

Ocean Isle Beach Extends Deadline On Dredging Payments

BY DOUG RUTTER

Ocean Isle Beach Commissioners will take matters into their own hands over the next month and personally urge property owners along five east-end canals to pay upfront assessments for a proposed dredging project.

After learning this week that property owners had failed to come up with enough voluntary payments to cover the project, commissioners decided to actively pursue property owner support to keep the proposal alive.

During Tuesday's regular monthly meeting, Mayor Betty Williamson told commissioners that only \$102,000 of the \$250,000 estimated cost of the project had been received as of Monday afternoon. The deadline for payment was Sept. 1.

The town plans to send another letter to those property owners who have not paid, urging them to have their money in no later than Oct. 10. The board earlier decided to refund all monies by Oct. 15 if the project could not be pursued this year.

In addition to official letters to property owners, commissioners will secure from the town clerk lists of lot owners who have not paid and call or write those people urging their cooperation.

Commissioner Terry Barbee said officials at Sunset Beach did the same thing and eventually got the

monies they needed to pursue a similar canal dredging project. "For the small amount of money in postage, I think it's worth another try."

The voluntary payments are needed because the town has a limited amount of money to fund the project upfront. Commissioners had asked that property owners on the canals come up with at least 90 percent of the money in advance. As of this week, however, the town had received only 45 percent.

The proposed project includes the first five canals east of the causeway and was initiated at the request of canal lot owners. The estimated assessment is \$650 for each 50-foot-wide lot.

The lack of upfront payments is partly due to a lack of participation from property owners who have not yet built homes on the canals. "The ones with homes have done very well," said the mayor.

According to Town Clerk Alberta Tatum, upfront assessments have been collected for only 10 of the 70 vacant canal lots.

The town can legally assess property owners benefiting from the project, but only after the dredging is completed. Also, the payments can be spread out over a 10-year period.

While the town had originally hoped to receive 90 percent of the estimated cost of the project through

Town Hall Open House Planned

The Town of Ocean Isle Beach will show off its new town hall during a special open house program scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 15, from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m.

Mayor Betty Williamson said state and county officials and board members from other local towns will be invited to attend the ceremony, along with the general public. Following several speeches, visitors will be allowed to tour the recently-completed facility following several speeches.

Town hall is located on West Third Street.

upfront payments, Town Attorney Elva Jess said Tuesday that 80 percent should be enough, adding that the town budget can "withstand" having to cover as much as 20 percent of the upfront money and collecting it later in assessments.

Ocean Isle developer Odell Williamson, who earlier agreed to let the town use some of his land at the east end as a spoil site, said the town also has to consider the cost of removing the spoil, which must be taken care of within three years of

the dredging. According to Williamson, spoil removal costs about \$3 per cubic yard.

He said he was not sure the town would be able to get the upfront monies it needs, but added that it would be a nice project if it can be accomplished.

Commissioners Debbie Fox, who has spearheaded the canal dredging project for the town, and Virginia Gibson were absent from Tuesday's two-hour meeting.

Personnel Discussed

In other business this week, commissioners discussed a personnel matter in executive session for about 30 minutes.

Mayor Williamson said following the meeting that the discussion included an evaluation of police officers. Police Chief Curt Pritchard was present for the closed session.

Bikes Cause Debate

For some time Tuesday, commissioners hashed out differences in an amendment to the town code dealing with parking and traffic which was eventually approved by a 2-1 vote.

The main purpose of the amendment was to prohibit parking on town sidewalks, something which was not previously included in the town code and therefore could not be enforced by the police.

The amendment also included a provision that prohibits golf carts from driving on the strand. Also included in that section, however, was the prohibition of bicycles from the strand, which caught the attention of Mayor Pro Tem Bill Benton.

Although the town has prohibited biking on the strand for about three years, Benton said he and many other island residents enjoy riding bikes on the beach and urged the board to allow it during the off-season.

After a lengthy discussion, commissioners agreed to permit bikes on the strand between Oct. 1 and April

30 of each year. The same schedule is followed for allowing dogs on the beach.

Ed Steele, who opposed the ordinance amendment, was upset with the fact that it allows permanent residents to ride bikes on the beach in the off-season but prohibits summertime visitors from enjoying the same thing.

"Let's not restrict the tourists then turn us loose when the tourists are gone," he said to the board.

Mayor Williamson and the two other commissioners, however, said the seasonal restriction is needed to keep the beach from being overrun with bicycles.

Building Inspector Druid Roberson said the prohibition of bikes was added to town code because of a bike rental operation near the pier. He said people would rent bikes and cause problems when they went out in the most congested area.

'No Wake' Sought

In another matter relating to island canals, commissioners agreed to purchase signs which they hope will reduce the damage caused by boat wake.

The signs will be used to inform

boaters that they are responsible for any damage caused by their wake.

The town plans to sell the signs to canal lot owners at cost, and hopes to have them as soon as possible. Commissioner Barbee will work on the project with Roberson, who recommended that the signs be used after researching various law enforcement angles.

The matter was brought to the attention of the board by Mayor Williamson, who said she had received several letters over the past few months requesting "No Wake" signs in the canals. Most of the problems have been near the mouths of the canals, where they intersect with the waterway.

Roberson added that most of the requests have come from the concrete canals, where he said it is difficult to find places to erect "No Wake" signs. If they are placed at the bottom of the canal walls, they interrupt boat traffic and if they are at the top of the walls, they are not readily visible.

"It's fishing season coming up so the sooner we have this the better off we'll be," said Mayor Williamson.

POA Proposes Nature Center

The Ocean Isle Beach Property Owners Association wants to establish a natural history museum on the island if the town board of commissioners approves the idea and supplies the land.

Commissioners considered the proposal Tuesday but made no commitment one way or the other. The project will be discussed in more detail at next month's meeting, when board members Terry Barbee and Bill Benton are to report on the proposal from the town's point of view.

During this week's meeting, Mayor Betty Williamson said she had received a letter from Stuart Ingram, president of the OIBPOA, stating that the group's board of

directors would finance the building for the Ocean Isle Nature Center if the town would purchase or lease land somewhere near the center of town.

The property owner organization has asked for a response from the town within 60 days.

The proposal is for construction of a 2,000-square-foot building which could be expanded to 5,000 square feet. It would be situated on a tract of land about one-half acre in size.

Although the town board gave no formal support or approval of the project, commissioners seemed excited about the idea of a nature center. "It certainly would be a first

for Brunswick County," said the mayor.

According to the POA proposal, the museum would be owned by the town and open seven days a week during June, July and August and weekends during May and September. It would be operated by volunteers.

The nature center would have displays of the native surf and offshore fish, shells, mounted shore and land birds, minerals, historical materials such as Indian artifacts and archaeological materials such as petrified shark teeth.

The town would be assisted in developing the museum by the Science Museum of Charlotte, which has agreed to help collect display materials.

While he wasn't opposed to the museum, island developer Odell Williamson said it will be a difficult project to complete and urged the board to take a long look at the plans before committing itself.

"You got to give them credit for the idea," said Williamson, who later added that the POA may not realize what it's up against.

"It's just about impossible for any individual to compete with the tax dollar," he said, referring to the N.C. Aquariums at Fort Fisher, Morehead City and Manteo. "It's rough to do these things with private capital."

BCC Expecting Highest Enrollment Ever

While Brunswick Community College may not reach its "dream goal" of registering 1,000 students for fall quarter, officials think the school will enroll a record number of students.

"Our dream, our goal was 1,000, but we're going to be pleased to have the best enrollment we've ever had," said Dean of Student Services Beth McLean. She said the school has "every indication" that registration will top the record 711 students who signed up in Fall 1986.

In the wake of an SBI investigation and a statewide trend toward lowered enrollment in rural colleges, enrollment at BCC dropped to 655 last fall.

By Tuesday, the first day of classes, BCC had already registered 509 students, the most ever by that time, McLean noted. Nearly half of those students signed up during the school's first preregistration period.

The effect was obvious at Monday's "registration day" as students waited in lines for no more than five or 10 minutes.

Late registration continues through Monday, Sept. 19, and she said, "Normally we pick up a lot of students during late registration. Everything is looking good."

Of the programs offered by the college, she said, "the big one" in terms of attracting students is the general education program, in which courses transfer to UNC-Wilmington and other campuses. "I will be not at all surprised if we double that (over a year ago)."

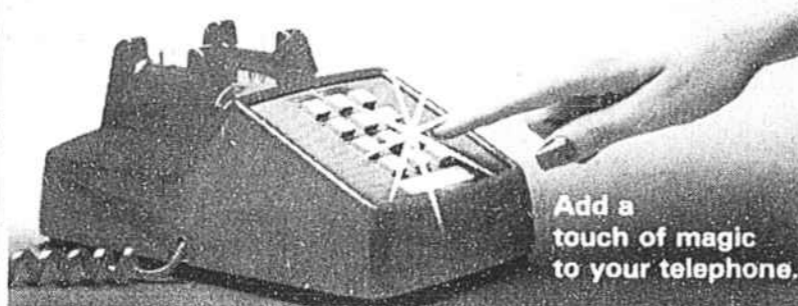
"UNC-W is turning them away and we can take them," she said. Students are also attracted by BCC's lower tuition charge and the possibility of completing their first two years at BCC without having to take the SAT, then transferring to another college as a junior.

BCC offers "express" registration for those taking a light course load,

and is accepting charge cards this year for tuition and fees, which must be paid in full in advance.

Late registration continues at BCC through Monday, with an "absolute" deadline of 7 p.m. Monday. Hours are weekdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and also 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Thursday and Monday.

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