

# OPINION

## Plan takes on water

County commissioners have turned around, collectively slapped their foreheads, and exclaimed, "Oops, we don't have the money to pay our water system debt."

And, according to figures released recently in conjunction with an engineering firm's study of the county water system, this is true. Brunswick County pretty well breaks even when it compares the annual cost of its water operation to the revenues from sales of water. What the county hasn't figured into the equation to date is the \$4 million annually it has to pay to retire the debt incurred in building the Brunswick County water system.

Until now, the county has been covering a good portion of the cost of this debt with general fund dollars. Now comes the engineering report commissioners ordered, and it is suggested water-user rates be doubled over the next four years in order to cover debt service without any general fund help.

On paper, that sounds like a good idea. In practice, it is not. It is fundamentally wrong to double the cost of water to wholesale customers like the towns of Long Beach and Caswell Beach after they have become captive customers.

Here's a little historical perspective on how managers of the county water system failed to assure it could pay its debt.

First, when the water system was built, it was built on the premise that county utilities would foster an economic boon to Brunswick County. With the availability of water, industry and good jobs would naturally flow here. All in the county would benefit from these solid industrial neighbors and their good jobs, so the cost of water was kept artificially low, subsidized by tax dollars. It was not the economic viability of the water system that was of concern; economic development was.

Second, when Brunswick County began expanding its water delivery system its mandate was not to extend lines to the most populous areas of the county which would assure the highest usage and most revenue. Its mandate was driven, instead, by a public health need. There were areas of southwestern Brunswick County where potable water was not available. The economic viability of the system was not a concern; public health was.

Third, footing the cost of building a water system was a tough political sell for county commissioners ten years ago. To make the water system more palatable to the voters who would have to approve bonds to build the system, county commissioners then consciously decided not to require mandatory tap-on by people who owned property beside main water trunks. Neither did the county require that those owning property alongside water lines pay impact fees, though surely their property increased in value. Economic viability of the water system was not a concern; political viability of those who proposed it was.

So now, ten years into this experiment, it is suggested usage rates for retail and wholesale customers be doubled to pay the debt of an economic development and public health necessity built on frail political backbone?

We sure hope not.

## Card-carrying voters

Municipal Election Day is just two weeks away and, of course, this is the time of year the registered voters of our towns and cities are afforded the opportunity to set a course for their communities by choosing those who will lead them.

One slightly -- and "slightly" is to be emphasized -- disturbing occurrence during the Long Beach primary election October 10 is worth mentioning here, so that election procedure is clear to all who wish to vote.

Sometime in the last couple years, the county board of elections switched procedures and started issuing identification cards as evidence of voter registration. The cards are also used at the polls to facilitate the process of qualifying voters as they appear to vote.

The disturbing thing at Long Beach was that someone placed a huge sign at the entrance to the polling place demanding, "Have your voter registration card ready," or words to that effect.

Those words suggested to some that they could not vote if they were not in possession of the little ID cards the elections board had sent out. Some at Long Beach read the sign and went scurrying back home or out to their cars to fetch the little cards. Others, we are told, just didn't vote.

To clarify: Those ID cards are a convenience for election personnel and used to help move lines of voters along. One need not present any such identification in order to vote if one is registered, regardless of what any signs may say.

If you are registered to vote you may do so -- with or without a card in your hand.



## Not exactly news

Those who thought baseball took a called third strike in the 1995 work stoppage were partly right during the regular season just passed, but the World Series is still what it used to be. The Atlanta Braves held a 2-0 lead going into Tuesday night's game by holding a Cleveland team that batted over .290 and hit over 200 homers this year to just nine hits total in the two games. "Good pitching will always stop good hitting," one baseball sage once observed, but then added, "and vice-versa." He, too, was partly right... North Carolina and N. C. State, who both posted badly needed victories on Saturday, are off this week when they normally would have played each other. The game was rescheduled to the Friday after Thanksgiving -- at 11 a.m. You reckon TV had something to do with that? And you reckon, since both the Tar Heels and the Wolfpack may enter the game no better than .500, that TV would like to rethink its scheduling?

Bald Head's announcement of plans to develop part of the Pfizer tract and the opening of Arbor Creek next to St. James Plantation bode well for future growth around the Southport periphery. Development opportunities inside town are limited, of course, but it's still nice to list Southport as a return address... Robert Ruark's The Old Man

and the Boy, which should be in great demand during the Robert Ruark Festival next weekend, is available at Little Professor Book Center. We know, because this week we helped forward a copy to Charles Holliday of Sumter, SC, whose time spent in Southport pre-dated the well-known author. Holliday attended school here from 1926-32, when his sister Lou was county health nurse.

Kayla Howell, 13-year-old daughter of Gilbert and Rebecca Howell of Boiling Spring Lakes, who made this column earlier after performing with the Embers here several months ago, has taken another step closer to the musical spotlight. The talented young singer has auditioned at Opryland in Nashville -- no word yet -- and will make a guest appearance at Carolina Opry in Myrtle Beach sometime between now and Christmas... Which reminds us to remind you, make your arrangements now to see a Christmas show at any one of the theaters along the Grand Strand. We hear all the time "Myrtle Beach this and Myrtle Beach that," but we haven't heard anybody ever complain about the entertainment... James Russ, whose Shoreline Erosion crew is working this week on the Bald Head Island sandbagging project, told us Saturday that the business is an outgrowth of the J. P.

Russ company which has been doing grading and hauling work since 1944, certainly placing it among the senior generation of businesses in the county. "My father started out hauling dirt in a Studebaker," Russ told us, and we were dismayed until we recalled that Studebaker did indeed make trucks back in that time.

It seems that our fall weekends are filling up with festival atop festival and event upon event. November 4 looms with both Holly Days arts and crafts festival and the Robert Ruark Festival here and the Dixon Chapel oyster roast in Varnamtown. And we wouldn't have it any other way, in this best of seasons when we can use our time to enjoy ourselves for a change... Answering our plea for help a couple weeks back, Lou Newton identified two of three buildings in "The Way It Was" as the U. S. Quarantine office and the Stuart House on the strength of owning an identical postcard giving those identifications. But he could not help in identifying the third house in the background, remembering that long ago there was at least one other large two-story structure on that waterfront block. The hand-colored postcard produced by P. O. Leggett was printed in 1902 and postmarked in 1910.

## Public opinion

### 'But they do'

To the Editor:  
In response to a letter by Bob Miller of Long Beach about exaggerated fantasies and the town charter, I must take issue with his views.

The town charter doesn't say that the taxpayers are supposed to pay for insurance benefits for elected officials that most cannot afford for themselves. But they do.

It doesn't say that incumbents should exclude 95 percent of the residents in self-government and policy-making. But they do.

The town charter doesn't say that elected officials can hold private and confidential meetings. But they do.

It doesn't say that they can spend taxpayers' money on pet projects without accountability. But they do.

It also doesn't say that the mayor and town council can divide the city into opposing sections for purposes of exploitation.

Mr. Miller should look at what the charter doesn't say rather than what it does.

Maybe the new candidates can

remedy all those exaggerated claims and return Long Beach to a government for the people instead of government by the few for the few.

Fred Bowden  
Long Beach

### Tax promises

To the Editor:  
(Long Beach resident) Bob Miller should listen more carefully and read my ads a little closer.

I have stated publicly and in my ads that with the vote and support of at least three council members I would propose and support a cut in the tax rate from 36 cents to 25 or

26 cents by eliminating the wasteful spending by the present mayor and councilmen, such as:

1. Cut out long distance calls by employees to residences, country clubs and stores.
  2. Eliminate free insurance for elected officials.
  3. Eliminate free insurance for families of employees.
  4. Down-size town government to 45 employees and demand better services.
  5. Cut out the Christmas party and bonuses for employees.
- This will save the taxpayers over half a million dollars a year. Everyone knows we will have to have a sewer system someday. I

propose to take the half-million-dollar tax savings and put it in an interest-bearing account, annually, and let it build up for a sewer system.

I also propose to raise our police officers' salaries 25 to 30 percent and open Town Hall for the convenience of our citizens on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Marvin Watson  
Long Beach

### Inaccuracies

To the Editor:  
In Richard Nubel's article "Good fences make good public debate" his account of the board of aldermen meeting contained several mistakes.

Nubel opened with "A citizen's complaint to the board..." referring to me as having lodged a complaint. In fact, I did not register a complaint. My reason for appearing before the board was to attempt to resolve an issue about the construction of my fence. The issue was that I had been told by the building inspector that I could not build the

See Opinion, page 6

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