

Owners To Meet

Property owner and taxpayer organizations at several local beaches plan Saturday meetings. Check out the details in the round-up on Page 7-A.

Island Living

Supplement Included In This Issue.

Celebrate Easter!

Opportunities to celebrate through worship around this weekend with Easter sunrise services a favorite. A list of services is on Page 8-B.



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'Look What We Found!'

Amidst a handful of sunbathers and hopeful pier fishermen, Ohio residents Angela and Colter Dustin were digging for crab shells in the sand at Sunset Beach Saturday afternoon. Although local beaches

were a bit foggy Saturday morning, the weekend turned out to be a spectacular one for visitors and homeowners getting an early start on the tourist season.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Shopping Center Coming To Seaside Anyway

BY DOUG RUTTER

A shopping center anchored by a major grocery chain will be built this year at Seaside, even though the store won't be selling beer and wine.

Strong community interest in the food store and the potential for adding alcohol sales at a later date were the main reasons for a sudden shift in the grocery chain's position regarding alcohol sales, Steve Mercer, construction manager with land developers Lat Purser & Associates, Inc., of Charlotte, said Monday. Until this week, project developers had said the grocery store would not build at Seaside unless it could sell alcoholic beverages.

"A lot of community support had a lot to do with it," he said. "I think all the credit goes right back into the community."

Despite an earlier rejection for annexation and recent talk of building the plaza elsewhere, Mercer said developers hope to start construction of the shopping center the first week in April and open the doors this October.

Both of those projections could be pushed back, he said, if there is a lengthy delay in acquiring a building permit or if contractors have to battle poor weather conditions once construction begins.

"Weather is the biggest factor," said Mercer. "We're really at the mercy of nature."

The plaza and Food Lion grocery store will be located on approximately 360,000 square feet of property south of Ocean Isle Fashions on N.C. 904, according to local developer Bill Benton.

Benton was informed of the decision Monday after Tom Smith, president of Food Lion, had telephoned Sunset Beach Mayor Mason Barber

to tell him the news.

Barber said this week that he and numerous other town citizens and property owners have been calling and writing letters to the grocery chain owner since last month's town council decision not to annex the property on which the shopping center is planned.

Annexation was requested to allow the grocery store to sell beer and wine. Since stores located in unincorporated areas of Brunswick County are not permitted to sell alcohol, developers wanted the property to be included in the town limits of Sunset Beach.

Following last month's denial of the request, developers mentioned the possibilities of locating the center elsewhere or incorporating the community to allow for the sale of alcohol.

Mercer said grocery chain officials apparently changed their mind about the need for alcohol sales after receiving a number of pleas from residents of the Sunset Beach area.

Given all of the support, he said Food Lion's decision to locate at Seaside was not a difficult one. "I think it was just a match," said Mercer. "That location is just perfect for that beach."

Mayor Barber, who favored annexation during a preliminary vote in January, said the shopping center will be convenient for residents and visitors, but will not create additional traffic problems. "We just think it will be an asset to the community," he said.

Pelican Square Shopping Center will consist of a 25,000-square-foot Food Lion and six smaller shops. Overall, the strip "low country" style center will cover 32,800 square feet and will cost approximately \$2.5

million.

Mercer said the shopping center project will also include two separate service-oriented businesses at either end of the plaza.

Those two parcels will be used for operations such as a fast food restaurant, financial institution or automotive repair service and will probably be built 12 to 18 months after the main shopping center opens, he said.

Mercer said the shopping center itself will create as many as 68 new jobs in the area. Food Lion stores typically hire about 50 full- and part-time workers, while each of the half dozen shops will employ an average of three persons.

Although Food Lion has committed to locating in the center, Mercer said developers will continue to push for annexation of the property to allow the food store to sell beer and wine.

"I think in time you'll see us get it (alcohol sales) one way or the other," he said. "Whatever options we have, we'll take."

Besides annexation, the only other option is incorporation, a possibility that was mentioned prior to this week's developments.

Depending on the outcome of this fall's general municipal election, Mercer said developers may resubmit their annexation request. "We think it's going to be a big election issue," he said.

Mayor Barber also said annexation will be an issue this November when seats currently occupied by two of the three council members who opposed the measure will be up for grabs. In addition to the seat now held by annexation proponent Ed Gore, seats held by board members Kathy Hill Peed and Minnie Hunt will be open.

Health Board Seeks Increase In Environmental Health Fees

BY RAHN ADAMS

In an effort to increase services without draining additional county tax dollars, local health officials have proposed raising fees for environmental health site evaluations.

Brunswick County Board of Health Chairman Ricky Parker told county commissioners Monday that the local health department has asked for no increase in county funding of the environmental health division for the 1989-90 fiscal year. However, the division's proposed budget shows an increase which would be made up through higher user fees, he added.

"We, the board, realize money has to come from one of two places: taxes or user fees," Parker told commissioners. "We're trying to act responsibly and create some revenue to help with the budget."

Commissioners did not comment Monday on the budget proposal, which was approved by the health board last Thursday and submitted to county budget officials this week.

According to Health Director Michael Rhodes, the environmental health division's proposed 1989-90 budget is \$523,849, which represents a \$135,767 or 35 percent increase over its 1988-89 budget.

The 1989-90 proposal shows no increase in local funding at \$296,274.

The difference between the two budgets is covered by a rise in fee revenue, which amounts to an estimated \$88,808 this year and would rise to an estimated \$224,575 next year.

Rhodes said the health board has proposed raising residential site evaluation fees from \$20 to \$35; and commercial site evaluation fees from a flat \$50 to a \$50 minimum and \$150 maximum, depending on the size of the sewage disposal system. Also, the health board has suggested charging \$10 to inspect septic tanks when mobile homes are relocated and raising water sample fees from \$3 to \$10.

"It's something we've been talking about for a long time," Rhodes said. He noted that state studies say site evaluations alone cost the health department about \$100 apiece, considering the related time spent by sanitarians, secretaries and administrators. More site evaluations were done last year in Brunswick County than any other county in the state.

Rhodes indicated that the health board feels the proposed budget increase in environmental health is needed to add two new field sanitarian positions to the current nine-member staff; to raise sanitarians pay grades to com-

petitive levels; and to purchase four vehicles for the sanitarians to use.

The health director said the current environmental health staff is now able to "keep up with" demands in the county's on-site sewage disposal program; however, the food and lodging inspection program has suffered, as was noted in a recent state study. A 1988 state manpower survey also pointed out that the environmental health division needs a staff of at least 16 sanitarians to handle the current workload.

Health officials have long maintained that local sanitarians need to receive higher salaries to keep them from training here, then moving to other counties where salaries are higher. Currently, sanitarians start out at \$17,906 per year. The proposed pay grade change would start them at \$19,726.

Rhodes said the four vehicles requested in the proposed budget are station wagons that would be rotated between sanitarians and other health department staff members. Sanitarians now drive personal vehicles and are reimbursed for mileage. Last year, a health department request for 10 pickup trucks was denied by commissioners in the 1988-89 budget.

Sheriff Asks For Share Of Shopping Center Settlement

BY RAHN ADAMS

Within the next several months, the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department should hear if it will benefit from last week's settlement of a federal lawsuit over ownership of a Shallotte shopping center.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen West indicated last Wednesday that the government conveyed its interest in Resort Plaza Shopping Center to A.B. Willis Jr.—the father of former owner Alvin Bryan Willis III—for

\$103,500. The settlement agreement was presented to federal Judge James C. Fox for approval last Wednesday in Wilmington.

Sheriff John C. Davis told the Beacon Friday that his department has submitted a claim for a share of the proceeds from the drug-related forfeiture action involving Resort Plaza. The claim was made prior to the settlement, which was announced last Wednesday by the U.S. Attorney's office in Raleigh.

West said the proceeds are placed in a federal forfeiture fund; up to 75 percent may be disbursed to local and state law enforcement agencies involved in the action. Since the money is already in hand, U.S. Attorney Margaret Curran probably will decide how it will be disbursed within the next 60 days, following a recommendation from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, West added.

(See SHERIFF, Page 2-A)

Report Rejects Protective Status For Lockwood Folly River

BY DOUG RUTTER

Leaders of the shellfishing community and county officials were shocked and disappointed by a state report released last week which recommends against special protection for lower Lockwood Folly River.

The preliminary report, compiled by state Division of Environmental Management (DEM) staff, recommends that the lower section of the river not be classified as Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW), which are entitled to special protection from pollution.

"I'm really disappointed," said Varnamtown oyster dealer Carson Varnam. "I was somewhat surprised because it seemed like they were listening to everything we were saying."

Brunswick County Commissioner Benny Ludlum, whose district includes the river, also said he was confused by the recommendation.

"I was surprised to hear that they had not recommended it," he said. "I really don't understand it."

Varnam, vice president of the local conservation group Save Our Shellfish and a member of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission, called Lockwood Folly River "the most productive river on the East Coast" and said it deserves the ORW classification.

"I was somewhat surprised because it seemed like they were listening to everything we were saying."

—Carson Varnam
Varnamtown oyster dealer



However, according to the report, the river does not meet requirements for classification, which include no significant impacts from pollution and excellent water quality.

The lower section of the river, between a line drawn from Genoes Point to Mullet Creek and the mouth, was nominated for the classification last year by the state Division of Marine Fisheries.

The DEM staff's draft recommendation reads as follows: "The outstanding shellfish resource clearly meets the requirements for ORW. This is also the area, of all those nominated, that most obviously needs the

additional protection provided by ORW status. However, the water quality problems in the area, at the present time, are such that the lower Lockwood Folly River does not meet the requirement of excellent water quality for Outstanding Resource Water designation."

The report also recommends that the area be reconsidered for the classification when impacts to the water quality are no longer present.

According to the report, the east side of the river appears to have the greatest problems with water quality. However, the source or sources of fecal coliform bacteria which pollutes the river and forces frequent shellfish closures is not readily apparent.

While the study area itself has only sparse development, the report states that there are at least 14 developments in different stages of completion around the river.

There are also four seafood houses with docks for fishing boats located just upstream of the nominated area, and the Lockwood Folly golf course community is just south of Genoes Point on the west bank.

Despite water quality problems, the report points out the tremendous resource values of the lower Lockwood Folly River.

The lower section of the river accounted for more than 40 percent of the shellfish landings in Brunswick County from 1985 through 1987. The annual value of the shellfish during that period was between \$386,031 and \$514,092.

"The growth rate for both oysters and clams is one of the most rapid in the state," the report says.

The state Division of Marine Fisheries maintains five shellfish management areas in the lower Lockwood Folly River. Between 1985 and 1987, the state planted 21,730 bushels of shell cultch and 25,857 bushels of seed oysters in the management areas.

Besides the river's reputation for shellfish, the report states that the shallow bays and creeks of the area are important to marine specimens such as spot, croaker, flounder, menhaden, striped mullet, blue crab and three species of shrimp.

Lower Lockwood Folly River is one of two areas nominated that were not recommended for ORW status. The other area includes Topsail and Middle sounds.

Areas recommended for the classification are Alligator River; Swanquarter and Juniper bays; Southeast Pamlico, Core and Back sounds; Western (See PROTECTIVE, Page 2-A)