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Mining permit

■ Critics claim amendment is 'smoke screen'

By Terry Pope
County Editor

It's not the size of the mining operation that residents fear, but its location and proximity to environmentally sensitive areas along with the threat of sinkholes has many alarmed at Martin Marietta's plan to dig for sand north of Southport.

At a state public hearing before the N. C. Division of Land Resources last week, a standing-room-only crowd told the department to deny the company's request to add four acres to its permit on the Laster tract north of Bethel Church Road.

"The operation proposed by Martin Marietta will constitute a substantial physical hazard to the public through sinkholes," said Muffy Thomas, one of a dozen speakers who opposed the permit request.

Martin Marietta holds a permit to operate a borrow pit on 4.5 acres, a permit obtained after it purchased the Laster tract four years ago. The permit is not for the mining of limestone, as Martin Marietta has once applied to do on its 1,000 acres between Bethel Church Road and the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point access road. That application has been withdrawn. There are depth restrictions and stipulations that no water is to be pumped off the tract for the borrow pit.

The N. C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources will continue to accept written comments until April 6 on the permit amendment. Department director Charles Gardner, who attended the hearing last week, said he will review the matter for 30 days before he makes a decision.

There are seven criteria on which the request may be denied. If the nature of the activity violates requirements of the N. C. Mining Act, or if the operation has adverse effects on groundwater, wildlife, estuarine or marine fisheries, it may be denied. If it is feared the operation would result in sediment in stream beds or if the applicant has compliance problems at other sites, the permit may be denied.

However, off-site noise, increased traffic and proximity to homes aren't addressed under the mining act but are matters for county zoning ordinances to regulate. Paxton Badham Jr. of Martin Marietta said there is a lot of confusion over what the company wants to do on its tract.

"We've got a couple of customers down here that have come to us in recent years and said they are desperate for some source of fill dirt," said Badham, "and given the fact that we own several hundred acres out here asked us if there was anything we can do to help them out."

After Martin Marietta took title to See Mining, page 9



Photo by Jim Harper
Leland area youngsters had a whale of a time on the Sea Ray and other super rides last week as Stine Amusements held forth on the North Brunswick High School campus. The spring carnival was a fund-raiser for the school PTO.

County board must approve

Refinancing may allow more school classrooms

By Holly Edwards
Feature Editor

Construction of up to four additional classrooms at Union Primary School was added to a funding package that already included 14 additional classrooms at South Brunswick Middle and Bolivia Elementary last week in a special meeting of the Brunswick County Board of Education.

School board members unanimously approved allocation of \$1.3 million for the Union Primary project, bringing the estimated cost of the three construction projects to \$7.5 million.

The additional funds will be allocated from the estimated \$2.4 million the school board expects to receive this fiscal year from the half-cent sales tax levied by Brunswick County.

The school system refinanced its annual service debt for all four projects to \$1.5 million -- \$100,000 more than the school system was paying each year for Belville Elementary alone -- by extending the term of the debt on the \$4-million balance owed on Belville Elementary from seven to ten years and obtaining a lower interest rate on the debt, and by extending the debt service on the three classroom construction projects to ten years.

Brunswick County commissioners must approve the refinancing proposal and the addition of the Union See Schools, page 5

ty planning director Jeff Coutu's staff has compiled.

With Oak Island towns pushing forward with a thoroughfare plan which includes a second bridge to the island, N. C. Department of Transportation (DOT) officials and county commissioners say they want to make sure the county is in the same boat. The corridor will lead to the community along Midway Road, which lies in the county's jurisdiction.

"We know the bridge is needed," said Jo Ann Bellamy Simmons, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners. "I want to know that we are putting it in the right place."

A countywide thoroughfare plan, which was to include plans for a second bridge, has been stalled with the appointment of a new DOT secretary amid a State Bureau of Investigation probe into alleged misuse of funds on highway

projects. But Coutu told the planning board last month his department is at work on the slow, tedious process of examining data blocks, like ones used to compile the U. S. Census, as legwork for DOT's engineers.

On February 16, county commissioners adopted a resolution asking that the DOT investigation not delay construction of the second bridge to Oak Island and stated the bridge See Bridge, page 5

By Terry Pope
County Editor

A fourth-year adjustment to public utility values may cause a \$2-million drop in county tax revenue, but officials say they won't panic over getting a smaller check from Carolina Power and Light Co. next fiscal year.

Tax administrator Boyd Williamson said his office may project growth of \$230 million due to new home and business construction in the county that may offset the loss in utility revenue and keep county commissioners from raising the tax rate, which is currently 68.5 cents per \$100 valuation.

Williamson said the N. C. Department of Revenue will arrive at a figure by April 15 on how Carolina Power and Light Co.'s Brunswick nuclear plant near Southport should be assessed fair market value. Those rates are based on what property owners are actually paying in taxes in relation to what their homes or businesses may actually be worth. Gaps exist when values are left unadjusted between revaluations, which will start on a five-year county cycle in 1999.

The last county revaluation was in See Tax loss, page 6

Value adjustment CP&L value loss won't tax county

\$5.8 mil past due

Tax officials have submitted a projected tax base to county commissioners for the 1998-99 fiscal year as a way to estimate revenues for the upcoming budget. Revenue collector Nancy Moore has also submitted a collection report which shows some \$5.8 million is still owed the county in delinquent taxes.

That amount stretches over a ten-year period, but \$2.6 million is owed from taxes due in 1997 alone. The county currently stands at a 93.6-percent collection rate for 1997.

Commissioners must base the budget on the previous collection rates and on what the tax base is projected to be. But with a fourth-year adjustment for utility companies, that tax base stands to change when the exact figure is decided by the N. C. Department of Revenue April 15 See Past due, page 6

More sign-on

Towns weigh trash options

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Eleven Brunswick County municipalities have agreed to participate in the county's curbside trash disposal plan approved last month by county commissioners.

County attorney Huey Marshall said Tuesday one other town is close to giving approval, four are meeting on the subject soon and one has indicated it will give an answer at a later date.

Commissioners approved the six-year, \$30-million contract with Waste Industries Inc. last month that will provide once-a-week curbside service for all 40,000 homes in the county, even inside municipalities. Thus far, approval has been received from Belville, Boiling Spring Lakes, Calabash, Bolivia, Holden Beach, Leland, Navassa, Northwest,

'The county last year spent \$5.2 million, and all we got was a landfill and six months of hauling.'

Huey Marshall
County attorney

Sandy Creek, Shallotte and Varnamtown.

The Long Beach Town Council has scheduled a special meeting Tuesday, April 7, 7 p.m., at the Long See Options, page 7

County looks at bridge corridor plan

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Brunswick County planners will get a peek this week at the development plan for a corridor leading to the proposed second bridge to Oak Island.

A workshop is scheduled Wednesday (tonight) at 6 p.m. by the Brunswick County Planning Board to review the draft that coun-

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