

Early Fighting On Deeds Office Pay

By BILL ALLEN

Proposed severance and salaries to be paid in the Register of Deeds office came under attack during a meeting of the Brunswick County commissioners on Tuesday afternoon.

Register of Deeds William (Billy) Gaither requested a budget amendment of \$3,156.05 to use for severance pay for discharged employees in the office.

Commissioner Marvin Watson voiced strong opposition to paying \$3,156.05 in severance pay. "I don't want to spend the taxpayers' money that way," he declared.

Watson proposed that the three employees work out their two-weeks' notice in order for the county to avoid paying most of the severance.

"The fact remains that the transition could have been made without costing the county a dime," Watson declared.

Watson said he would be glad to explain in private to Gaither how it can be done without costing extra tax money.

Gaither said Emily McKeithan is due \$2,304.96 in vacation and sick pay while Shirley Frazier is due \$672.24 and Brenda Mercer \$178.85. All were dismissed on Monday by Gaither.

Commissioners also expressed alarm about some of the salaries Gaither plans to pay his new employees in the office.

Faye Dickerson, who has worked in the office two years in the past, would receive \$9,545. Mrs. McKeithan was making \$9,988 after being with the office almost 16 years.

Gaither said he wanted to pay Clerk Peggy Clark, who has worked in the office eight years in the past, \$7,626. Mrs. Frazier was making \$7,282 at the time after almost four years on the job.

Marlene Moyer, who has no experience in the office, is proposed to receive \$6,642,

the same salary Miss Mercer was making after more than two years on the job.

Gaither told the board he set the salaries on the basis of qualifications. In addition, he said they would only have four years or less to work on the job.

County Manager Don Flowers, Jr., questioned why the new employees were not starting in step one in their salary bracket. Mrs. Dickerson is at step five, Mrs. Clark at step three and Mrs. Moyer at step two.

Chairman Cletis Clemmons pointed out that Mrs. Dickerson would be making

Continued on page 2



SIGNING OATHS OF OFFICE after being sworn-in Monday morning by Chief District Judge Frank Grady, newly-elected county officers assume their new duties. Here, Coroner

Tommy Gilbert fills out the proper form, while Commissioner Bill Stanley waits at Gilbert's left for his turn.

School Fund Balance 'Good,' Says Auditor

By ED HARPER

The Board of Education has been told it should keep a sizeable fund balance because of the way funds are provided by the county.

Auditor Francis Smith of Fred A. Turlington and Associates of Tarboro said a \$771,000 balance "may look good — even excessive — but the way the county is funding the Board of Education, it's not."

Smith, pointing out the large balance at the end of last fiscal year, said the county has not been funding the Board of Education until November. At the end of October, he said, "there's not a lot of money in the bank."

Smith, whose audit report was accepted by the board, also said the school food service program is operating "about as near to breaking — even as it can," taking in only \$300 more than was spent during the fiscal year that ended June 30.

In the individual school audit reports, Smith said bookkeeping "keeps getting better in general," but it depends to a large degree on the individual keeping the books. He said the most common problems are securing invoices, but said he made notations of anything

that was not exact. "I'm a little bit picky on the schools," Smith told members of the Board of Education.

The board did not review in detail audit reports of nine federal programs after Smith said nothing out of the ordinary had been found.

The board spent 45 minutes in executive session with school board attorney Bud Powell and attorneys Jimmy Barnhill and Keith Vaughan of the Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge and Rice law firm of Winston-Salem. The firm has been retained by the Board of Education in the lawsuit to recover the cost of re-roofing the three high schools, which have experienced leaks.

After hearing reports of disruption — "violence" — at games involving South and West Brunswick high schools, Supt. Ralph King said the board "might need to re-look at our athletic program." Chairman Wilbur Earl Rabon said he would "rather see athletics suspended than have somebody killed."

Rabon said if coaches and other school officials could not control their teams the board would consider suspending athletic events

Continued on page 2

Chamber Annual Meeting

The annual dinner meeting of the Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce will be held Tuesday night, starting at 7 o'clock at the Harbour House Restaurant, Long Beach.

Jackie Stephenson, director of the county Resources Development Commission, will be among the speakers at the Dutch dinner, to which members — and prospective members — and their families are invited.

Morris Ferrell is the president-elect, replacing John Barbee, who served during the Chamber's first year of operation. Plans and goals for the coming year will be discussed at the Tuesday dinner.

Question Lingers About Appeal Of Hospital Tax

The question of whether the deadline has passed without an appeal being filed in the hospital tax case has been raised. Clerk of Court Jack Brown said it has passed; the attorney for the plaintiff said it has not.

"The appeal would have had to be in this office and filed before 5 p.m. on Monday afternoon," Brown declared.

He said he sat and waited until past the 5 o'clock deadline because he wanted to be sure the plaintiffs had an opportunity to file an appeal.

However, Harley Evans of Supply, one of the six plaintiffs in the case, told The Pilot that an appeal had been made.

Evans said he was told by his attorney, J.B. Lee of Whiteville, that he contacted Superior Court Judge Henry McKinnon in Whiteville on Monday afternoon to give notice of appeal.

He said that if Lee failed for some reason to give notice to appeal in the case, he would

strongly consider bringing a lawsuit against his attorney.

But Lee, contacted Wednesday morning by The Pilot, said he had indeed discussed the matter with Judge McKinnon and was satisfied he still had time to appeal.

"Somebody had better read some law," he said.

According to Lee, the ten days allowed for appeal begins when the judge signs the court order, which Judge McKinnon reportedly did on December 2. Lee said Notice of appeal was "in the mail" to the Clerk of Court's office.

The Whiteville attorney said he discussed the matter with Judge McKinnon after his client, Evans, was "upset" by Brown's announcement that the time limit would expire Monday afternoon. Lee assured The Pilot that time had not passed. "You can put that in your book," Lee

Continued on page 6

Bellamy Leaves Office, Denies Any Misdoings

By BILL ALLEN

Brunswick County Tax Supervisor K.T. Bellamy resigned under pressure his position in county government on Tuesday.

County Attorney John Hughes read Bellamy's letter of resignation during a meeting of the Brunswick County commissioners on Tuesday afternoon.

Bellamy denied any wrongdoing in connection with the value reductions received by Odell Williamson. He said any valuation reductions granted were done under the "direction, approval and instruction" of the old board.

Bellamy made no comment despite the fact he attended two executive sessions with the commissioners on Tuesday. After the letter of resignation was read, attorney Henry Foy indicated that Bellamy may make a statement at a later time.

Chairman Cletis Clemmons announced that the board would hold another meeting on Wednesday morning to name Bellamy's successor.

Although Bellamy's resignation is effective January 17, Chairman Clemmons said his last day in the office was Tuesday. After the meeting, Bellamy and associates were seen in his office packing up his pick-up truck.

Bellamy, who will not be in the office, will stay on the payroll until January 17 to draw his accumulated vacation pay and two weeks severance, and complete work on the State Tax Commission ruling requirements. He has been making \$15,867 a year.

Bellamy has been a center of controversy during the 21 months he has held the position. The latest controversy involved valuation reductions received by Ocean Isle Beach developer Williamson.

Bellamy denied in his letter of resignation that he had given any "unilateral" tax reductions to Williamson.

"If Mr. Williamson received any adjustments to his property valuations, it was not done unilaterally by

me, but under the direction of and with the approval of the Board of Equalization and Review," the statement said. "In accordance with instructions given me by the

previous board of county commissioners, the property of developer Odell Williamson received the same treatment as other development property."

Bellamy said he was resigning because it was "obvious" at the meeting on Monday that the commissioners wanted a new tax supervisor.

"My continued employment by Brunswick County under these circumstances can lead to strained relations which, in my opinion, may result in a situation detrimental to Brunswick County government and the county as a whole," the letter said. "This cannot be."

Bellamy said he needed until January 17 to complete work on the order by the State Tax Commission to revalue the property owned by Williamson. Although the work has been completed, he said the additional time is

Continued on page 3

Acting Tax Supervisor

Eldridge Hickman of Hickman's Crossroads was named acting Tax Supervisor by the county Board of Commissioners Wednesday morning.

The vote was unanimous except that Commissioner Willie Sloan abstained. He said he had met Hickman for the first time today, and questioned whether an experienced person should not be named.

Following the vote, commissioners toured the tax office and returned for a "personnel" executive session. They were still meeting at presstime.

Matter Of Annexation To Be Heard Monday

The public hearing to consider extending the Southport city limits will be held Monday night at 7:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Mayor E.B. Tomlinson, Jr., has already announced that the Southport Board of Aldermen will make no decision on the night of the hearing.

Under law, Mayor Tomlinson has said, the town can't act on annexation until seven days after the hearing. The board then has 60 days to act on the question.

Officials of both the Brunswick nuclear plant and Pfizer, Inc., which would be taken into the city if the proposal is approved, have announced opposition to annexation. They said the city has nothing to offer the two industrial facilities.

"Thus the result of annexation would be that Southport, through taxation, would charge the Brunswick plant for services the plant

does not need and cannot use," said President Shearon Harris of Carolina Power & Light Company, the owner of the nuclear plant.

Plant manager Stanley Ensminger of Pfizer, Inc., has said the proposal would saddle the plant with heavy new taxes while contributing very little benefit to the company or to the residents of the area that would be annexed.

The city had originally planned to hold the public hearing on November 22. But the date has to be changed to December 13 because the city did not meet the legal requirements to hold the hearing in November.

Wilmington attorney John Newton has been hired to represent the city in the annexation matter. City attorney Carter Lambeth said he could not hold the position due to a possible conflict of interest since he represents both the city and Pfizer.