

County Tax Base 'Shrinks' 16 Percent

By BILL ALLEN
Staff Writer

What has caused the Brunswick County tax base to shrink more than \$228 million since last July?

The question is being asked after it was learned that the county tax base has shriveled down from \$1.5 billion to \$1.271 billion in the five-month period between July and December.

No one — including County Tax Supervisor K.T. Bellamy — can explain why the tax base has decreased \$228,913,981 since the 1975-76 budget was adopted.

"I would be happier than I am now if I knew the answer," stated Bellamy, who said he had lost sleep worrying about the decreased tax base

in the county.

The Brunswick County tax base was set at \$1.5 billion on July 1 upon tax information provided by Bellamy. "It was the best figure we could come up with the information supplied by Allied Appraisal Company," Bellamy stated.

However, a report a fiscal information as of December 31, 1975, showed that the tax base has dropped to \$1,271,086,019. The county is required by General Statute 159-33.1 to file the report with the state on the last day of December.

The report showed that the six townships contribute \$872,204,138 and public utilities \$458,013,376 to a tax base of \$1,330,217,514. Releases granted by the department — \$59,131,495 — reduced the total county tax base to

\$1,271,086,019 as of January 31. Bellamy said the information contained in the report is still accurate.

Incidentally, the report showed that Smithville Township, including the Brunswick nuclear plant, contributes more than half of the total tax base in the county.

The value of townships in the county include Northwest, \$267,738,683; Smithville, \$212,742,161; Shallotte, \$149,214,441; Lockwood Folly, \$97,976,265; Town Creek, \$97,424,368; and Waccamaw, \$47,108,220.

A \$1.5 - billion tax base would have generated \$5,313,000 based on the 38.5-cent tax rate. The \$1.272-billion base will produce \$4,502,186, or \$810,814 less.

Finance Officer Regina McKeithan said the county was not in financial trouble because the wrong base was used. She said that grants received by the county have offset the difference.

Under law, it is Bellamy's responsibility to provide county commissioners with the tax base used to set the tax rate at budget time each year.

The tax supervisor said he believed at the time that the \$1.5-billion tax base was conservative because of the skyrocketing land values resulting from revaluation.

The \$1.5-billion tax base was only a little more

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City Joins Protest Against Rate Hikes

By BILL ALLEN
Staff Writer

Southport has decided to join with other cities in the state in the battle against higher electrical rates.

The Board of Aldermen, meeting Thursday night at City Hall, voted unanimously to become an "active" member of Electricities of North Carolina, an organization of municipal systems that purchase electricity at wholesale and then retail it to their residents. The membership fee is \$1,068 a year.

"This may be one of the most far-reaching decisions we make this evening," Mayor E.B. Tomlinson, Jr., said after the vote was taken.

The mayor said he had opposed the city joining Electricities in the past in order to "maintain good relations with our corporate neighbor," the CP&L Brunswick nuclear plant located outside Southport. But he said the time had come "to re-consider our position."

Mayor Tomlinson said that CP&L has asked for another rate increase. It would raise the wholesale rate 28 percent effective March 1. Electricities has estimated that the rate increase would mean that Southport would have to pay \$12,000 more per month for electricity.

"When CP&L puts it to us, we have to pass it along to our customers," Mayor Tomlinson declared. "We are not anti-CP&L. But the time comes when we have to look at the increases in a realistic way."

Electricities saved the city \$65,000 several months ago because of its opposition to a

proposed rate increase, according to a letter from the organization read by Mayor Tomlinson. Southport received the advantages although it was not a member at the time.

In other business, Alderman Pierce Horne expressed concern because no progress report was given on the water, sewer and storm drainage project, which has already run two months past the original completion date.

Horne told the board that he called City Hall on Monday to have the matter placed on the agenda of the meeting,

but was informed that it was too late.

City Manager Alvin Kornegay, Jr., said he was making arrangements for the general contractor to make a report at the next meeting.

Horne said he had received a letter that the project was 86-percent complete. "Does that mean that the entire project is 86-percent complete?" he asked. "Or does it mean that it is 86-percent complete on one side of town?"

Alderman Conley Koontz said the companies should complete the entire project

before going back to do finishing work. The companies are delaying the completion of the project to do finishing work at the present time, he reported.

"It looks like at times that Pierce Ditching Company is digging up this week what they put down last week," Mayor Tomlinson added.

Gilbert Ambulance Company was the only firm that asked for the city ambulance franchise when bids were opened during the meeting by Alderman Mary McHose, who is chairman of

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Southport-Oak Island Chamber Elects Slate

Directors to head the Southport-Oak Island Area Chamber of Commerce were elected by the membership Monday night.

The 15 directors — eight from Southport by the flip of a coin and seven from the island — will meet this coming Monday night to choose officers.

Named as directors from the Southport side of the waterway were Tom Owens, Bobby Willis, Jim Prevatte, Judy White, J.A. Francis, D.V. Jones, John Barbee and Brooks Napier. Representing Oak Island on the board are Morris Ferrell, Ted Wood, Buddy Rudd, Jim Somers, Lee Aldridge, Patricia Foy and Warren Calloway.

Barbee, acting president since the Chamber was formed, presided over the Dutch-dinner meeting at Jones' Restaurant in Long beach. He urged the 75 to 85 charter members to work on their own to get at least one other business person to join. An interest survey had shown approximately 200 potential members in the Southport-Oak Island area.

As of Monday night the Chamber had received \$5,505.42 in membership investments. Pledges from members who have paid at least part of their dues totaled \$7,267.92, but with the addition of new members — including several large businesses — the total should

approach the proposed \$15,000 budget figure.

With that budget the Chamber will be able to employ a full-time director, Barbee noted.

Priorities of the Chamber will be established through questionnaires returned with the payment of the membership investments. Among the projects being considered are local promotional ads, television ads in the Piedmont area of the state, quarterly meetings of the coffee-hour type, a central forum to act as spokesman in governmental affairs, a Better Business Bureau, a Credit Bureau, and the publication of maps and brochures depicting the Southport-Oak Island area.

The members present Monday night approved the Constitution and Bylaws as they were printed, but the board was directed to make revisions subject to later approval by the entire Chamber membership.

The president of the Chamber will be elected by the board according to his place of business. Election will be for one year, and will alternate between the island and the Southport area.

"Booster members" will have a vote in Chamber affairs, but no one associated with a business can be voting booster member. "These memberships are intended for retired persons who are not in business, but who have a great interest in the development of this area," Barbee noted.

Business members will have one vote for each \$70 increment in membership dues, with a maximum of five votes regardless of the dues paid. Dues may be paid on a quarterly, semi-annual or yearly basis.

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A LANDMARK IN BRUNSWICK County history was noted Saturday as was ground was broken for the new Brunswick County Memorial Hospital, located one mile west of Supply on US 17. The referendum that called for the construction was approved in June, 1973 and work began on the project this past December. According to hospital administrator Warren Oliver, estimated date of completing the close-to-\$4-million project is December, 1977.

Leland Housing Aid Is Studied By Board

By ED HARPER
News Editor

The Brunswick County Board of Commissioners is considering a way to "turn \$5,000 into \$20,000" for the improvement of sub-standard housing in the Leland area.

The opportunity to quadruple the funding was presented to the board by Joel Webb, director of the Department of Social Services for Brunswick County. Under Title XX, he reported, the federal government will pay 75 percent of the cost of minor home improvements if the balance of the funds is found elsewhere.

He suggested using Community Development funds, which are being sought for water line extensions in the Leland area. But if these Community Development funds are used, all Title XX work must be done in that immediate area.

The board decided, however, that a countywide approach was preferable. "It is another case of the federal government telling us where to spend the money," said Commissioner Franky Thomas, "even if it is in an area that may not need it the most." Thomas is from Leland.

Webb indicated he would prepare the application showing \$10,000 local funding — \$5,000 from Community Development and \$5,000 from the general fund that would allow work to be done throughout the county. Vice-Chairman Willie Sloan, who presided over the meeting, noted that matching funds achieved through Community Development would cost the county nothing.

The proposed work ("There are a lot of contingencies here," Webb pointed out) would be under the supervision of the

Department of Social Services, which would determine eligibility. The program would tend to favor the elderly, Thomas noted, which he said was good.

"What can you do on a dilapidated house for \$200 or \$300 that would make any difference at all?" Thomas asked.

Rose Ann Mack of the Cape Fear Council of Governments office replied that the repair program was mostly concerned with eliminating health hazards, such as broken steps, poor wiring, etc., rather than increasing home value. "It's an emergency kind of situation," she told the board members.

In other business before the Board of Commissioners during its short third-Monday meeting, Mrs. Earl (Barbara) Clewis was named to serve as an extra-territorial member on the Southport

Planning and Zoning Board.

Appointments to the Resources Development Commission were postponed until the next county board meeting March 1 at the request of Commissioner Rusty Russ, who was absent because of a "business conflict." Chairman Steve Varnam was unable to attend the Monday meeting because of a death in his family, and Russ asked the delay until both could be present for the appointments.

RDC Executive Director Jackie Stephenson, who was at the meeting, said the postponement would create no problem because the appointments would not take effect until March 3, after the next RDC meeting.

The board approved the appointment of Mrs. Judy White to the County Recreation Commission, replacing Wink King of

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BCMh Groundbreaking Celebrated On Saturday

Brunswick County Memorial Hospital will receive grant funds from The Duke Endowment, an official announced during groundbreaking ceremonies Saturday afternoon at the Supply site.

James R. Felts, Jr., executive director of The Duke Endowment hospital and child care section, said that the hospital has received \$125,000 from the foundation.

Felts made the first public announcement about the grant while delivering the feature address during the groundbreaking for the new hospital.

In addition, he said the foundation expects to make a similar grant in

1977 to bring the total contribution to the new Brunswick County hospital to \$250,000.

The Duke funds, Hospital Executive Director Warren Oliver said, will be used to construct a four-doctor office complex on the Supply site.

Chairman Steve Varnam, Jr., and Commissioners W.T. Russ, Jr., and Ira Butler, Jr., Former Commissioners William Kopp, Jr., J.T. Clemmons and Robert Simmons and members of the Hospital Authority broke ground for the hospital during the ceremonies. Authority Chairman Mason Anderson presided over