

THE STATE PORT PILOT

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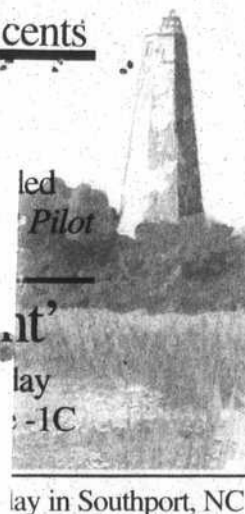
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County budget: \$92 mil

By Terry Pope
Staff Writer

County commissioners cut \$12 million from a proposed 1999-2000 budget Monday before adopting one that increases overall spending about ten percent from last year.

Most of the cuts came at a Thursday afternoon session where the board of commissioners asked county manager Jim Varner to reach a 55-cent-per-\$100-property-valuation rate — somehow, someway.

But pressure came Monday from volunteer fire and rescue squad members who were not pleased that a proposal to increase their funding was scrapped in favor of staying at last year's level of allocation. They also criticized the board for cutting 12 new paramedics and three ambulances from the county's emergency medical services budget.

"We're at a serious crisis in Brunswick County, as far as public safety is concerned," said Tom Florckiewicz, chief of the Southport Volunteer Rescue Squad.

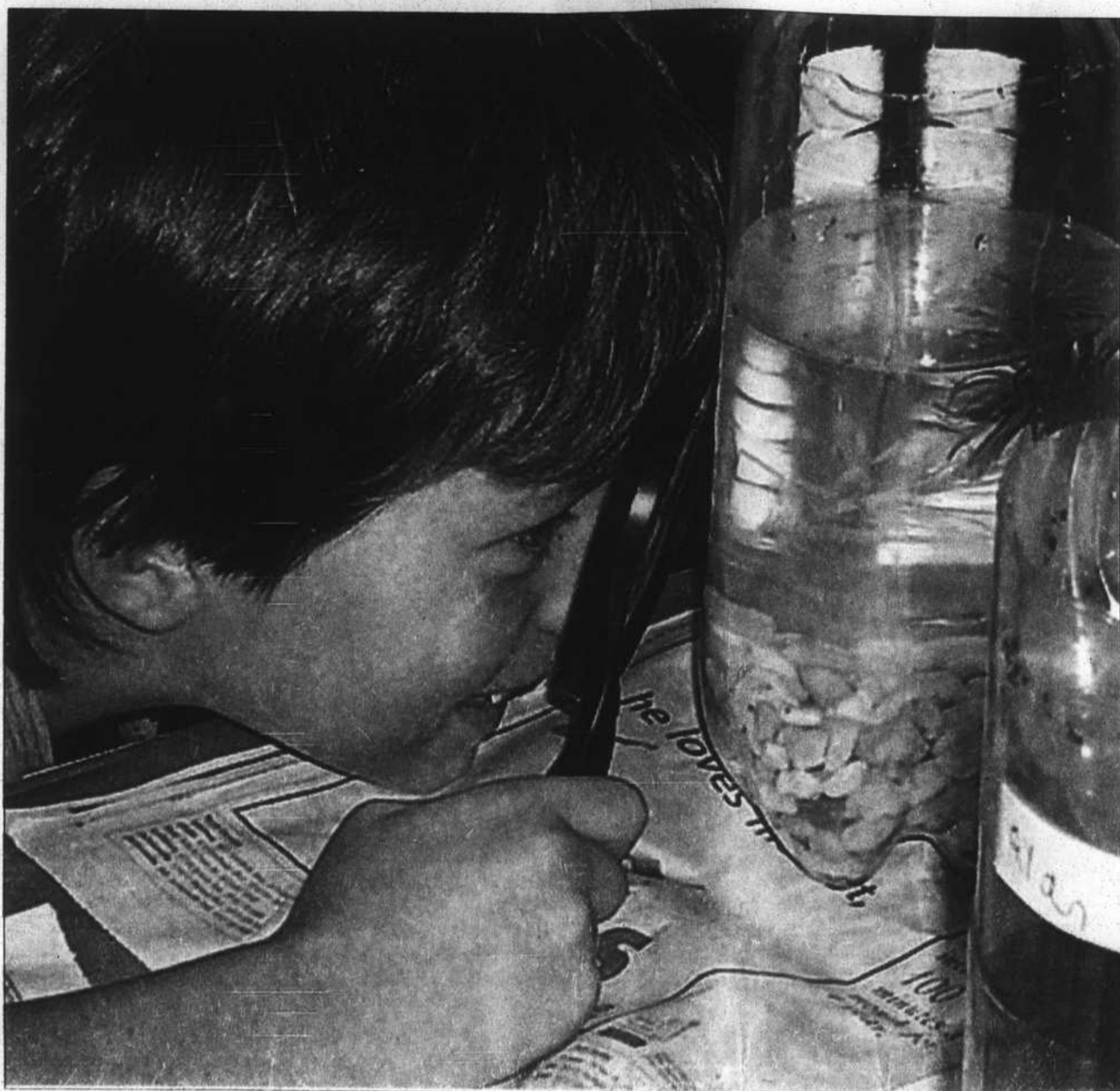
The new tax rate will drop from Varner's proposed 60 cents to 55 cents, and down from last year's 68.5 cents. But although the rate is lower, the value of property in the county increased by an average of 57 percent in a revaluation earlier this year, the first in five years. In some areas, property values climbed by more than 140 percent.

Last year's \$82.4 million in spending has increased to \$92 million this fiscal year. But it is less than the \$104 million recommended by Varner, who was absent due of illness Monday when the board took its unanimous vote. Varner recommended 62 new positions; all but 29 were cut at last week's workshop.

Sheriff Ronald Hewett kept nine of his 11 requested positions in the budget, including four new road patrol deputies, four jailers and a detective assigned to investigate domestic violence cases. That will help keep part of district attorney Rex Gore's Family Triage Unit active despite losing state and federal grants for the program this fiscal year. The program was set up two years ago to separate domestic violence cases from typical traffic offenses, and prosecutors say it has worked.

Eight new positions were kept in the health department, including two new environmental health specialists who perform soil evaluations for septic tank approval. Four child support agents were kept for social services, and the See County, page 7

SOMETHING FISHY



"I see him! My fish!" exclaimed Southport Elementary student Ryan Wisse, who peered at the tiny fish in his homemade aquarium with the help of a magnifying glass. Ryan was one of 50 students who attended Summer Science Enrichment Camp at the school last week. Other camp photos and articles are on the Our Schools pages, section B.

Photo by Diana D'Abruzzo

First budget Oak Island establishes 34-cent rate

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

In separate actions Monday night, Yaupon Beach Board of Commissioners and Long Beach Town Council both unanimously voted approval of a 34-cent tax rate and a \$9.1-million first-year budget for the Town of Oak Island.

Prior to acting on the budget, elected officials took one citizen problem off the table. On a split vote — with Yaupon Beach commissioners prevailing — plans for a boat launch ramp on Davis Canal at SW 20th Street were scrapped for the coming year. Instead, a bulkhead will be placed at the street end and a floating dock for canoes and kayaks will be installed, under terms of a motion offered by commissioner Marty Wozniak. Davis Canal property owners had objected to Long Beach councilors' plans for the launch ramp, but applauded Yaupon Beach commissioners' counter proposal for access improvement prior to beginning of the public hearing.

The new budget will take effect July 1, the beginning of the new fiscal year (FY) and the effective date of incorporation of the Town of Oak Island by the consolidation of Yaupon Beach and Long Beach.

The FY 1999-2000 tax rate of 34 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation is two cents less than proposed by town manager Jerry Walters at the beginning of June.

The approved budget calls for no increase in water rates in either of the two water service areas of the new town. A mid-year water rate adjustment is still possible, however. Oak Island will pay off additional debt associated with system improvements and increased overhead storage capacity. Long Beach already has paid off some \$600,000 of original system construction debt assumed in the 1970s. Brunswick County's water rate for several years also has been adjusted at mid-year, affecting rates its municipal wholesale customers must charge.

Solid waste removal fees will rise 40 cents per month to \$6.27 for homes that are currently in Long Beach. Residents and property owners now in Yaupon Beach will pay a first-ever \$2.36 per month recycling fee. Solid waste service will include weekly curbside recycling collections townwide next year. Long Beach area customers will receive twice-weekly refuse collection five months of the year and once-weekly service in the off-season. Ocean Drive residents and property owners only will be provided a second weekly collection in-

See Oak Island, page 11

Williamson thanked by council — Page 2
Final budget workshop Wednesday — Page 2

St. James plan will proceed Gated town won't receive usual state funds

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

Until such time as the gate restricting access to St. James Plantation comes down, residents of the proposed Town of St. James will populate a municipal corporation without access to traditional state funding.

Those who have petitioned to transform the upscale golf and waterway community into a North Carolina municipal corporation have accepted Rep. David Redwine's condition: the Town of St. James, upon incorporation, may levy a property tax to support itself, but will not qualify for local-option sales and use tax distributions, Powell Bill funds for roadway development, franchise taxes, gasoline tax, intangibles tax replace-

ment distributions or beer and wine taxes.

Redwine last week told supporters of incorporation he and state Sen. R. C. Soles would not allow a gated community to receive those funds. St. James Plantation developers last week refused to remove the gate and the guard who mans it, saying the gate and security force had been promised property owners upon purchase of their lots.

"A delegation of the POA (property owners association) and interim council met with Rep. Redwine on Friday and we are going ahead with our legislation, with the agreement we will not accept state funds until the gate comes down," St. James mayor-designate Earl Dye said Monday.

Dye said all involved in the incorporation effort See St. James, page 16

'It's controlling our own destiny — controlling things that are germane to our community.'

Earl Dye
Mayor-designate

Based on percentage School funding comes up short

By Diana D'Abruzzo
Staff Writer

A lower Brunswick County tax rate will translate into fewer local dollars for the public school system.

And that means school administrators now have to find ways to cut what they say is an already tight budget, or find alternate means of putting nearly \$290,000 back in.

"We're just going to have to go back and look at the budget and look at our priorities," said Supt. Marion Wise. "It will be difficult, but we have to do it."

Under Brunswick County schools' local budget for 1999-2000, the school system asked the county for more than \$17.3 million. Because the county agreed last year to give the school system a flat 36.5 percent of tax revenue, the county tax rate would have had to be set at 57.5 cents per \$100 property valuation for the schools to get what officials say was needed.

But county commissioners on Monday set a 55-cent rate, which means See Schools, page 11

'We'll just have to go to the drawing board and see what we can do.'

Supt. Marion Wise

LAKES SQUAD

Building may go to county

By Terry Pope
Staff Writer

While rescue volunteers came to county commissioners Monday to ask for more money, some came bearing a gift — an unusual and very generous gift.

Boiling Spring Lakes wants to give the county its volunteer rescue building, along with an emergency response vehicle, if the county will operate it as a new emergency medical services substation. For nothing in return.

"If it fits in with the long-range plans, absolutely," said District 2 county commissioner David Sandifer of Holden Beach afterwards.

At a budget workshop Thursday, the board of commissioners cut 12 new paramedics and three EMS response vehicles from county manager Jim Varner's recommended budget. But after learning of the See Squad, page 11

SBSD taps new manager, plans budget

By Richard Nubel
Staff Writer

Southeast Brunswick Sanitary District has a new manager.

Charles Smith, 57, a Charlotte CPA and management consultant, was formally hired by action of the SBSB board of commissioners Monday, also his first day of work.

"This really happened quickly," Smith said. Commissioners asked him to fax his references last Wednesday, interviewed him, and on Thursday offered him the job.

"It's been a pleasure. It's exciting so far," Smith said. Smith arrived about the same time as the district's FY 1999-2000 budget proposal and he has busied himself reviewing last year's operations and fine-tuning the budget document.

Commissioners conducted a workshop on the budget proposal on Monday and have set a public hearing on the document for 7 p.m. Monday, June 28.

Smith and the Southport-Oak Island area aren't exact- See SBSB, page 6



Smith was hired Thursday, began work on Monday.