

# Tougher Building Regulations Debated At Holden Beach Meet

BY TERRY POPE

Proposed zoning ordinance changes that would increase setback requirements and limit the size and number of bedrooms allowed in new homes built on Holden Beach met with mixed reactions from residents and developers at a public hearing last Tuesday night.

If approved, the changes that are designed to cut down on septic tank ground pollution and greater density on the beach may become the "most stringent" standards placed on builders along Brunswick County's coast. Holden Beach Planning Board Chairman Alan Holden, a developer, acknowledged the requirements would exceed the building limitations of both Long and Ocean Isle beaches.

Following the public hearing last week, the planning board delayed action on the proposed changes until its February meeting. If accepted by the planning board, the zoning amendments would then go before the town council for a public hearing and final approval.

Under the new amendments, the minimum side yard setbacks for all homes would be increased from the present five feet to seven feet. A roof overhang could extend up to two feet, or one foot on each side, into the yard setback area.

Several restrictions would also be added to a section of the ordinance labeled, "Building Limitations," including a formula for limiting the total number of bedrooms allowed on a lot. The total number allowed would not exceed the bedroom limit established by the Brunswick County Health Department.

Bedrooms would be limited to the total dry lot area (area lying above the mean high water line) divided by 1,500 square feet. For example, on a 50x100 square foot lot, or 5,000 square feet divided by 1,500, three bedrooms would be allowed.

The new ordinance would also limit the heated area of a home to 30 percent of the dry lot area, while bedrooms could not exceed 40 percent of the heated area of a home. A heated area is defined in the ordinance as "that area within any building which is enclosed and capable of being heated either by means of a central system or by use of a permanent or temporary room heater."

A bedroom would be defined as any room having an area of 70 square feet or more, other than living, dining, kitchen, bathroom, utility, closet or storage areas.

According to Town Manager Bob Buck, the bedroom limitations were added to the proposed ordinance to help control septic tank ground pollution

"which is directly related to the number of people housed in a defined dwelling."

"We have found very quickly that a three-bedroom house can easily become a four-bedroom house," Buck said.

According to planning board Vice-Chairman Jim Fournier, the proposed ordinance changes "reflect as closely as we could make it the input of the board of commissioners." The planning board has been drafting the ordinance since April 1984.

Without a town sewer system, it is important that the town act now to control ground pollution, Fournier said. He defended the bedroom limitations that would produce smaller homes by adding, "You can put 25 people in a bus, but not in a Volkswagen."

Several developers and builders in the audience of about 20 spoke out against the bedroom limitations, but many agreed with the seven-foot side yard setback requirement.

Developer Virgil Roberts suggested the board recommend the seven-foot setback to the town council and "then build all the house you want. The health department regulates bedrooms."

According to Holden, Long Beach maintains an eight-foot setback on side yards while Ocean Isle's set-

back is five feet. Neither town has established bedroom limitations, he added. When Holden took a poll of those present, 13 residents raised their hands against the ordinance changes while three favored the restrictions.

"We want bigger homes on these expensive lots. Are we going to be penalized?" asked developer Michael Hobbs. "They've got their home in heaven and they don't want anyone else to come."

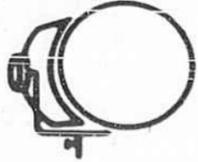
"The bottom line of what you're talking is dollars," Fournier replied. "We didn't take that approach. This is the best thing for Holden Beach."

Builder Don Clemmons said he was against cutting down the size of homes on the island now when "sooner or later there's going to have to be a sewer system put in."

In speaking for the tougher restrictions, resident Sid Swarts said that sooner or later the increasing number of septic tanks would pollute the canals. In regard to density levels, he noted that without the setbacks, a fire could wipe out a whole row of houses in the future.

Fournier believes the town will be told it can no longer build houses on the beach if the health department discovers pollution in the town's canals, which are routinely sampled.

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### Navassa Fire

### Almost Forced An Evacuation

Quick action by the Leland Volunteer Fire Department helped prevent an evacuation of the Navassa community early Friday morning when a fire broke out in the USS Agri-Chemicals fertilizer plant.

An electrical fire that broke out in the ammonia control room of the plant around 7 a.m. was confined to a switch board area, said Brunswick County Emergency Management Coordinator Cecil Logan. Although the room was destroyed, the fire did not spread to the dangerous ammonia chemicals used in the production of fertilizer.

"Ammonia puts off a poisonous gas when ignited," Logan said. "Had it caught on fire, we would have needed an evacuation."

Emergency crews were alerted to find the fire in the fourth-floor section of the plant, but Leland Fire Chief Mike Thomas found a way to quickly extinguish the fire before it could spread to the chemicals.

"He carried a rope with him to the fourth level of the plant and dropped it down," Logan said. "Then they hooked the fire hose to it and pulled the hose up by the rope. That smart action cut out about five to eight minutes of rigging time if they had carried the hose up by the stairwell."

The Leland Volunteer Rescue Squad was also called to the Navassa plant, which is about five miles north of Leland.

According to Logan, the fire started from a shortage in the switch board. Although the control room was a total loss, it was only a minor portion of the huge plant, Logan said.

Burning ammonia gas can cause explosions if stored in tanks and is poisonous if inhaled. The USS Agri-Chemicals plant is a division of the United States Steel Corp.

### Waste Management Is Hearing Topic

A hearing will be held in Raleigh Friday, Jan. 18, to receive comments on the proposed standards for siting of hazardous waste management facilities.

The hearing will be held in the auditorium of the Highway Building beginning at 1:30 p.m. It is sponsored by the N.C. Department of Human Resources' Division of Health Services.

Siting, or location, standards will be considered for adoption at a Jan. 25 meeting of the Commission for Health Services.

Copies of the proposal are available at the Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Branch, Room 215, 50th Building, 505 North Wilmington St., Raleigh, N.C. 733-4471.

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