

THE STATE PORT PILOT

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Brunswick rescinds fire district vote

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Faced with a special legislative bill left dying in committee in Raleigh, the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Monday rescinded its earlier 3-2 vote that asked for permission to establish a countywide fee for fire and rescue funding.

State Rep. David Redwine (D-Ocean Isle Beach) and Rep. Dewey Hill (D-Lake Waccamaw) both told commissioners they could not introduce a bill when there wasn't unanimous support at the county level. Last month, commissioners split on a vote that asks the N. C. General Assembly for permission to establish a five-member countywide tax authority that would manage fire and rescue funds. A flat fee would be charged on tax bills for homes, businesses and vacant lots.

"After that vote, some information came to light that made me reconsider my vote," said District 3 commissioner Leslie Collier of Long Beach. "We felt there was a time factor involved. I think it kind of rushed our judgment."

Instead, commissioners will hold another workshop at 3 p.m. Monday, July 27, and with county staff involved decide on the best way to generate funds for fire and rescue departments. The burning question last month was whether property owners should pay by account number or by parcel.

The backtracking Monday also sparked another heated debate between board members, particularly between Ms. Collier and District 2 commissioner David Sandifer, an original committee member who has worked vigorously to see a method adopted to better fund fire and rescue volunteers. However, he and District 5 commissioner Bill Sue of Leland voted against last month's motion to charge flat fees on tax accounts.

"Of all the ways you could have done it, that was the least equitable way in Brunswick County," said Sandifer.

Property owners or developers can consolidate all of their land holdings into one account per township at the tax department. It means such property owners would have to pay just one fee per township and not a fee for every home or lot owned in that township.

Most tax bills have been consolidated by the tax department for easier handling, with one tax account for each business, since commercial accounts cannot be consolidated into one billing. The motion last month called for flat fees but did not indicate what those fees would be. It can be decided later if the board agrees on a method and a non-controversial bill is passed by legislators.

County attorney Huey Marshall said Redwine and Hill have not been given instructions to withdraw the bill from committee. If the board can unanimously agree on a funding method in two weeks, it will still have time to make the state House deadline.

"They will be there, I bet, until late August," said Marshall.

Ms. Collier said there are still three schools of

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CITIZENSHIP



Warm congratulations were exchanged between new Americans and old ones at last Wednesday's naturalization ceremony. The ceremony on the pier, which has become a regular part of our Independence Day celebration, bestowed citizenship on 39 applicants from 25 countries as the opening event of the 1998 N. C. Fourth of July Festival.

Photo by Jim Harper

Oak Island project 'Dismay' over state agencies' bridge review

By Richard Nubel
Municipal Editor

A second bridge to Oak Island with a roadway corridor from Middleton Street to Midway Road at N. C. 211 continues to enjoy the nearly unqualified support of Oak Islanders, local government officials say.

Moreover, Oak Islanders expressed outrage to their local elected officials this week at the revelation N. C. Department of Transportation is being pressured to study an alternative route which would place a bridge at the end of West Oak Island Drive to connect with Sunset Harbor Road on the mainland.

Last week, Long Beach mayor Joan Altman secured from DOT officials a stack of responses from agencies charged with environmental review of DOT's bridge and corridor selection study. Eight of ten agencies responding blasted a DOT Environmental Assessment for rejecting western corridor alternatives and urged study of the route through Sunset Harbor.

Mayor Altman said that review could delay bridge construction up to two years. A bridge connecting to a roadway through Sunset Harbor would not serve the transportation interests of Oak Island, she said.

Other Oak Island officials agree.

"I think it's sad that a whole county lists that bridge as its number-one transportation improvement and we get thrown on the back burner. People are downright mad."

Kevin Bell
Long Beach councilor

"I think I can say without fear of contradiction the citizens of Caswell Beach support a second bridge at Middleton Street," Caswell Beach mayor Joe O'Brien said.

O'Brien said citizens of Caswell Beach crave an easing of traffic at the crowded intersection of Country Club Drive and Yaupon Drive near the entrance to their town. He said travel

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End-of-grade tests

Schools earn high marks

By Laura Kimball
Feature Editor

The word "exemplary" is becoming a common term around Brunswick County schools.

After preliminary results from state end-of-grade tests were evaluated, eight of ten elementary and middle schools were labeled "exemplary" and one school, South Brunswick Middle, was labeled a school of distinction, said Mary McDuffie, assistant superintendent for curriculum, when she presented results to the Brunswick County Board of Education Monday night.

"We still have a lot of work to do and a lot of room to grow, but we're very pleased with the results," she said.

Achievement is measured by assessing how many students scored a three or four on the end-of-grade tests, which means that, according to state standards, they are proficient in

that subject.

The exemplary title is given a school where achievement is ten percent greater than expected. In a school of distinction, 80 percent of students at the school scored "proficient" on the tests.

Test results from all school districts in southeastern North Carolina reveal that most students, including those in Brunswick County schools, showed dramatic improvement in reading and math for the 1997-98 school year.

The test scores are used in the state ABC's of Public Education school reform plan to assess whether or not a school met its goals for the year.

Last year only three Brunswick County schools -- Waccamaw Elementary, South Brunswick Middle and Shallotte Middle -- were exemplary.

"It's a big improvement," McDuffie said. See Schools, page 8

The other side

Sunset Harbor can see positive impact

By Laura Kimball
Feature Editor

Opinions about the location of a second bridge to Oak Island vary depending on where you ask.

Though most Oak Island residents rally behind the originally proposed route for the bridge, from Middleton Street on the island to Midway on the mainland, some Sunset Harbor residents are hoping for an alternative route that would involve a bridge on the west end of the island that utilizes the already existing Sunset Harbor Road.

Linda Lambert, who lives along the alternative Sunset Harbor route, is in favor of the road coming her way.

"I think it would be wonderful. It would help our economy a lot," she said. See Sunset, page 12

Southport quiet again after Fourth

By Laura Kimball
Feature Editor

Monday morning in Southport was quiet.

Plastic flags were being removed from their fluttering positions above the streets, traffic moved smoothly and sidewalks were dotted with just a handful of pedestrians.

Only the few remaining vendors' tents and the abandoned rows of portable toilets waiting to be removed indicated that the town had just hosted one of the biggest parties in North Carolina.

The N. C. Fourth of July Festival, which began last Wednesday and ended Sunday, included a parade, arts and

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Festival activities kept everybody hopping all last week.

First-time levy 30 cents

County won't collect SBSD tax

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Southeast Brunswick Sanitary District won't get any help from Brunswick County in collecting a 30-cent property tax assessment the district board approved in its budget last month.

A request by SBSD chairman James (Bubba) Smith asked the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners to direct county tax collector Nancy Moore to collect the tax, set at 30 cents per \$100 of property valuation. But the request died Monday when county commissioners voted 4-1 to table the matter, apparently with no intention of revisiting it anytime soon.

"I, for one, am not for collecting inside sanitary districts," said commission chairman JoAnn Bellamy Simmons.

District 3 commissioner Leslie Collier of Long Beach voted against District 5 commissioner Bill Sue's motion to table the SBSD request, but she voiced her dismay at the district's reason for calling on the county for help.

"Part of the reason they said they needed a tax is that the county is not fulfilling its contractual agreement in issuing permits," said Ms. Collier. "I'm confused as to why we would do a better job of collecting taxes than we would with our contractual agreement to issue their permits."

The district approved a \$912,000 budget for 1998-99 that includes, for the first time, an ad valorem tax for residents and businesses along the Long Beach Road corridor.

The tax would come in addition to the county property tax of 68.5 cents per \$100. See SBSD tax, page 11

"I'm confused as to why we would do a better job of collecting taxes than we would with our contractual agreement to issue their permits."

Leslie Collier
District 3 commissioner