



High-Rise View Of Past Short-Lived

STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

The journey across the new high-rise bridge to Ocean Isle Beach provides an aerial view of the existing swing bridge in action—a view that won't be around for long. The old bridge is up for sale and should be dismantled next month, removing one more obstacle to uninterrupted boat traffic on the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. Local anglers still hope to come up with sufficient

funds to transform the superstructure into an offshore fishing reef. The new high-rise Odell Williamson Bridge is scheduled to open today (Wednesday). Mayor Ladane Bullington plans a 3 p.m. ribbon cutting followed by a motorcade to the beach once the span passes its final inspection as anticipated.

DOT To Hear Both Sides Of Parking Issue

BY SUSAN USHER

Cast in the unusual role of referee, State Department of Transportation officials will meet with Sunset Beach town officials on Thursday, Dec. 5, in search of a compromise solution to the parking controversy at that beach.

Last Wednesday transportation officials met with a group of "concerned citizens" at Sunset Beach who say the town's recent ban on roadside parking has put a hardship on those who want to visit the shore.

"We listened to their side as they conceived it," said J.M. (Jimmy) Lynch, traffic engineering branch manager and one of several transportation officials involved in the meeting. "We're going back to hear the town's side."

"I would like to think that some kind of compromise could be worked out. If not we will take both sides into consideration and work something out here (in Raleigh)," he said.

DOT officials also plan to meet in a separate session with officials of the Town of Holden Beach, which has adopted a similar ban along Ocean Boulevard and on side streets within specified distances of intersections.

Usually, said Lynch, it's a town that is reluctant to cooperate when DOT wants parking eliminated in a certain spot such as a high-hazard intersection, but this time the tables

are turned somewhat.

"We usually don't have this—parking banned in an entire town, especially one on the coast, when all citizens are supposed to enjoy our coast," said Lynch.

Citing potential safety and traffic flow, Sunset Beach has banned year-round all parking along and on Main Street, its boulevard paralleling the oceanfront.

Some parking is available on a short-term, indefinite basis in lots leased by the town along Sunset Boulevard and land on the western tip has been donated for the purpose of creating a parking area.

The ban could conceivably be lifted, Lynch said, when a newly-constituted town board takes office next month.

That still wouldn't resolve the town's long-range parking problem, he said.

"They're mainly concerned about the distance they're having to walk to the beach," noted Lynch. "If you have to carry fishing tackle and walk that far, you aren't going to walk in the sand, you're going to walk in the road. You're going to ride bikes on the road also."

Getting pedestrian traffic off the roadway was one of the town's original goals in banning roadside parking.

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DEMOCRATS VOTE MONDAY

Three Seek Nomination To County Coroner's Post

BY SUSAN USHER

The 50 executive committee members of the Brunswick County Democratic Party meet Monday, Dec. 2, at 7:30 p.m. at the Brunswick County Government Center to nominate a new coroner, announced Chairman Rex Gore of Shallotte.

The meeting will be held at the public assembly building.

The party's nominee will be presented to the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners for formal appointment—possibly that same night, if time permits, since commissioners meet in regular session at 6:30 p.m.

Gore said three persons have expressed an interest in the post held until Monday week ago by Tommy Gilbert, a Southport Democrat who

resigned the office in order to accept another job.

The prospective candidates include Pam Gurganus of Shallotte, a school nurse who ran against Gilbert in the 1984 primary; Greg White, a rescue volunteer employed by Brunswick Funeral Service; and a local physician who is currently on the list of local medical examiners. In a news release, Gore did not identify the physician by name and he could not be reached for additional comment Monday.

In the May 1984 primary Gurganus received 3,559 votes to Gilbert's 3,934.

Another person, longtime Assistant Coroner Larry Andrews of Supply, has publicly announced his interest in the job. However the Republican Party member has not contacted the

Democratic Party leadership seeking the nomination.

Gilbert's successor will complete the unexpired portion of a four-year term that ends in December 1988.

Those eligible to vote at Monday's meeting include the chairman and vice-chairman of each of the 21 precincts, the six officers of the county executive committee and the president of the Brunswick County Democratic Women.

Elected officials of the Democratic Party are ex-officio non-voting members of the committee.

Traditionally, those nominated to fill vacancies in elective office are of the same party.

The precinct chairman and vice chairman may cast for their precinct one vote for each 50 Democratic

votes cast by their precinct for governor in the 1984 election, with a minimum of one vote per precinct. If only one officer is present and a written proxy has not been provided, the officer present may cast half the precinct's votes.

There are no special qualifications spelled out in the law for coroner.

Most counties—96 of 100 in the state—have abolished the position and gone to a system of medical examiners. Brunswick County commissioners voted on Nov. 18 to go ahead and fill the vacancy, intending to consider the need for the post again before adopting the 1985-86 budget.

"In our county," said Gore, "the coroner system serves a good purpose. It provides a lot of help to the family."

Holden Beach Woman Opts To Leave House On Lot

Mrs. Ralph Inman moved her erosion-threatened house at the east end of Holden Beach last week away from the ocean and closer to the road, said Building Inspector Dwight Carroll.

Inman opted to leave the house on a carriage on the original lot until town commissioners clarify their policy on the moving of houses, he said.

At last Monday night's commissioners meeting, the board voted 3-1 to continue the moratorium on the relocation of buildings from one location to another on the island except in emergency situations, to be determined by the building inspector.

Owners were given the option to move the house off the island not

later than 30 days after the opening of the new high rise bridge or to move the house to another lot he owns adjacent to or across the street from the present location.

Mrs. Inman had asked to move the house onto a lot she owns across the street at 331 Ocean Boulevard East. After the meeting she said she wasn't exactly sure what the commissioners meant by their policy.

Carroll determined she could move her house due to the "emergency situation," as the policy stated, but he said she doesn't want to move her house to the new lot until she is certain she will be allowed to leave it there.

Property Valuation Notices Expected To Send Shock Waves Across Brunswick County

BY SUSAN USHER

County officials expect shock waves to roll across the county when property owners receive valuation notices in the mail next month.

The value of rural property will generally increase from 30 percent to 50 percent in most areas while waterfront property will increase by three to five times since the last tax appraisal in 1978.

"If the reaction is true to that statewide," predicted Tax Administrator Boyd Williamson, "we expect a negative, a very negative reaction."

So far, though, he has seen no organized resistance. "Most of the people I've talked with say they are taking a wait and see attitude," he said, adding that it would help if people realize revaluation isn't the county's idea.

Property essentially unaffected by resort values will increase in value about 100 percent. Weisner gave Leland, Shallotte and Southport as examples, but cautioned that historic redevelopment areas in Southport will show larger increases for land and buildings. Values along the waterfront and on Bald Head Island will show much larger increases.

Along the water—whether the Atlantic Ocean, waterway or Calabash River, property values have skyrocketed.

"There's a real wide variation," said Weisner. "The market value for farm property has not gone down, but it has not increased as much as other property."

"On the rivers we're seeing a drastic increase. The last time (in 1978) they hadn't caught on yet because oceanfront and waterway property was still available."

The purpose of the revaluation is to appraise the property at its fair market rate.

"This is our opinion of the market value. It is not the final value," said Weisner. "We urge property owners not to overreact."

When the initial shock wears off, telephones will start lighting up at the county complex office of W.P. Ferris Inc., the firm conducting the 1986 revaluation. The firm's work has taken appraisers to approximately 70,000 parcels of land across the county, Revaluation Director Brent Weisner said.

The revaluation process is slightly behind schedule, but Weisner said county officials and the company are satisfied with the current schedule. Because of the county's tremendous growth in 1984, he said, appraisers had to visit a lot more buildings than first estimated. "That's good for the county and bad for us," he quipped.

The state Machinery Act requires that real property be revalued for property tax purposes every eight years.

Weisner and his staff will be ready with extra telephone lines and extra patience once notices are mailed in early to mid-December. Weisner said he expects between 4,500 to 7,000—up to 10 percent of all property owners—to question the values assigned to their land. And he expects to find some mistakes.

During the first week his staff will schedule appointments with dissatisfied property owners. These meetings should be done in about six weeks. Property owners can expect to receive an answer to their query

eight to 10 weeks after the conference.

The answer will come in the form of a new valuation notice, either restating the previous value assigned, or adjusting it.

Weisner said he expects more non-resident property owners to write than call. About one third of all property owners live outside the county, according to Tax Administrator Boyd Williamson. Their letters will be considered informal complaints and requests for a review of the value, said Weisner, and that will be done. Their answers will arrive within the same time frame and format as those stemming from conferences.

At this point in the appeals process appraisers can address physical problems, correcting errors in listing, adjusting depreciation or the land value. They cannot, however, adjust the base value of the property.

Property owners who aren't satisfied with the results of their initial hearings—typically no more than 10 percent of those questioning their property values—will appeal their cases to the Brunswick County Board of Equalization and Review, which will begin hearing appeals in April. Tax Administrator Boyd Williamson's office, not Ferris, will schedule those appointments.

These appeals must be completed in time for the county commissioners to confirm the tax base and set a tax rate for the 1986-87 fiscal year. A very few property owners are likely to continue their appeal to the State Property Tax Commission, Weisner said, and most of those would likely be resolved before reaching the hearing stage.

Most meetings of the E & R panel will be held during the day, however Williamson said some would be scheduled at night to accommodate property owners who can't make a daytime meeting.

This is the first time in eight years that new values have been assigned to land and structures in Brunswick county for property tax purposes. The state requires revaluation every eight years and allows a "horizontal adjustment" at the four-year mark. Brunswick County commissioners, voting four years ago, did away with the results of such an adjustment, also performed by W.P. Ferris Inc.

With revaluation, much of the tax burden in the county will shift to the individual property owner, County Manager Billy Carter has said repeatedly.

About half of the county's tax valuation is based on utilities and personal property and inventory, all of which are revalued each year.

An 18 percent adjustment in the tax value for Carolina Power & Light and Southern Bell reflects that difference.

In 1986, when the new values go into effect, the two utilities will lose their 18 percent adjustment, but will benefit from a reduced tax rate.

Even if Brunswick County's tax base doubles as anticipated and the county commissioners sharply reduce the tax rate, Carter has also stated, many property owners will receive higher tax bills.

The current tax rate is 56.9 cents per \$100 of property. The 1985 total valuation is \$2.213 billion, with a levy of \$13.17 million.

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