."

Bonner said many officers who start their careers in Edenton end up moving on to other law enforcement agencies for a variety of reasons.

Many see a small department like Edenton as offering little chance for advancement. Some move up to bigger city agencies that offer higher salaries.

Others don't like the confinement of patrolling a small town day in and day out.

Bonner said there is very little difference in salary between Edenton and other small town police departments, including Elizabeth City.

At \$30,000 per year, a rookie police officer in Edenton can do reasonably well compared to other local employees. With overtime, an officer can expect to earn more.

Towns like Greenville, Rocky Mount or Raleigh, of course, pay higher.

For some officers, a small town is the starting rung on a career ladder. Turnover will always be high but Edenton is no less competitive than other municipalities, Bonner said.

Entry level officers make their way to the force by way of a 15 week basic police training course offered by the College of the Albemarle and other institutions. To

Edenton schools down 16 positions due to enrollment

Officials expect class sizes to remain constant

By Vernon Fueston
Contributing Writer

Three certified teachers and two teaching assistants received pink slips at the end of school last year, but that's not the extent of the belt tightening that Edenton's schools will face this year.

A total of 16 jobs have been cut, many by attrition. Those cuts are happening because enrollment in the county's schools fell by 31 students.

How such a small change in enrollment could force such drastic cuts is a lesson in the complex and quirky business of North Carolina school funding.

It's a strange mix of local and state tax revenues, lottery money, and state regulations.

The biggest hit was felt by the county's teachers. While three were actually let go, a total of 11 teaching positions were cut, the remaining eight by attrition.

Four teacher's assistant positions and one clerical position were also elimi-

nated due to decreased enrollment. That caused the lay-off of two teacher's assistants.

So, how can a reduction in enrollment of 31 students cause a loss of 16 jobs to the school system? It all has to do with the way North Carolina funds its schools.

"We get funded a year in arrears," said school superintendent Allan Smith.

That means school funding that's pegged to the number of students enrolled is based on last year's figures. Those figures were lower this year than the eight-year average by 31 students.

But it's not that simple. The two previous years were higher than the eight-year average, by 116 students. That two-year rise in enrollment, followed by a decrease from the average enrollment this year, meant a steep decline in funding.

That makes the cuts larger and particularly painful. Smith said hard decisions had to be made.

"We wanted to be certain that class size stayed at an acceptable level," Smith

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Local shop owners feeling effects of economic pinch

By Rebecca Bunch
Staff Writer

Local motorists aren't the only ones feeling the pinch when it comes to higher gas prices. Businesses are feeling the impact, positive and negative, too.

For local businesses like Peebles it is resulting in higher sales as customers try to save on travel by shopping at home, according to store manager Janelle Wagner.

But others, like Edenton Furniture owner Alton Elmore, are seeing a drop in sales as those who used to come from neighboring counties to buy in Edenton are cutting back on travel too.

Campaigns to buy local

In the midst of the downturn in the economy, the Edenton-Chowan Chamber of Commerce and Destination Downtown Edenton launched an ambitious "Buy Chowan First" campaign to encourage shoppers to support local businesses.

Among the shoppers heeding the message was Kelly Davis of Edenton.

"I've always tried to find things in town before I went

somewhere else," she said. "But now with the higher gas prices, well, that's definitely a factor."

Chamber Director Richard Bunch said he felt the campaign's message really resonated with shoppers and that the timing couldn't have been better.

"I really think the 'Buy Chowan First' campaign did a wonderful job of making people aware of the importance of shopping first in Edenton and Chowan," he said. "I had more people approach me this time around than in the previous marketing effort, so I know the message got out."

That message was presented to the public in a variety of ways, including newspaper ads, banners and a billboard on Hwy. 32.

Linda Ashley, chamber president, said reaction to the campaign was strong among local shoppers.

"I've heard from a lot of people who've told me they saw the ads in the paper, for example, and actually looked here at home before going out of town. They said they were pleasantly surprised at what they found."

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