



VARNAMTOWN RESIDENT ANNIE SMIGIEL (left) and her husband, Donald (right) chats after the Coastal Initiative meeting with N.C. Coastal Federation representatives Todd Miller and Lena Ritter.

## Shellfishermen Say More Development Is Not What Coast Needs From State

BY SUSAN USHER

Shellfisherman Annie Smigiel of Varnamtown had a short, but pointed message last Wednesday night for a panel charged with finding ways to encourage development along the coast while simultaneously protecting its fragile environment.

"The clambers and fishermen of Brunswick County asked me to tell you that they don't want any more building along the coast," she said. "We have enough pollution. Development will only add more to it," she concluded, handing to the commission chairman, former Lt. Gov. Jimmy Green, a petition with 825 signatures opposing Gov. James Martin's "Coastal Initiative."

Mrs. Smigiel was one of approximately 25 speakers to address representatives of Martin's 15-member "blue ribbon" commission before an audience of about 250 people gathered in Bryan Auditorium on the UNC-Wilmington campus. Most were skeptical, if not hostile, challenging the governor's vision for the North Carolina coast.

However, listening from seats near the front behind state transportation official Tommy Harrelson of Southport were Southport Mayor Norman Holden, Alderman Robert Thorsen and a former mayor, Eugene B. Tomlinson, who is a member of the Coastal Resources Commission. Partly at Tomlinson's urging, Southport is positioning itself to apply for election as one of three to seven "pilot" communities targeted for special attention during the initiative's first year.

James Harrington, mayor of Bald Head Village and Martin's transportation secretary, opened the meeting by telling those present, "All of us have a responsibility to its (the coast's) stewardship and to make development along it enhance its value. The entire region will benefit from sound, ecological development."

Doug Boykin of the Alliance for Balanced Coastal Management, a lobbying group of coastal business interests and landowners, appealed to the state to lay the "substantial technical groundwork" needed to identify and protect resources, to find out how to protect them, and to classify coastal waters "appropriately."

He added, "We need to be realistic in dealing with sources of pollution."

Pat Howe, president of PenderWatch & Conservancy, was concerned about the proposal in the initiative to promote coastal development. She told commission members, "It is much easier to promote development than to control growth. Once our pristine waters are polluted, they cannot be restored."

Joe Huber, one of the principals in M & J Marina at Seaside, stood at the lectern wearing a N.C. Oyster Festival t-shirt and said he was speaking not on behalf of the marina industry, but for local shellfishermen.

"These fellows are having a harder and harder time making ends meet," he said. "Many of them have no other way to make a living."

Referring to his shirt, and the annual state festival held locally each year, he added, "My concern is we have to someday import our oysters for this festival."

Keeping pace with rapid coastal growth was the concern of Brunswick County Health Director Michael Barrett-Rhodes. He pointed out that agencies dealing with the environment are "crying out for manpower" already.

"With the push for the Coastal Initiative, we really need to take a look at putting funds at the manpower level

so we can do the best job we can without being inundated with more development than we can handle," he said.

Several speakers wondered how the state could offer coastal communities the special help when state environmental agencies are already overworked. Money that would go for the initiative would be better spent, they suggested, in support of existing agencies and programs.

The plan calls for incentives such as technical assistance and higher grant priority for communities that put together feasible plans for stimulating waterfront development, with an emphasis on promoting the marine waterway system. At the same time, it also proposes protecting the most sensitive areas using a new "outstanding resource water" designation which carries more stringent restrictions on development than the stormwater runoff rules now in effect. The Environmental Management Commission is still debating which waters will be so classified.

Nolan O'Neal, chairman of the New Hanover County Commissioners, was among those who questioned the feasibility of increasing coastal development with the idea of placing it where pollution could be limited.

"Contaminated waters will be distributed by tides, winds... and the churning of boats," he noted. "But contamination cannot be contained by lines on a map or good intentions. The people who drew this up knew this, and that disturbs me."

Several speakers suggested that the initiative might be targeting the wrong kind of development. Instead of relying on traditional industry such as tourism and its service-related jobs, they suggested, the state should focus on high-tech jobs as found in the Research Triangle Area, "environmentally benign" marine biotechnology and alternate production methods to support the state's seafood industry.

Other speakers were concerned about what he called the "systematically politicized" natural resource agencies and commissions that would be involved in decisions relating to the initiative. Said Dr. Robert Parr, "It's a henhouse designed by foxes, built by foxes and overseen by foxes."

A final speaker, who said he had been involved in a longstanding dispute with the state over ownership of submerged lands, asked that the state's program give more consideration to the rights of individual property owners. He suggested also that leasing bottoms would do more to promote increased shellfish production than their current public harvesting.

Shallotte residents James and Virginia Bellamy attended the meeting, but did not speak.

Afterwards, Bellamy said, "It was a pretty good representative group. People are beginning at long last to be concerned about their environment, especially the coastal environment. They've expressed that here tonight."

However, Tommy Harrelson, of Martin's administration and a former Southport businessman, saw the meeting in a different light.

The meeting was the fifth in a series of six across the state. It was the only one where the audience was hostile to the Martin administration and its coastal program, according to Harrelson. He attributed the audience's bent to the strong influence of The Star News Newspapers, which have taken strong editorial positions on coastal issues.



A WILMINGTON AUDIENCE of approximately 250 people received Gov. Jim Martin's vision of balancing increased coastal development with environmental safeguards coolly last Wednesday night, noting that ex-

isting coastal programs stand in need of attention. The crowd at UNC-W's Bryan Auditorium included a good-size contingent from Brunswick County.



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