

CRC Allows Variance For Baptist Assembly's New Convention Center

BY SUSAN COOPER

The state's Coastal Resources Commission bent its rules last Thursday to grant a variance request from the N.C. Baptist Assembly for construction of a 32,500 square foot conference center within an area of environmental concern.

"It's a unique situation," Office of Coastal Management Director David Owens said afterward. "They're trying to comply with the spirit and intent of the regulations. They said it was a good project and the Commission agreed."

The 250-acre assembly is located on the eastern tip of Oak Island, on the grounds of what was formerly Fort Caswell. It has been owned by the Baptist State Convention since 1949 and is used as a retreat and learning center.

In January Brunswick County denied the assembly a minor CAMA permit for the project because it was found inconsistent with both CRC regulations and the county's land use plan.

CAMA regulations permit only residential structures of four units or less or non-residential structures of less than 5,000 square feet within the inlet hazard area. The county's land use plan discourages high intensity uses and large structures within the 100-year flood plain, erosion prone areas and other locations susceptible to hurricane and flooding hazards.

However, last Thursday, the Office of Coastal Management staff concurred with the Assembly's view that the proposed development was appropriate. That recommendation, said Owens, was based on the stable nature of the adjacent Cape Fear River Inlet and the Assembly's plans to use the center to replace three existing dormitories that stand closer to the water than the facility intended to replace them.

The dormitories were built before the regulations were adopted and will be relocated elsewhere on the Assembly's grounds, outside the hazard areas.

To build the conference center—part of a long-range development plan for the Assembly, "they'll have to apply again for a permit and meet all the other permit conditions," said Owens.

The Assembly was represented at the Thursday morning hearing by its attorney, Jim Prevatte of Southport.

While some of the state's inlets may shift as much as 1,000 feet in a matter of weeks, studies of Cape Fear Inlet in 1974 and 1978 showed that it is "very stable" with little movement since 1938 and little movement expected in the future. In fact, aerial photographs made in conjunction with the 1974 study show "significant accretion" or building up of the Assembly's property at the site of the proposed construction between 1949 and 1972.

Legislation Proposed

In other business last week, the CRC's Planning and Special Issues Committee directed staff to draft legislation that if adopted would ban the use of plastic six-pack rings in the state, set tentative hearing dates for coastal counties regarding their updated average erosion rates, and adopted for public hearing proposed changes in the size of decks allowed over wetlands and public trust waters.

Public Information Officer Kathy Henderson told the committee that the proposed legislation could help reduce plastic pollution along the coast. Thousands of marine mammals, birds and fish die annually when they attempt to eat or become entangled in plastic waste—a focus of the Beach Sweep program held last September. A slide program on the impact of plastic pollution on the coast is available for check-out from the CRC's Wilmington office for showing to interested groups.

Erosion Rates Updated

Average annual erosion rates are the major factor used in establishing oceanfront setback standards for construction.

This year, at an estimated cost of \$60,000 the coastal management staff has updated figures last compiled in 1983. The study involves analysis of aerial photographs of the state's entire shoreline. At the request of the

Implementation and Standards Committee, the new maps will indicate that while the maps don't show the effect of nourishment projects along the coast, that the manually placed fill is considered by the CRC staff in its permitting process.

A hearing on the updated average annual erosion rates for Brunswick County will be held May 19 at 7 p.m. in Southport City Hall, in the aldermen's chambers.

After hearings in all 20 coastal counties are completed, tentatively by May 25, the CRC will decide whether setbacks should be changed in accordance with the updated information on erosion. The changes will effect those places designated as areas of environmental concern because of susceptibility to erosion or flood damage.

Rule Reworded

The CRC also accepted a recommendation of the Implementation and Standards Committee regarding deck size. Preston Pate, field services director, said the proposed change would "make it easier to issue a permit" especially where the wetland margin is irregular.

Under the proposed change, the pier extending over the wetland can be six feet wide, while the end of the T—typically a dock, or loading platform—can be up to 500 square feet in size, so long as the depth of the platform perpendicular to the pier that

extends over the wetlands is no more than six feet wide.

Pate said the six-foot width may result in some degradation of the marsh, but not its destruction, such

as occurs with shading of a larger area.

"When its wider," he told the committee, "look under it and it's a mud flat. The marsh is gone."

Challenger Outlines Education Platform

An improved educational system is the key to economic revival in eastern North Carolina, according to 14th District N.C. House candidate Glen Peterson.

Peterson released his education platform last week, saying improvement of the system must begin with teachers.

"Education provides the opportunity to chance the pattern of the past, a chance to break out of the cycle of poverty and teenage pregnancy," said Peterson.

He noted that currently one in five North Carolinians is considered functionally illiterate. "Capable workers who are literate and have job skills provide the basis for higher-wage industries," he said.

He recommended several approaches for improving the public education system, including recruitment of bright college students to teach in the state, particularly in the eastern section, providing scholarships keyed to teaching in subjects and geographic areas where there are critical needs.

Peterson, an attorney for both the Brunswick County Board of Education and Brunswick Community College, also backs further reduction of class, expanding on efforts begun through the state's new Basic Education Plan.

"It is currently set at 26 per class,

but allows for an increase to 29," he said. "Let's make class size definite without any option for increase, and work toward reducing elementary class size to 18 per teacher."

He said he would also vote to speed up the process of putting more guidance counselors in high schools and elementary schools and would examine the balance of administrators and clerical staff.

The state should also look at possible full-time employment of adult bus drivers—an approach now being taken on a limited basis in Brunswick County, with drivers used in support roles in the schools during the day. This dual role creates full-time jobs that pay enough to attract drivers, he said.

Peterson's platform also includes advocacy for higher salaries and better benefits for teachers, including: increased pay; dental plan for teachers; "cafeteria" style benefits plans; and improvements in the Career Ladder program such as insuring that evaluators are from the teacher's subject area and creation of a revised evaluation instrument, to be sure the process is fair before it is implemented statewide.

He also supports increased funding for the state's community colleges to retrain adults for jobs.

Peterson is challenging incumbent Rep. David E. Redwine of Ocean Isle Beach in the May primary.



Selected For Youth Tour

Juniors Bill Jackson (left), son of William H. Jackson of Ocean Isle Beach, and Grover A. Gore II (right), son of Mr. and Mrs. Grover A. Gore of Southport, will represent Brunswick County as participants in the annual Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., June 11-17, with an opportunity to win a \$1,000 scholarship. Tour delegates from 30 states will attend seminars, meet with their state's congressional delegation and compete in an "Energy Battle" while in Washington. They are among four students selected for the tour by Brunswick Electric Membership Corp.

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