

SBTPA Hasn't Given Up Hope Of Stopping High-Rise Bridge

BY SUSAN USHER

From its inception in October 1983, the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association has vigorously opposed replacement of the pontoon bridge that now links the island and mainland sections of their town.

Saturday, the organization reiterated that stand. From the approximately 60 persons attending the meeting at the Sunset Beach fire station, a vote on a resolution worded by Warren "Bud" Knapp drew all eyes except for one abstention and one no.

With both state and federal governments strapped for money, delays in the bridge's construction, and rising costs, several directors said the timing seemed right to bring the issue into the foreground again.

Knapp's resolution calls for Gov. Jim Martin and the N.C. Department of Transportation to drop plans for a high-rise bridge the SBTPA says "is not wanted and certainly not necessary" to the island. Instead it recommends the money go to help pay for highway improvements (such as the widening of U.S. 17) and teacher's salary increases. As reasons to abandon the project, it cites both the continuing opposition of the SBTPA and the federal budget deficit.

Plans have been in the making to replace the pontoon bridge for approximately 10 years. Now in the design stage are plans for a 65-foot high fixed span, budgeted at \$7.88 million, which would allow simultaneous waterway and land traffic. Due to delays in obtaining permits, construction isn't expected to begin until the 1991 fiscal year.

Knapp said Saturday the estimated cost of the project has increased from \$6 million to \$10 million, "although what the ultimate cost will be when the bridge may finally be built is anyone's guess—perhaps \$15 million."

When Liz Liebert asked how one should counter arguments that a fixed span is needed for safety reasons, Knapp advised, "That bridge is perfectly safe and will continue to be as long as it is maintained." The

bridge had been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair but has since been improved, he said, with piling replacement under way now.

However, Julia Thomas, who helps the Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department with fund raising, said in the event of a major fire, a ladder truck could not be taken across the island on certain tides. She added, "I think truly the (new) bridge is for the waterway traffic, not the island."

The pontoon bridge is considered one of the last of the type along the Eastern Seaboard and the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. It has been the recent subject of numerous articles and artwork.

Welcome Extended

Members also approved a letter from the board of directors to Tom E. Smith, president of Food Lion Corp., applauding its decision to locate a grocery at Seaside. "Your decision makes it apparent that annexation by the Town of Sunset Beach of the site of the new store was not necessary as a means of achieving the desired result," the letter further points out that the association's opposition was to the proposed annexation, not to the grocery itself.

VFD Has Plans

Work has begun to add two new bays to the fire station, Jeff Potter, chief of the Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department, told the taxpayers association. The department also plans repairs to the roof and other areas.

Now that its building fund goal has been met, he said, the department wants to begin setting aside funds to purchase a vehicle to replace a 13-year-old truck.

Potter said the department is in good financial shape, but in need of additional volunteers—both firefighters and others in support capacities such as building maintenance and game night operation.

The VFD is exploring, with the Calabash Volunteer Rescue Squad, establishment of a "first responder" unit within the department. Trained individuals would be the first to res-



SUNSET BEACH FIRE CHIEF Jeff Potter explains to association members how a VFD first responder unit would care for emergency victims until the rescue squad arrives.

pond to non-fire emergencies in the service area, helping stabilize victims while awaiting arrival of the rescue squad. In conjunction with the project the rescue squad may station a vehicle at the fire house.

At Ocean Isle Beach, the property owners' association donated a vehicle for use by the first responder team there, Potter said. Some emergency care equipment would also be needed.

In other business the group:

•On a motion by Everett Woldbruck of Charlotte, expressed appreciation for local merchants and

permanent residents.

•Noted contributions of \$500 each to the Sunset Beach Volunteer Fire Department and Calabash Volunteer Rescue Squad.

•Heard a financial report from Treasurer Cletus Waldmiller, who reported a balance of \$6,809, as well as a plea to participate in the second year of the Adopt-A-Block litter pick-up program. Last year 33 areas were adopted, with good results, he said.

•Heard that the underground cable project will be delayed at least until winter because the town had not worked out provisions for relocating

telephone phone company cables as well as electrical service cables. Atlantic Telephone Membership rents space on above-ground poles from Brunswick Electric Membership Corp. Local legislation adopted last year at the town's request allows Sunset Beach to pass along to taxpayers the cost of relocating elec-

trical cables, but not others.

•Learned that contractors must put up a \$100 litter clean-up deposit for site work in town. If the contractor fails to clean up after his crews and a complaint is filed, the town can use the money to clean up the area.

•Heard plans for an associational Labor Day social.

SAD 3 Property Owners Say County Water Is Too Costly

Property owners in the county's third special assessment district told the Brunswick County Utility Operations Board last week that they oppose having to pay for the water line extensions in their Seaside area subdivisions.

The SAD 3 public hearing was held March 21 at the Public Assembly Building, Bolivia. According to Planning Director John Harvey, UOB members Robert Nubel, Ed Gore and D.V. Jones attended the 2½-hour hearing.

SAD 3 mainly includes Hideaway Estates, Brooks I, Brooks II and B&B subdivisions. Water department figures show that 130 of the district's 255 different property owners already have tapped onto the new

lines, which were installed by last June.

Cost of the project is \$147,973.87. If the final assessment roll is approved by commissioners, property owners will be asked to pay an assessment rate of \$6.45 per front foot. For example, a property owner with a 50-foot-wide lot would be assessed \$322.50.

Harvey told the Beacon that 16 speakers at last week's public hearing all opposed the assessments. Many of them stated that the proposed assessments are too expensive, Harvey indicated.

He added that several property owners said they plan to attend the county commission's April 3 meeting, to take their complaints to commissioners. No commissioners attended last week's hearing.

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