



SOIL AND WATER OFFICIALS last week proposed extending the boundaries of the Cawcaw Drainage District in southwestern Brunswick County by an additional 1,800 acres, which would mainly include Carolina Shores subdivision near Calabash and timberland along N.C. 130. The proposed boundary is indicated by the heavier broken line, while the lighter line indicates the current perimeter.

Officials Discuss Cawcaw Drainage District's Reactivation, Boundary

BY RAHN ADAMS

Although stormwater runoff hasn't become a problem in southwestern Brunswick County this year due to dry conditions, efforts are continuing to reactivate the Cawcaw Drainage District.

Soil and water conservation officials and two of the drainage district's three commissioners held an organizational meeting last Thursday in Calabash to discuss proposed boundaries for the district and the means of reactivating it.

Attending the one-hour meeting at Calabash Town Hall were Drainage Commissioners O. Kendall Bellamy and Jennings Edge; Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Chairman James Bellamy; area and state soil conservation officials John Garrett, Phil Edwards, Billy Jones, Dean Bingham and David Combs; and local soil conservation staff members Harold Jones and Baker Harrell. Drainage Commissioner Wendell Bennett was absent.

The Cawcaw Drainage District was established in 1959, followed by the completion of 16.5 miles of canals in 1967. The district originally was designed to drain about 40,000 acres of farmland in southwestern Brunswick County.

In December 1976, the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office dissolved the drainage district, although opinions issued by the N.C.

Attorney General's office in 1977 and 1987 stated that the dissolution was improper.

Since much of the affected area now includes valuable residential and commercial property, soil and water conservation officials renewed discussion of reactivating the district last October. About 175 residents of the area in and around the drainage district supported its reactivation at a public hearing held by Brunswick County Commissioners last November.

On Feb. 29, Brunswick County Clerk of Court Diana Morgan cleared the way for reactivation of the district by setting aside the 1976 order which dissolved it. Her action was in response to a request made last December by county commissioners and the local soil and water conservation board.

According to James Bellamy, the group discussed extending the district boundaries by approximately 1,800 acres. The largest areas to be added include Carolina Shores near Calabash and timberland on N.C. 130.

"Right now we're just getting into the starting stages of it (reactivation of the district)," Harold Jones told the Beacon Friday. He added that no official action has been taken to extend the boundaries.

Jones indicated that either the N.C. Division of Soil and Water Conservation or the U.S. Soil Conservation Service will do an engineering study

within the next few weeks to check the carrying capacity of the current canals.

District Board Chairman Kendall Bellamy also said a survey needs to be done involving property outside of the old boundaries to determine "how the district can best serve" property owners in areas which may be added.

"It'll take several months," Bellamy said. "There's a lot of groundwork that has to be done before you get in there and start working."

Another issue that drainage commissioners must decide is how to fund the district, whether through county assistance, formation of a service or special assessment district, or some other method of assessing property owners.

James Bellamy estimated that the cost of restoring the canal system to its original state will be around \$120,000. He added that annual maintenance of the district would probably cost \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Bellamy said federal funds may be available to finance work on a portion of the district. Also, state monies may be available on a one-time basis, he added.

Later this month, Jones and Kendall Bellamy plan to meet with Brunswick County Attorney David Clegg to discuss legal aspects of setting new boundaries and reactivating the district.

Williamson Named

(Continued From Page 1-A)

those intentions last Wednesday. FAA Program Development Supervisor Howard Robinson said Friday, "If they (the airport commission) tell us they will resolve that issue and take that land out of Mr. Gale's lease, that would solve the problem we have."

Robinson added that if the airport should remain in non-compliance, it could be declared ineligible for future funding but would not be required to repay federal monies that were received in the past.

The airport currently is seeking three grant applications for more than \$1.7 million, Robinson said. According to Gale, the monies would be used for construction of a parallel taxiway, expansion of the runway ramp and completion of an airport layout plan update.

Filling The Vacancy
County commissioners were scheduled to name Parker's replacement at their regular Aug. 1 session. However, they delayed the appointment in order to give the airport commission and representatives from Southport, Long Beach and Boiling Spring Lakes opportunities to comment on the matter at last Thursday's special meeting, according to Ms. Beasley.

"This board is going to be prepared to discuss that (the airport lease)," she stated at the Aug. 1 meeting. "We're going to do our homework."

But at the outset of last Thursday's meeting, Ms. Beasley read a brief, prepared statement which pointed out that "the only direct influence the four government entities have exercised over the (airport) commission has been in the nature of appointments to its board."

She added that county commissioners were in no position "to mandate that the airport commission take or refrain from taking any specific action. It is not the position of the Board of County Commissioners to act as a referee over in-

dependent contractual obligations of the airport commission nor of its fixed-base operator or any business decisions of that operator."

Following her statement and a motion by Commissioner Frankie Rabon, Williamson's appointment was unanimously approved without discussion.

After the meeting, Commissioners Chris Chappell and Benny Ludlum said Williamson had contacted them to ask for the appointment before they attended the annual conference of the National Association of Counties in Anaheim, Calif., Aug. 5 through 11. Also, Chappell confirmed that he discussed the matter with Ludlum and Commissioner Jim Poole in California.

However, Rabon said he made the nomination with no earlier contact from Williamson or the other four commissioners over the appointment. "I have a lot of confidence in Mr. Williamson being a good businessman," Rabon said, adding that he did not tell anyone—including the other commissioners—who he planned to nominate prior to last Thursday's meeting.

But Airport Commissioner John Walters told the Beacon that he was informed before the meeting that Williamson would be appointed. "It was just a phone call," he said, declining to identify the caller.

Giving His Best Shot
Williamson confirmed last Thursday that he asked Chappell and Ludlum for the appointment after he read about the airport commission's difficulties concerning the lease, but maintained, "Normally I wouldn't do something like this."

"I feel like I can render some know-how on the business end of it," he said, adding that he would "give it (his) best shot."

When interviewed after last Thursday's meeting, all five commissioners indicated that they felt Williamson's experience with the Ocean Isle Beach Airport would be an asset in helping the airport com-

mission with state and federal agencies including the FAA.

Former Airport Commission Chairman Conrad was pleased with the county commissioners' choice. "I'm delighted to have a man of Mr. Odell Williamson's business experience and expertise on the board," Conrad said, "and I'm delighted that a man as busy as him is willing to serve."

Although he also noted the developer's airport experience, Walters was more reserved. "Mr. Williamson might be all right," he said. "I always try to judge somebody by their actions... We'll have to wait and see."

According to Ocean Isle Beach Town Clerk Alberta Tatum, Williamson is the head of Ocean Isle Aeronautics, which operates the town-owned airport. "Anything we do out there, he's in charge of it," she said.

But the county commissioners and Williamson himself said his involvement with both airports would not result in a conflict of interests. Gale also echoed Williamson's statement that the airports are "two different types of operations." In addition, Robinson said the FAA had no problem with Williamson being affiliated with more than one airport.

And while admitting that he owns as of yet undeveloped timberland adjoining two sides of the county airport, Williamson said his ownership of that property was not "an overriding interest" in his desire to serve on the airport board.

"They've got a good little airport," said Williamson, who has been a pilot since 1942, "but it's pathetic that they keep staying in the news."

Gale said he thinks Williamson's "objectivity should be able to pull the (airport) board together."

"I believe that if the airport commission can come together and we can be a team again, I think we can make it," Gale said. "The last 14 months have been a major struggle."

Marina Opposition Reinstated

(Continued From Page 1-A)

was included in the permit application.

"If that's a missing part as I suspect it is, then it's an incomplete application," said Parker. "It's sort of an oversight on both sides."

A sewage treatment plan is vital to the application, he said, since most of the concern voiced by environmental agencies and local fishermen has focused on the coliform bacteria, found in sewage, which often causes shellfish closures.

Coastal Management has to make a decision on the permit application by Sept. 1, according to Parker, but a decision on the project can be delayed if the application is incomplete.

"There's no action planned this week and we're looking at the entire record to see if anything's missing," he added. "To even consider an action without knowledge of sewage treatment is ludicrous."

The Marine Fisheries comments submitted last week were revised from previous comments, which opposed the marina for different reasons. When the first comments were submitted, it was thought the marina would cause the automatic closure of shellfish beds.

Following a meeting with developers last month, however, Marine Fisheries announced that it would drop its opposition to the project because it would not result in the automatic closure of shellfish waters.

Hogarth said the most recent reversal in opinion resulted from concern for local shellfishermen and the potential damage to the resource and was not a result of outside political pressure.

Although there will be no automatic closure of oyster or clam beds with the Lockwood Folly Marina, Hogarth said every other marina in the state has a shellfish closure associated with it.

"Our job is to protect the

resource," he added. "I just felt like we weren't doing our job unless we did object to it."

Since there is no automatic closure, however, Hogarth said the Marine Fisheries comment "may not have as much teeth" as it normally would. "There's some question as to whether Coastal Management will pay attention to it or not."

In most permit application reviews for marinas, Marine Fisheries comments weigh heavily on the decision to issue or deny the permit. Of the 10 state agencies which comment on the

proposal, other key ones are Coastal Management, Environmental Management and Shellfish Sanitation.

Coastal Management submits comments in two levels. Parker said the field report was favorable for the marina, but the permit decision is ultimately up to David Owens, director of Coastal Management.

Both Environmental Management and Shellfish Sanitation, a section of the N.C. Division of Health Services, have voiced concerns about the project but do not oppose it.

Postal Service May Have Site

(Continued From Page 1-A)

cepting offers from interested property owners for sites between Gause Landing near Ocean Isle Beach and Calabash.

Benton said the postal service received about a half dozen offers and decided the best site was on N.C. 904 at Seaside. "This is definitely their first choice."

While Gordon would not confirm that the postal service has an option to purchase the land, he did say negotiations are continuing with property owners.

If the postal service cannot come up with adequate funds this fall or the property owners decide against the

sale, he said the station will have to be delayed several years.

It would take about 18 months to go through the site selection process and purchase agreement from scratch, he said, and those processes could not begin again until the project reached the top of the priority list. All of that, he said, could take anywhere between two and five years.

The Sunset Beach Planning Board recently sent a letter to the postal service in an effort to determine its interest in the property after the current land owners indicated an interest in annexation. Town Administrator Linda Fluegel said the postal service never responded.

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