



Sunset Rejects Annexation

BY DOUG RUTTER

The vote was 3-2 against. Before a tightly-packed, nail-biting crowd of about 70 area residents, Sunset Beach Town Council Monday night turned down a request to annex about 114 acres of commercial property extending from the town limits to the Seaside area.

Council members Minnie Hunt, Al Odum and Kathy Hill Peed opposed a motion from Councilman Ed Gore to annex the tracts. Gore's motion was supported by Mary Katherine Griffith, but failed and quickly cleared the council chambers.

Many audience members grumbled disapproval of the long-awaited outcome as they filed through the town hall's front door. As she left, one woman commented, "I guess we're giving our money back to South Carolina."

She was referring to money which local residents will apparently not be spending at a proposed Food Lion grocery store which was considering locating in a shopping center proposed in the area considered for annexation.

Developers of the project said earlier that Food Lion would not commit to locating in the plaza unless it can sell beer and wine. Since the unincorporated areas of Brunswick County are "dry," the site must be part of a town with an ABC board in order to obtain and ABC license.

If approved, annexation of the 126 acres would have extended the corporate limits of Sunset Beach eastward along N.C. 179 to its intersection with N.C. 904 at Seaside, then north on N.C. 904 to include the proposed shopping center site.

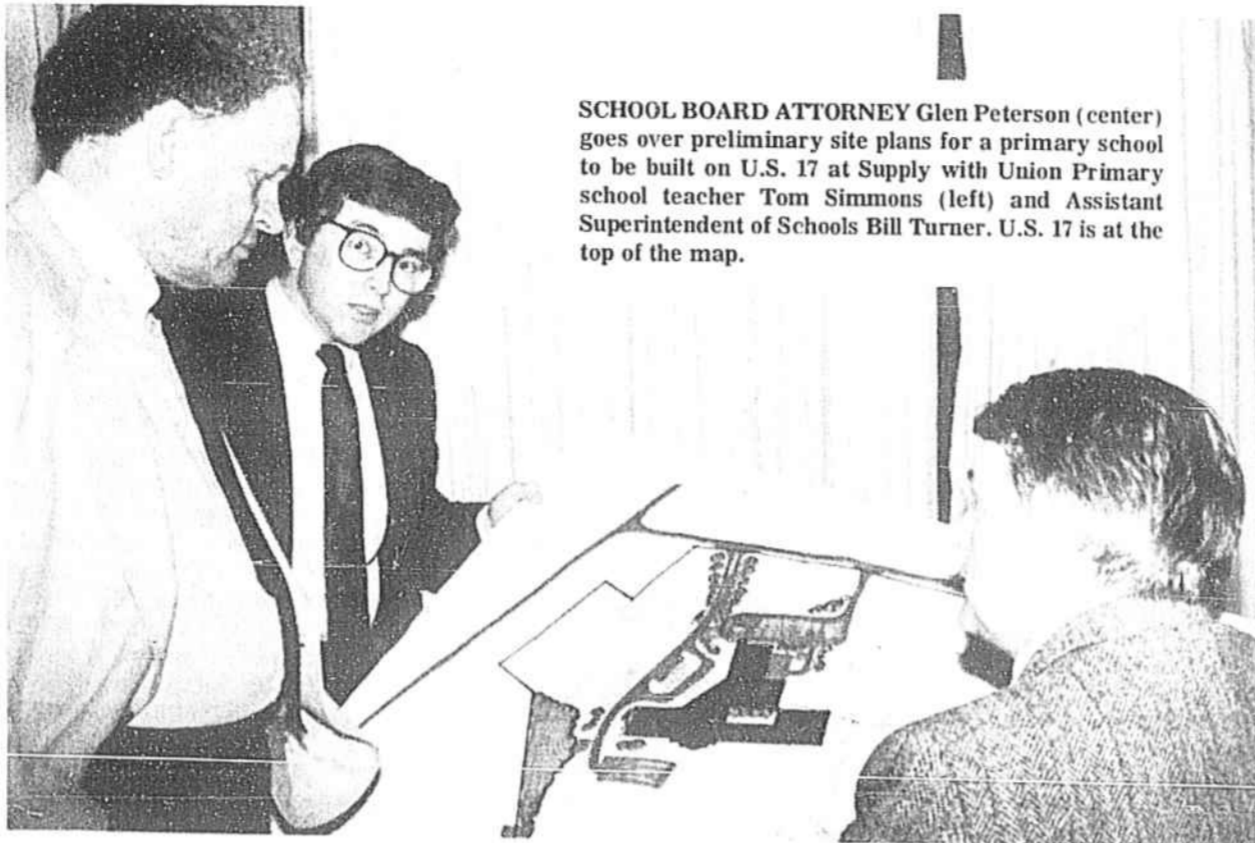
The annexation request came from property owners Sea Trail Corporation, Long Bay Associates and Pope & Pope and was favored by most who attended a public hearing on the issue last month. The proposal drew its only major public opposition from the directors of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association.

This week's vote was the second on the annexation request. With Councilwoman Peed absent, the board voted 3-2 last month to annex the tract. However, at least a 4-1 favorable margin would have been necessary in order to annex the property on a first vote.

At that time, Mayor Mason Barber cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of annexation. It was a negative vote from Councilwoman Peed this week that finally settled the matter.

Following the meeting, Mrs. Peed said she opposed the annexation because she feels there is already enough commercial property within the existing town limits to accommodate a Food Lion and shopping center without the town taking in

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SCHOOL BOARD ATTORNEY Glen Peterson (center) goes over preliminary site plans for a primary school to be built on U.S. 17 at Supply with Union Primary school teacher Tom Simmons (left) and Assistant Superintendent of Schools Bill Turner. U.S. 17 is at the top of the map.

Primary School Site Pinpointed In Court-Approved Agreement

BY SUSAN USHER

Brunswick County's newest primary school will be built on a 40-acre tract that fronts U.S. 17 in Supply, acreage acquired by the school board under unusual circumstances.

Winding up maze-like negotiations among several parties, school officials signed a contract Monday night that calls for payment of \$30,000 to the grantors of the land.

The agreement conveys to the board a portion of a larger tract posted with Brunswick County Superior Court on Sept. 17, 1985, by G.W. and Lois L. Brown as security on a \$150,000 bond for drug defendant Alan Dale Brooks of Sunset Beach, their grandson.

Brooks pleaded guilty to felonious drug charges but later failed to appear in court for sentencing, triggering forfeiture of the bond. Also indicted in 1987 by a special investigative grand jury on drug trafficking charges, Brooks remained a fugitive from justice until taken into custody by local law officers in 1988.

Citing hardship, the Browns had sought remission by the courts of all or part of the bond forfeiture. By state law, forfeitures and fines in state drug cases generally are awarded to the local board of education.

School board attorney Glen Peterson said Monday night that Superior Court Judge James B. Strickland agreed last week to partial remission of the bond, subject to the contract being fulfilled by the end of February.

The agreement remits to the Browns a section of the property on which a three-bedroom house is located, with a 75-foot side buffer from the school property, as well as allowing a switch-off of property so

the Browns can keep a tract along the run of Royal Oak Swamp where they propose to build. The tract is bordered on one side by S.R. 1502, Benton Road, and in part by the swamp and by U.S. 17 north of the Royal Oak Swamp bridge.

"The board really showed a lot of compassion," said Assistant Superintendent Bill Turner. "The board tried to work with the situation."

The board had concentrated its search for property in the immediate Supply area, central to the Sunset Harbor, Supply and Holden Beach communities to be served by the school, which will house approximately 650 students in grades kindergarten through five. The school board was interested in land fronting on U.S. 17 because of the availability of public water from the county and greater ease in meeting state wastewater treatment requirements, and for the view. Said Turner, "We were very fortunate. We were in the right place at the right time."

In a localized version of "shuttle diplomacy," Board of Education members had met with Peterson with increasing frequency as negotiations progressed, including twice Monday night alone.

Midway their meeting, the board gave Peterson instructions before sending him off to Bolivia to discuss the contract with Brunswick County Commissioners.

Following a closed-door session of their own, commissioners approved the spending of \$30,000 in school system capital outlay funds for the property, a decision Peterson hurried back to Southport to report in a final closed-door session with the school board. Finally, in open session, the board unanimously

authorized signing of the contract.

A survey of the new property is the next step in the school construction program, Turner said, followed by a meeting of the school planning committee and the N.C. Division of School Planning to go over facility guidelines under the state's Basic Education Plan.

Plans for the school tentatively call for a facility with an estimated 80,000 in square footage—slightly smaller than North Brunswick High School, Turner said, which would take a year to a year-and-a-half to complete.

The new school would draw an estimated 390 students from Union Primary, 172 from Shallotte Middle and 73 from Southport Primary.

Funds to construct the new school will be in the board of education's 1989-90 budget request to the county.

Drug Survey Results Concern School Board

BY SUSAN USHER

While students were more likely to experiment with alcohol and tobacco, preliminary results of a drug survey made last year indicate that approximately half of Brunswick County's high school students had used marijuana at least once.

The survey involved 22 percent, or 821, of the 3,838 students in grades seven through 12 was conducted last May 25 through June 6. Superintendent John Kaufhold told Brunswick County Board of Education members that the survey had not asked students about frequency of use. "We wanted to determine what drugs had been tried, not much on the extent of use," he said.

"Kids will be kids; they will experiment. That's the nature of kids. But we want to find methods to keep this experimenting from turning into full-time use."

"Curiosity" was the reason listed most often for trying a drug. While school board members received preliminary findings in writing, Kaufhold would not share those results with the public Monday. Instead, he said he expected to issue a "full report" of survey results

Grand Jury Indicts Department Head In Check Forgery Case

BY RAHN ADAMS

The director of the county's computer services has been accused of forging a Brunswick County check to obtain more than \$50,000 worth of unauthorized computer equipment for her department.

A Brunswick County grand jury Monday indicted Regina Moore McKeithan of Bolivia on charges of forgery and misdemeanor larceny, according to court records at the Brunswick County Clerk of Court's office.

Mrs. McKeithan, the wife of former Brunswick County Board of Education member Marvin McKeithan, has been a county employee for 16½ years, having worked in the finance department and computer services, said Personnel Technician Debbie Bowling.

The true bills of indictment allege that Mrs. McKeithan stole a county check and forged the names of Finance Director Lithia Hahn and Clerk to the Board of Commissioners Regina White (Alexander) on it. Dated May 13, 1988, the \$50,667.63 check was made payable to L&B Computers, a Knightdale firm.

Sheriff John C. Davis said Monday that the indictments followed an SBI investigation that was requested about six months ago by county commissioners through County Attorney David Clegg.

Word about an SBI probe involving a county employee initially surfaced following a controversial executive session at a Dec. 5 commissioners' meeting. Officials would not reveal the nature of the investigation at the time.

While Clegg and Ms. Hahn would not comment early this week on the indictments, County Manager John T. Smith indicated Monday that the unauthorized funds apparently were

used to upgrade the computer services' Data General equipment with both hardware and software.

"It (the money) was not budgeted to do that," Smith said, adding that the county board had decided to purchase a computer system for the Brunswick County Register of Deeds' office instead.

The county's 1987-88 audit shows that Mrs. McKeithan's department finished the year almost \$20,000 under its \$248,107 budget, even though funds were overspent on operating costs and contractual services.

According to the audit, \$103,616 was budgeted for operating costs, while \$109,907 was spent during the fiscal year. Some \$19,710 was budgeted for contractual services, while \$32,398 was spent. The overruns were made up in the department's \$73,202 capital outlay budget, of which only \$34,638 was spent.

After a commissioners' meeting Monday night, Smith said no disciplinary action had been taken against Mrs. McKeithan "to this point" in connection with the allegations. The board meeting included an hour-long executive session requested by Clegg to discuss, in part, personnel.

Mrs. McKeithan was not at work Tuesday. However, an unidentified employee said the director was expected to return today (Thursday). When contacted at home Tuesday morning, Mrs. McKeithan declined to comment on the indictments.

Sheriff Davis said late Tuesday afternoon that the defendant's orders for arrest had not yet been served.

The maximum penalty for forging a check is imprisonment of up to five years. Misdemeanor larceny carries a maximum sentence of two years in prison.

Fine Wines Coming To Town

After holding their toasts for the past three months, shoppers will soon choose from a better selection of wines in Shallotte stores.

Despite a low voter turnout Tuesday, residents of the town overwhelmingly approved the sale of unfortified wines for off-premises consumption by a more than a 10-to-one margin.

The final tally was 145 for and 14 against, according to registrar Carl Holden. Of the 584 names on the list of registered voters, only 159, or 27 percent, turned out to vote.

Shallotte Mayor Jerry Jones, who prior to the special election had predicted that a low turnout could cause the measure to be defeated, said Tuesday night he was glad he was wrong.

The low turnout, he said, proved the issue is not controversial in town. He also speculated that there was not a lot of interest because it was the only issue on the ballot.

Holden said voting at the fire department was slow all day. Two hours after the polls opened, only three voters had cast ballots.

This week's election was the second time in the past three months town voters had the opportunity to voice opinions on the wine sales issue.

In November, voters supported the measure by a margin of 293 to 145. At that time, two-thirds of the town's registered voters cast ballots.

However that referendum was later invalidated

when it was learned that it violated state election law that bars holding of an alcoholic beverage election in conjunction with a general election.

Jones said this week, "Let's hope it's behind us and they don't come back with any more technicalities."

The vote will allow store managers to sell unfortified wines, also known as dinner wines, which have an alcohol content less than 14 percent. Stores within the town limits are already permitted to sell the more potent fortified wines with an alcohol content between 14 and 20 percent.

Larry Fowler, manager of Hill's Food Store, said, "I'm real glad it passed. I've been waiting for it and really hoped it would pass."

He said he plans to get wines in the store as soon as possible. "Just as soon as we can get it in the store we'll be ready for it."

Before local stores are permitted to sell the finer wines, certified results of the election must be sent to the state Alcoholic Beverage Commission in Raleigh.

Once the outcome is confirmed, store managers will be able to apply for an unfortified wine permit, which costs \$100. The store will then be investigated by the state Division of Alcoholic Law Enforcement in Wilmington before a permit is issued.

Bill Hester, administrator of the state ABC Commission, said the process commonly takes between two and three weeks once the election has been confirmed.

Chamber Cancels Casino-Style Fund-Raiser

BY SUSAN USHER

Friday isn't such a lucky day after all for the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce.

Plans for Lucky Friday Casino Nite, a popular fundraising event scheduled Friday by the chamber, were shelved Monday following the shut-down of a similar event in Wilmington.

"We're calling it off; we can't take the chance," said Dean Walters, president-elect of the chamber and general manager of Sea Trail Golf Links, where the event was to have been held in the clubhouse. "I don't believe it's worth jeopardizing the name of the chamber or Sea Trail Golf Links."

Staged for the first time three years ago, the casino-style party is

one of the chamber's largest fundraising events, second only to the N.C. Oyster Festival. Attended by members and their employees, the project typically netted between \$5,000 and \$7,000.

Walters said the chamber had hoped to make it a semi-annual event and was looking forward to "having a big number" in attendance Friday.

"Let me assure you we are very upset about it," he continued. "But we'd rather them tell us now and be disappointed than to wait until Friday night."

The chamber would not intentionally violate the law, he explained, noting that the project was initially undertaken only after consulting several attorneys. "They felt we didn't have a problem," he recalled.

While some tickets were sold in advance, most sales were expected at the door. However, Walters said chamber representatives will be at the Sea Trail clubhouse at Sunset Beach Friday to refund admission. Refunds are also available at the chamber of commerce office in Shallotte.

The decision to cancel fell to Walters in the absence of Chamber President Allan Dameron, who with his wife and another couple was snowbound in Atlantic City, N.J., and Chamber Executive Director Suzanne Sartelle, who was attending a chamber leadership training program in Raleigh.

Last Friday night agents of the state Alcohol Law Enforcement

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