

Commissioners Will Consider Providing Revolving Loans

BY SUSAN USHER

A previously-rejected request to set up a revolving loan fund to help subdivisions improve their roads fell upon new ears at a Brunswick County Board of Commissioners meeting Monday.

On Commissioner Jim Poole's motion, the board instructed County Attorney David Clegg to draft a preliminary resolution for consideration on Feb. 4, the first step of a process that could take several months.

That action was part of a lengthy meeting which saw only the fifth agenda item considered after two hours. They also met behind closed doors for about two hours, until approximately 11 p.m., to discuss top candidates for the county finance officer position.

They did not encumber any county funds as yet and will not for at least several months.

In November 1984 the previous board rejected the loan fund idea on a split vote, but residents of Brooks Road in the Seaside area took then-Commissioner, now Chairman, Chris Chappell at his word when he sug-

gested they come back and try again with the new board.

The residents, with Mrs. Marshall Brooks as their spokesperson, want commissioners to advance them the money to bring their road up to the standards required for acceptance in the state secondary road system, then allow them a year after the work is completed in which to repay the loan.

Under the plan the county would add the bill to their county tax notice, along with each property owners' pro-rated cost of the proceedings.

Several residents have refused to help pay for the work in advance, but have pledged to pay once it is completed. Mrs. Brooks said the community wants the county loan because the county "can collect it" and, she added in response to a question from Commissioner Frankie Rabon, because similar loans aren't available through banks.

Several members of the past board suggested such a revolving fund could "open a can of worms," causing more problems than it solved.

But Mrs. Brooks said the revolving fund—for which the previous board had set aside \$50,000—is a good way for the county to help its citizens and to improve the community.

With only \$50,000 set aside, Commissioner Grace Beasley noted, the county could commit to only one project at a time of the scale of the Brooks Road project. Mrs. Brooks suggested the loans be made on a first-come, first-served basis.

Clegg said several persons had approached him in the past about the funds, in addition to the two pending projects.

Construction costs alone for the Brooks Road project were estimated by the state last year at \$26,000, and commissioners will request an updated figure.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Beasley asked for background information on the project.

The county has advanced money for roadwork before, but in the case of Water Wonderland subdivision, the money was collected from residents before the work was begun,

rather than when it was completed.

Rather than a gift or simple loan, the advance is technically a "statutory special assessment," Clegg noted. Commissioners must enter a preliminary resolution, hold a hearing, advertise and then vote to adopt an assessment resolution. Then the cycle begins again as they develop, certify and approve an assessment roll. The appeals procedure available to property owners who disagree with the assessment extends into district court.

"There is no way to get around it," said Clegg. "This is what we have to do."

About 40 to 45 people live on Brooks Drive, which has about 80 lots. All lots have been sold and the developer is no longer obligated to maintain the streets and the residents are not providing maintenance themselves. The road has fallen into disrepair. At one point mail delivery was halted temporarily because of road conditions.

Their petition was the first of three requesting an advance of funds. The

second group has since privately obtained the money needed. The third is Oak Grove Road, where residents want a loan for paving.

Focal Point

Gwen Ellis, representing Social Worker Supervisor Evelyn Johnson of the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, asked for clarification of the board's recent vote establishing itself as the county's focal point on aging, a status previously assigned their department.

Chairman Chris Chappell said the department no longer has that responsibility and that a decision will be made soon regarding a related half-time position in the department.

He said commissioners took the responsibility themselves to allow time to establish the kind of program for the elderly they want the county to have.

Things To Come

In response to a question from Brunswick County Department of Social Services employee Debbie Aldridge of Southport, County Manager Billy Carter reaffirmed that county personnel who worked overtime during Hurricane Diana last September would receive either overtime or compensatory time off.

The county is appealing a decision by the Federal Emergency Management Agency not to award grant relief for that purpose. Depending in part on the results of the appeal, the county will decide later on whether to pay overtime. Whether compensatory time off is the only compensation available, or it is the method chosen by the employee, the employee will not lose those credits, he said.

Earlier in the meeting Ms. Aldridge told commissioners that, in her opinion, a policy that requires all county employees to live in the county could backfire.

She suggested that because employees live in the county doesn't mean they will necessarily do a better job. She said the policy could result in the county losing the opportunity to hire qualified employees, that the county could suffer in terms of employee performance.

She added, "There are a lot of people hired from within the county, and believe me, some of them are slack."

Other Business

In other business, the board: • Heard from Tax Collector Nancy Moore that as of Jan. 7, 88.6% of the 1984 \$12.4 million tax levy has been collected, along with \$270,000 in back taxes through foreclosures.

• Approved plans for encouraging public participation in revision of the county's CAMA land use plan. These include, at three stages in the planning process, joint public workshops by the commissioners and planning board members most directly related to each township, meetings with special interest groups for input and coordinating efforts with those of nearby counties and municipalities.

• Approved advertising to fill the

water management and mosquito control equipment operator position previously held by Wayne Edwards, salary \$12,532.

• Approved a change order, with a \$2,637.84 cost increase, for 232 additional feet of pipe installed by Somerset Landscaping Inc. in relocating the county water line away from the north approach of the new Holden Beach Bridge. Even with the increase, the contract is still cheaper than the second bidder's, County Engineer Dan Shields said.

• Agreed with County Manager Billy Carter and staff's recommendation to reject an \$874 grant offer from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to repair stream blockage from Hurricane Diana. Carter said it would cost the county more to spend the money than it would receive, but that the documentation of the blockage—even though much of it did not qualify under the disaster program—would give the county data it needs to seek "finer and better things" in the area of water management through other state and federal programs.

• Appointed Marie Brown, nurse, District 1; and reappointed Fred Lesh, pharmacist, District 3; to the Brunswick County Board of Health; reappointed Pauline Morgan and Kenneth Bellamy, District 3, to the Brunswick County Hospital Authority; and appointed Commissioner Grace Beasley to the COG Regional Emergency Medical Services Advisory Committee; and at Ms. Beasley's recommendation, appointed County Attorney David Clegg to the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority.

• Announced the official resignation of Chris Chappell and former Commissioner Carl "Mackie" Forny Duval from the Brunswick County Social Services Board.

• Accepted for referral to the state SR-2 petitions to add Basin Street and Westover Drive and the roads in Oak Haven subdivision to the state-maintained secondary road system.

• Because not all property owners along the right-of-way had signed, took no action on a request to submit a petition to the state to abandon proposed Stella Road near Leland. County Attorney David Clegg advised commissioners they had no authority in the family road dispute, which he said was more properly a matter for the state transportation department or the courts. The proposed road would provide the only access to a subdivision that has received preliminary plat approval from the county planning board.

• Accepted the dedication of the Rock Crab subdivision water distribution system to the county.

• At Chairman Chris Chappell's direction, asked Engineer Dan Shields to report on voluntary growth of the water system along its southwestern segment, including footage of water lines dedicated by developers to the county, their value, number of lots served, and the like.

Flu, Cold Weather Keep Absences High

BY TERRY POPE

Monday morning's bitter cold temperatures weren't exactly what Brunswick County school officials were hoping to see following a week of high absences due to colds and influenza.

Several county schools last Friday reported absentee rates of 25 percent to 36 percent of the student enrollment due to flu. Absenteeism rates soared to around 50 percent at several schools Monday morning as a result of both the weather and the recent flu outbreak.

At Shallotte Middle School, 412 students out of 1,077 enrolled did not show up after schools opened one hour later than normal Monday morning. Secretary Elaine Wright said an average of 100 to 150 students were absent each day last week with the flu.

"It was bad last week," Ms. Wright said. "Parents have just been keeping their children home if they think they may be coming down with the flu."

The entire fifth-grade quad at Shallotte Middle was without heat Monday morning as county maintenance employees worked to repair the problem, Ms. Wright said.

At West Brunswick High, the cold spell struck amid first-semester exams. An hour delay in opening school Monday morning sent teachers and students scurrying to class as Principal Roland English announced the exam schedule would remain as planned through Wednesday.

Attendance Secretary Ruth Johnson said that of West's 969 enrolled students, 138 students were absent last Thursday while 112 were absent on Friday. She spent Monday

revising attendance figures as late buses kept arriving until after 10 a.m.

Several classes at Union Primary School huddled in the school library to keep warm after heaters failed to keep classrooms warm in the older sections of the building, said Secretary Kay Varnum.

Of the school's 737 students, about 40 to 50 percent were absent Monday, Ms. Varnum said.

"It's been very poor attendance," she said. "About 20 percent of the student body was out with the flu last week. It's not been raging that bad yet."

Parents of kindergarten and first-grade students were keeping their children home because of the threat of catching flu, she said.

"We have one or two classrooms without heat," she said. "There are

other parts where there is little heat. The maintenance men have had their hands full."

After learning of the heating situation at Union Primary Monday, Ms. Varnum said, many parents began picking their children up from school.

The last school bus had arrived at Bolivia Elementary School by 11:15 a.m. Monday morning, said Secretary Kay Lemley.

Of the school's 495 students, 168—or about 35 percent—were absent Monday, she said. The school was not experiencing difficulties with heating.

"Since Christmas, the flu has been keeping our attendance down," Ms. Lemley said.

Last week, 30 students were out on Monday, 28 on Tuesday, 45 on Wednesday, 48 on Thursday, and 29 on Friday, she said.

Cold-Weather Power Demand Tops Prior Record

BY SUSAN USHER

As temperatures plummeted across the area, demand for electrical power from Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. reached a record peak Monday morning, General Manager David Batten said.

Even with load management controls in operation, demand surpassed the record 102,000 KW summer peak established in 1984 by several thousand KW, Batten said, for a record peak demand equivalent to about 106 or 107 megawatts.

Demand for electrical power is highest normally between 5:30 a.m. and 8 a.m., peaking about 7:30 a.m. Batten said Monday's high occurred closer to 8:15 a.m., probably in relation to later openings of schools and some businesses.

BEMC has connected 1,482 services with load management switches, with plans to install 10,000 over

a three-year period. The rural cooperative went on load management automatically about 5:30 a.m. and came off it about 9 a.m. Monday, Batten said, saving about 2,500 KW of demand. At a demand charge of \$10.29 per KW, Batten estimated savings of \$25,725 for the co-op Monday morning.

The unusual demand and severe cold weather put strains on the system, with outages experienced in varying locations. Isolated problems began occurring about 11 p.m. Sunday, but most interruptions in power occurred during the peak hours between 5:30 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Monday.

The longest outage, affecting the heavily-loaded west end of Long Beach, lasted approximately three hours, Batten said. When transmission was lost, he said, BEMC had trouble picking it back up because it

was during the early morning peak.

In other outages, customers may have experienced outages of several minutes only.

Demand was greater than the Prospect transmission station, now undergoing a \$3.5 million enlargement that will double its capacity, was set to handle. BEMC shifted some of the load to transmission stations at Whiteville and Wilmington.

But Batten said that while 5-degree weather was a strain on the system, Tuesday's forecasted low of 15 degrees was expected to cause no problems.

He classified most of the cold-related problems in three categories: 1) lightning-scarred lines or conductors that drew up and snapped in the cold and required resleeving; 2) blown transformers as a result of overload in a particular area; and 3) blown fuses in even more localized situations.

BEMC buys its electricity from Carolina Power & Light Co. CP&L reduced its voltage by 5% at about 5 a.m. Monday, but the difference should not have been noticeable. Customers are also being asked to conserve energy.

Sunset Bridge Struck Again

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He said several factors made it possible for crews to restore traffic so quickly last week, including good working weather and cooperation from both other departments and from local volunteer fire and rescue units.

"They took a load off us and we were able to concentrate our efforts on one thing," he said.

The Brunswick County road maintenance crew took over the small boat ferry service from volunteers late Sunday and operated Monday and "maybe Tuesday," said Bill Renton, county road engineer. They also built and maintained the ramps for the landing craft ferry service that operated between Bonaparte Landing and the island causeway. That service was

operated by the state's ferry division, while the traffic services division made directional signs and helped with traffic control, he added.

Sunset Beach residents generally praised the speed with which state agencies responded to the emergency.

At a meeting after the bridge was struck, Sunset Beach Town Manager Wallace Martin told Joseph Dean, State Secretary of Crime Control and Public Safety, "It felt good being able to get hold of state officials on a Saturday. It sure reduces your level of frustration."

And one local realtor, Greg Gore, confessed, "You always think of the state as being slow, but they responded fast. The fact we got such a fast response eased a lot of the tension."

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WORSHIP SERVICE 11:00 A.M.
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