

# Holden Beach Height Limit Bill Returns To Town With More Errors

BY DOUG RUTTER

A basically simple bill to limit the height of buildings on Holden Beach to 35 feet has run into more problems in the state legislature.

After learning in April that a bill ratified last summer was quite different from what the town had requested, Holden Beach officials found out Monday that a substitute bill introduced last week to correct the problem is no better.

The original House Bill 2324 ratified June 29, 1988, restricted the height of buildings on the island to 35 feet, but failed to include a clause requested by the town board stating

that the only way to change the regulation would be through a referendum of voters.

State Rep. David Redwine, who introduced the original bill last year, told town officials two weeks ago that he would correct it this session as part of a similar piece of legislation requested by the Town of Long Beach.

But a draft of the revised bill that arrived in the mail Monday at Holden Beach Town Hall still differed from what the town had requested.

The revised bill, which also applies to Long Beach, allows town commissioners to call for a referendum on

the height limit, but does not permit town residents to petition for a special election.

More importantly, however, the substitute House Bill 927 fails to eliminate a section in the original bill that permits the town board to simply adopt an ordinance to change the height restriction.

Holden Beach officials discussed the draft bill briefly during Monday night's regular meeting before asking the town attorney to work with the state representative to get what the town board wants.

In a cover letter accompanying the revised bill, Redwine said that it had

already passed the local government committee and was moving to the next committee. Redwine could not be reached for comment Tuesday. His secretary said he was in session and had meetings all afternoon.

Holden Beach Town Administrator Gus Ulrich said Tuesday that Redwine had told him there is still time to get the bill passed this year. The bill will have to be through at least one of the houses of the state legislature no later than May 11 to have a chance of passage this session.

Town Attorney Doug Ledgett said Monday that he thinks the person

who drafted the revised bill failed to look closely at the original bill. He said the author apparently did not realize that the section allowing the town board to change the height restriction was still included in the new draft.

"I don't think that they've taken the two and put them together," said Ledgett.

The attorney also said he expects the town to have a difficult time getting the bill ratified with a provision allowing the people to petition for a referendum. Going on what he called a "gut feeling," Ledgett said, "If you try to get that wording back

in there, you may never get it (the bill) back."

Mayor John Tandy said he thinks this latest error was the result of trying to rush the bill through the General Assembly.

Commissioner Georgia Langley, who helped push for the original bill and was very upset after learning that it had not gone through as expected, said Monday that Long Beach officials were also upset about the mistake.

"This can be drug out one more time and the General Assembly will be out of session," she said.

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Dike System Fails

STAFF PHOTO BY RAHN ADAMS

A few lots and a portion of Concord Street at Ocean Isle Beach were flooded last Tuesday evening when a section of the dike system used for a canal dredging project on the island gave way. Building Inspector Druid Roberson said he didn't know what caused the retaining wall to fail, but said he doesn't

expect further problems with it. He added that the street was flooded no worse than it is normally flooded after a heavy rainfall and that it dried up the next day. Roberson also said he knew of no major property damage resulting from the accident.

## Board Meets In Secret With Suspended Department Head

Brunswick County Commissioners announced no action Monday after meeting behind closed doors with a suspended department head who pleaded guilty last month to forging a \$50,000 county check.

The 45-minute private conference with Computer Services Director Regina M. McKeithan was part of a 1 1/4-hour executive session during Monday night's regular commissioners' meeting in Bolivia. The secret session was requested by

County Attorney David Clegg.

County Manager John T. Smith said Tuesday afternoon that Mrs. McKeithan was still suspended without pay, as she has been since Feb. 7, when she was accused of forging a county check last May to buy more than \$50,000 in computer equipment for her department.

The county manager said Tuesday he planned to "take some action" concerning Mrs. McKeithan's job status, but he did not indicate what

steps he would take or when the action would be taken.

Smith said in February that Mrs. McKeithan's employment hinged on the outcome of her court case. Last month, she pleaded guilty in Brunswick County Superior Court and received a suspended sentence.

However, Mrs. McKeithan asked to meet with commissioners after her court appearance, apparently to discuss her employment, Smith said last week. He indicated then that she

would remain suspended without pay until the board reviewed her case.

The county manager was not present in the commissioners' conference room Monday while Mrs. McKeithan talked with board members.

After the meeting, board Chairman Frankie Rabon would not comment on the commissioners' talk with Mrs. McKeithan in the executive session, except to say, "Nothing happened."

## Causey Selected Brunswick County's Teacher Of The Year



CAUSEY interviews with nominees representing 10 county schools. As teacher of

the year, she receives a \$1,000 cash award from United Carolina Bank and will compete next spring for regional recognition.

Runners-up in the annual competition were Janis Simmons, a third grade teacher at Union Primary School, and Shirley Bryant Williamson, an eighth grade math and science teacher at Leland Middle School, said Jean Parker, who coordinated the program. They too received monetary awards.

Causey, a public school teacher for

22 years, was recognized in March as the 1989 Outstanding Teacher of American History by the Daughters of the American Revolution, North Carolina.

As part of the selection process, she and other nominees were asked to prepare a statement of their philosophy of teaching.

Her reply is as follows: "I entered teaching because I felt a deep sense of personal calling and total commitment in and to my role. It is not a September-June nor 8-3:30 assign-

ment through which I satisfy an employer. I do not count my hours, nor watch my clock, nor simply complete the books. In school and out of school I am constantly looking and thinking of new or innovative ideas that will enhance my effectiveness as a teacher.

"I believe I must teach the total child, whether it be educationally, emotionally, physically, socially or morally. I use community resources and specialized expertise of others to

(See CAUSEY, Page 2-A)

## Holden Beach Voters Say Yes To Town Manager Approach

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach will soon have its first town manager at the helm.

Town residents voted 92 to 38 Tuesday to amend the town charter and change the form of government from a mayor/council format to a council/manager system.

Holden Beach Board of Elections Chairperson Charlotte Pringle said 130 of the 368 registered town voters cast ballots in the special election, a turnout rate of approximately 35 percent.

"That was a good turnout," said Commissioner Gay Atkins. "We have a lot of people that just aren't around here during the week."

Mrs. Pringle said there were no challenges filed during the election and that voters flowed through town hall slowly but steadily all day. "Everything went very smooth," she said. "We were glad to have 130 voters."

In casting their ballots in favor of the charter amendment, voters backed town officials who initiated the change last year.

Commissioner Bob Buck, who served as the town's administrator for approximately five years, had pushed hard for the switch-over since last summer. Tuesday night he said he was very happy with the election outcome.

"It's pretty much what I had expected and hoped for," he said. "I'd been hoping for it for years."

Ms. Atkins also said she expected

the measure to pass, but noted that opposition to the proposal seemed to grow as the election approached. She said a good turnout was needed for the referendum to pass.

The change in the form of government will allow the town to hire a town manager, who is expected to relieve town officials of their daily administrative tasks.

Unlike a town administrator, managers can hire and fire employees and have more authority in implementing policies dictated by the town board.

Ms. Atkins said, "I think we need a professional running the town, and I guess other people thought we did too."

Gus Ulrich, who was hired as town administrator in January, will become Holden Beach's first town manager.

Mrs. Pringle said the vote will be verified Thursday when town election officials recount the ballots and make sure that the referendum was legal.

An ordinance passed earlier this year by town commissioners to amend the town charter subject to a referendum becomes effective immediately after the vote is verified.

Although Tuesday's referendum ran smoothly, town officials struggled earlier this year to set an election date. Originally slated for February, the special election was rescheduled twice before finally being set for May 2.

## Local Shellfish Beds Reopen

Brunswick County shellfishermen were back in business this week following a week of dry weather.

Oyster and clam beds were opened Tuesday morning in the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway between Lockwood Folly Inlet and Shallotte Inlet after being closed for more than a month.

Waters near the mouth of Shallotte River, downstream of a line running from the south shore of Shallotte Creek to the south shore of The Swash, are also opened to shellfishing.

Other local oyster and clam beds reopened last Thursday that had been shut down since March 2. They were the Cape Fear River, Elizabeth River and Dutchman Creek.

The areas that reopened over the past week had been temporarily closed to shellfishing due to rainfall and the resulting runoff that carries pollutants.

Lockwood Folly River, which typically takes longer than other county rivers to clear itself of pollutants, remained closed to shellfishing as of Tuesday.

## County Board Puts Planners To Work On Zoning Ordinance

BY RAHN ADAMS

While county land use regulations won't be off and running in Brunswick County for at least another year—if at all—commissioners this week took their first solid step toward countywide zoning.

On a split vote Monday night, the board decided to instruct the county planning department to draft a zoning ordinance that will encompass the entire county, not just the more developed, coastal sections as was initially proposed and approved Monday.

Planning Director John Harvey has said a zoning ordinance can be drafted in approximately a year, at an estimated cost of \$10,000 for special legal services. After the draft

is presented to commissioners, state law requires that public hearings be held before the board decides whether or not to enact the ordinance.

Commissioner Kelly Holden, who revived the zoning issue in February and has been its only unwavering supporter since then, was understandably elated by the board's surprising action. "I just feel great about it," he said.

Holden later added that "the whole thing just threw me completely off," because he did not expect the board to seek countywide zoning. Thinking he could not get board backing for a countywide ordinance, Holden indicated he was merely hoping to get support for a draft to cover only the

areas south and east of U.S. 17.

Three separate votes on different aspects of zoning were taken near the close of Monday's 3 1/4-hour meeting in Bolivia. The topic, which was listed on the board's agenda, was addressed immediately following a 1 3/4-hour executive session that was requested by County Attorney David Clegg to discuss land acquisition and personnel matters (see related story).

Despite the lengthy closed-door session, citizens—most of them zoning supporters—still filled the commissioners' chambers when the zoning questions were discussed.

Earlier in the meeting during the public comments section, former county GOP Chairman John Dozier,

Brunswick County Board of Realtors President Glenn Fugate, Carolina Shores board member Jim Deehan, Save Our Shellfish President Annie Smigiel and Southport-Oak Island Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Douglas Kerr urged commissioners to support zoning.

Thomas Yaegle, a member of the Brunswick County Solid Waste Advisory Board, was the only citizen to speak against zoning Monday night. He asked commissioners to call for a public referendum on the issue. "Let's let the people decide what they want," he said.

After Holden made his zoning proposal, Commissioner Grace Beasley unsuccessfully attempted to amend his motion by asking that zoning be

decided in a referendum. "I do not think it (a referendum) is a cop-out," she said. "I think that's democracy in this county we live in."

Holden countered that commissioners lately have decided other controversial issues without public input and that it was the board's responsibility to decide either for or against zoning. "We don't always have the opportunity to make a popular decision," he said.

The proposed amendment failed on a 1-4 vote, with Ms. Beasley as its only supporter. Holden's original motion then passed 3-2—split along party lines—with Republican Commissioners Holden, Frankie Rabon and Gene Pinkerton voting in favor.

Then came the surprise for Holden

and the other zoning supporters present.

Before making the motion to draft a countywide zoning ordinance, Commissioner Benny Ludlum—who had opposed Holden's proposal—stated, "It is my belief that if we zone, we should zone the whole of Brunswick County... Let's see if we're for zoning or if we're just for spot (area) zoning."

He added that zoning was presented as a countywide issue at the nine public forums which were held across the county in March and April to gather public input. Also, he said it wouldn't be fair to "clean up" one area and leave a neighboring

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