

St. James' growth increases the demand for public services

Fire fund

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ed to know what it would look like if we offered a letter of insurance to them," said District 3 commissioner Leslie Collier of Long Beach. Her motion that sets up routine department funding as of January 1 passed unanimously.

Otto Becker, president of St. James Fire Department Inc., said the department is looking at \$100,000 needed for equipment to get started and that residents also want a first responder emergency crew as soon as possible. The department is working with county fire marshal Cecil Logan and A. C. Daniels of the North Carolina Department of Insurance to map a new district that will border with Southport, Sunset Harbor/Zion Hill and Long Beach fire department districts.

"We need all the people we can get," said Becker. "I was overwhelmed by the turnout. It's really a credit to the folks in our community."

A number of veteran firefighters have already signed up, including chief Bill Schmidt, who has over 30 years experience. Becker said Joe Lane has over 25 years experience providing emergency medical services. Other volunteers have signed up to go through fire and rescue training offered by the county EMS or to help operate the office.

During a recent pledge drive that began October 11, the community obtained \$34,000 in donations in a short period of time. The department plans to purchase a pumper truck from the Northwest Volunteer Fire Department and will continue to search for a tanker and other equipment.

Land for the station is being donated by St. James Development Co.

The borders of the new fire district have been tentatively mapped and agreed upon by Southport. The goal is to be fully operational by late 1999.

Becker said the district would reach eastward on N. C. 211 to where the current western edge of Southport's district extends. The western district will reach to Midway Road and the southern

boundary to the Intracoastal Waterway.

"Whatever makes the most sense, we are willing to do," said Becker. "We are not trying to serve other people's turf."

The Department of Insurance requires that departments have a roster of 22 trained volunteers on hand, can move at least 1,500 gallons of water to a blaze and operate from a heated station in order to obtain an approved classification rating. That classification can be achieved without a history of responding to emergencies for new departments that are just getting established.

Under county funding policy, each of the 21 volunteer departments receive \$35,000 in capital outlay funds and rescue squads \$17,500 for operating expenses per fiscal year. St. James will receive six months of that funding starting January 1 and become eligible for the full funding amount after July 1, 1999.

County commissioners have also set aside a funds totaling \$650,000 from which all departments can request as needed for emergency capital needs. An appointed fire capital expenditure advisory committee takes individual department requests and recommends to commissioners what items ought to be funded.

Commissioners are currently studying new ways to better fund fire and rescue departments and has ordered a study through tax administrator Boyd Williamson's office on the effect of funding units by fire and rescue districts. That report hasn't yet come back to the board.

Becker said with the pledges and the county's contribution, the department has gotten off to a good start.

"With that kind of funding, we'll get there," said Becker.

Ms. Collier's motion also instructed county attorney Huey Marshall to work with the volunteers on obtaining their letter of insurance needed to finance a new building. Preliminary discussions have already been held with architects and designers, said Becker, but mortgage companies need the letter from the county for assurance that county funds are available and that the department is officially recog-

nized. In other action Monday, commissioners also appropriated \$126,775 in capital outlay needs to seven fire departments as recommended by the fire capital outlay committee. Those amounts include:

- Bald Head Island VFD -- \$25,000 for construction on a new fire department building, repairs on tank truck, tires and new engine for portable pump.

- Sunset Harbor/Zion Hill VFD -- \$8,000 for hose and chain saw.

- Northwest VFD -- \$3,137 for ten pagers.

- Waccamaw VFD -- \$6,050 for ten pagers and computer equipment.

- Ocean Isle Beach VFD -- \$25,000 for construction and training room for new building.

- Calabash VFD -- \$45,738 to purchase 75-foot aerial truck.

- Grissetown/Longwood VFD -- \$13,550 for land acquisition and concrete.

Fast pace

Continued from page 1
and residents are lobbying state legislators to become the Town of St. James, which would be the 19th municipality in the county.

Since the community's initial development, E&T has served as the primary site contractor, handling about 85 percent of all heavy earthmoving projects in St. James. The company was formed in 1971 by Tom Jones and was hired on by St. James developer Homer Wright, who in 1984 purchased the 6,000 acres that may one day become a town. He created it as a planned retirement community.

"You have to envision a golf course being there," said Will Jones, son of Tom Jones and a superintendent for E&T Construction, as he drives along the unpaved roads and mapped holes that will one day be an integral part of St. James.

The marina looks like a huge cement bunker for now on the banks of the waterway, but developers also have a vision for how the Brunswick Harbor Marina will complement a new phase of the community. E&T was nationally recognized recently by *Construction Equipment Guide*

magazine for its work in handling the project, after removing 350,000 cubic yards of dirt on time despite Hurricane Bonnie's visit to the area and the remnants of another hurricane that followed its path.

"My dad spent 48 days out there, some days all by himself," said Jones. "He took that project on, and he took it seriously."

It is Brambell's job to drive the 24 miles of paved streets in St. James daily and to oversee projects which need to be done -- street repairs, mowing and now the beginnings of a new phase of development. There are townhouses under construction and new streets are being prepared, as well as the push for phase III.

"I wanted to start six months ago," said Brambell. "They put us on a time frame that didn't give us any margin for error."

Then the hurricanes struck, but it didn't slow progress in St. James.

"We just plugged at it every single day," said Jones. "I was excited when we first got the project. But after we got it, I was like, 'Oh, boy!'"

This weekend, St. James will bring in prospective buyers to take part in a technique developers are now using that resembles a gold rush. The first person to stake a claim on a lot has the right to purchase it. It has worked in the past.

But with marketing that occurs sometimes months in advance, employees like Brambell also gamble with nature just like the contrac-

tors who pray for fair weather. Getting another phase ready means coordinating the seeding of greens and the removal of tons of dirt. Phase III includes more wooded areas of the 6,000 acres that Wright first purchased and will likely have a uniqueness of its own.

There have been numerous changes Long Beach planning director Bob Grant has approved, since most of phase III is within the town's zoning jurisdiction. Most changes involve ways to preserve the terrain and trees that developers can appreciate in person but maybe can't see on a surveyor's plat. Hurricanes haven't delayed the progress, and neither has Long Beach.

"We've done our best to leave trees standing," said Brambell. "We've even redesigned areas to leave trees. Long Beach has worked very well with us on this. If you find something like a tree that you want

to save, you can't get locked into something that holds up the planning process. Their willingness to work with us has been very helpful."

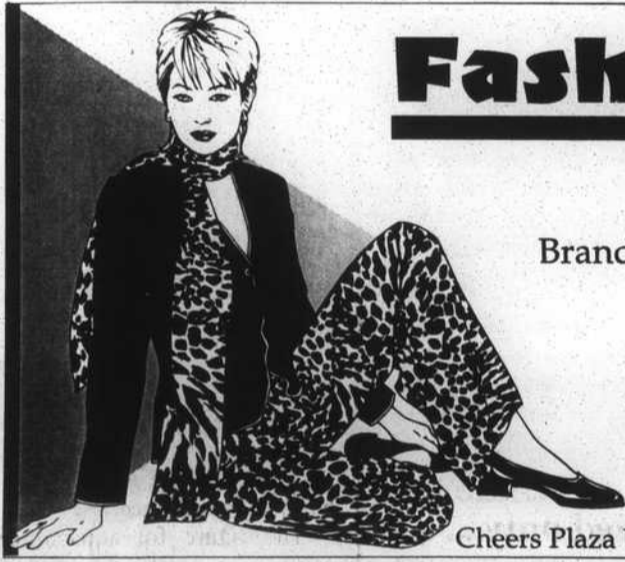
St. James is a community that has received cooperation from Long Beach and the county but through its progress is also rapidly changing. The call for a new fire and rescue department was greeted favorably by county commissioners Monday. It remains to be seen how state legislators will view the community's request to become another town.

But for now, progress proceeds within this golf course community one phase at a time.

"So far, Mother Nature has cooperated," said Brambell, looking over golf holes three through six of the new course at The Members Club. "It's not as green as we had hoped, but with another week to go, if we don't get disastrous weather we'll be okay."

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