

Commissioners Balk At Prioritizing List Of Proposed Building Projects

BY RAHN ADAMS

Brunswick County Commissioners agreed last week that an estimated \$25 million worth of proposed capital improvements projects can't be prioritized because all of them are "immediate" needs.

That was the eventual consensus of all five commissioners during a two-hour workshop last Wednesday morning in Bolivia. The session was a continuation of the board's April 2 regular meeting.

In the only action taken during the workshop, the board voted unanimously to have county workers raze the dilapidated Red & White Building in Bolivia. The county bought the building for \$75,000 two years ago, with intentions of renovating the structure and using it for additional county office space. No renovation work was done.

Commission Chairman Gene Pinkerton reported to the board last month that the building was beyond repair, according to consultants who looked at the structure. Demolition is expected to cost approximately \$10,000. If the work was not done by county employees, it would cost an estimated \$28,000, Pinkerton said.

Following a set of "personal notes" that he distributed to fellow commissioners and the press, Pinkerton led discussion of financing 15 building projects, three of which have already been funded—a jail addition, a new social services building and a new industrial training facility in Leland Industrial Park.

"My agenda is simple," he continued, "and that is to get on with the agenda of capital project projections and needs to keep Brunswick County going forward with services to the people."

For the past month, county officials have discussed arranging public and/or private financing for the proposed projects, which also include a 911/emergency management/emergency medical services building, new elementary school at Supply, new sewer plant for the county government center, water system improvements, county landfill improvements, roofing work at the complex, courthouse expansion, cafeteria expansion and construction of new office space for the parks and recreation, water and land records management departments.



STAFF PHOTO BY RAHN ADAMS

SITE CLEARING WORK BEGAN last week at the Brunswick County Government Center for construction of a new Social Services Building—one of 15 capital improvements projects that commissioners are thinking about including in a special funding proposal.

The board met last month with Ed Regan, executive director of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, and Raleigh attorney A.P. Carlton to talk about six different financing options. Pinkerton also met privately with Regan earlier in the year.

Under a plan suggested by Regan, the county would pay for all of the projects except the school and water system improvements through installment sales contracts—a financing method similar to mortgage financing, in which the facilities themselves are treated as collateral. The school and water system projects would be funded through general obligation bonds under Regan's proposal.

The association director estimated that if the county financed around \$21 million, annual payments would start at just under \$1 million in the 1990-91 fiscal year, just over \$2 million in 1991-92 and almost \$2.5 million in 1992-93. Resulting tax rate increases would be 2.5 cents in each of the first two years and an additional one cent in the third year. The county's current tax rate is 59.5 cents per \$100 of property valuation.

Commissioner Benny Ludlum questioned Pinkerton last Wednesday as to why he included the \$116,000 jail addition, \$1.08 million social services building and \$800,000 training center in the list of projects to be financed, since the county already has allocated funds for the projects.

Pinkerton responded that money which can be obtained for those three already-funded projects possibly could be used for other capital ventures, such as the school, for example. "You're just swapping money from one pocket to the other," Pinkerton said. "You've got to look at the total picture."

The commissioners agreed that the county already is committed to the jail addition, social services building, 911 building, training center and complex sewer plant. Except for Commissioner Kelly Holden's comment that he feels water system improvements should occupy the next highest spot on the priority list, the board was unable to decide on an order of importance for the projects.

Ludlum was the only commissioner to question the feasibility of long-term, private financing. "If you went with the first five (projects) and the school," Ludlum offered, "what would be wrong with putting the rest on a bond issue and letting the people say what they want?" A public referendum is not required to approve installment contract financing.

Pinkerton pointed out that the proposed projects are "mandated" either by the state or by local residents. As an example, he noted that the county already has paid \$5 million on a countywide mapping project (land records management) and now needs space to store and utilize those materials. "I don't need the people of Brunswick County to tell me that's real," Pinkerton said of the county's capital needs.

Though neither he nor any other commissioner would offer a priority list, Ludlum also suggested a plan in which the projects would be spread out over several years. Pinkerton answered, "If we've got one (project) we can put off for seven or eight years, we don't need to be sitting here talking about it."

The chairman indicated that additional work sessions will be needed to work out the capital improvements financing plan prior to the board's budget workshops later this spring. Interim County Manager David Clegg was instructed to consult with financial experts—such as Carlton—to obtain more definite cost figures on project financing. Also, Pinkerton said county department heads would be asked to give estimates of additional space they need in their departments.

ABC Merger Nixed

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towns with ABC stores, including Belville, Boiling Spring Lakes, Calabash, Long Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Shallotte, Southport, Sunset Beach and Yaupon Beach. Mixed drink sales also are legal at Bald Head Island.

However, until the county establishes its own ABC store or merges with an existing system, businesses in the county's remaining municipalities and unincorporated area cannot receive mixed drink permits due to the law that requires a business to buy liquor for its mixed drinks from the ABC system whose jurisdiction covers that business.

State and county ABC officials told the Beacon last month that several Holden Beach area businesses, in particular, had inquired about the availability of mixed drink permits. As a municipality that was "dry" prior to last November's county-wide referendum, Holden Beach is one of the towns now under the county ABC system's control.

The county ABC board picked the merger route because establishing a county ABC store would take up to six months, the officials said. Estimates of the cost of starting a county store range from \$138,000 if the building were leased, to more than \$250,000 if a new building were constructed, according to county ABC board member John Ramsey.

After meeting with N.C. ABC Commission administrators in Raleigh last month, the county ABC board approached Boiling Spring Lakes about a possible merger, apparently because Boiling Spring Lakes ABC is the smallest of the county's nine municipal ABC systems and it is located closest to

Bolivia. With both governmental boards' approval, Clegg and Ms. Jess began merger negotiations April 6.

Ms. Cumbee said Tuesday that the town commissioners specifically objected to two provisions in the proposed resolution involving membership of the merged ABC board and the sharing of expenses.

According to a resolution draft which Clegg presented to county commissioners Monday, the merged ABC board would be composed of six members, representing the members of both bodies' present three-member boards. However, one of the Boiling Spring Lakes representatives would be a "non-voting member."

The other provision that Ms. Cumbee referred to states: "That the cost of utilities, rent, salaries and other fixed operational costs shall be borne by the Boiling Spring Lakes ABC Board. In the event that fixed operational costs of the board increase, the said board may consider whether or not a pro rata share of the increased costs may be charged to the Brunswick County receipts."

Clegg told county commissioners Monday that he talked with Boiling Spring Lakes officials after the special town meeting, and that he thinks the town will continue to negotiate terms of the merger. He added that the draft would serve as a "framework" for further negotiations.

To facilitate a merger with Boiling Spring Lakes ABC or any other municipal system, the county board unanimously adopted the merger resolution by adding the phrase, "and any other alcoholic beverage control board in the county," to all references to Boiling Spring Lakes ABC.

Sunset Officials Ask For Improvements

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Commissioner Benny Ludlum, who made the motion to appoint Bellamy, indicated at the board's April 2 meeting that he wished to replace Robinson because he often missed the RDC's monthly meetings due to other commitments. However, Ludlum said two weeks ago that he intended to nominate local surveyor Thomas Morgan for the post.

Commissioner Kelly Holden cast the dissenting vote Monday. After the meeting, Holden said he voted against Bellamy's appointment because he feels the former clerk of court is a "controversial figure." Bellamy resigned as clerk of court in September 1987 after he pleaded guilty to possession of more than one gram of cocaine.

Ludlum told the Beacon that he decided not to nominate Morgan due to apparent opposition that surfaced after he mentioned the matter April 2. The commissioner added that he nominated Bellamy because the Holden Beach area resident was interested in the RDC position and had "paid his debt" where the 2 1/2-year-old drug case was concerned.

In September 1987, Bellamy was sentenced to a two-year probation, which was lifted by a Brunswick County Superior Court Judge in January 1989, on a recommendation from N.C. Attorney General Lacy Thornburg. During his probation, Bellamy was not allowed to hold public office.

In other appointments Monday, Jesse Clemmons, Bill Dunn and

Wilbur Earp were appointed by acclamation to serve on a newly-formed blue-ribbon committee to study county solid waste issues.

Commissioners voted April 2 for the three-member committee to replace the 12-member Solid Waste Advisory Board, which had been formed in April 1989. Clemmons, Dunn and Earp are former members of the defunct advisory board.

Other Business
In other business at Monday's meeting, commissioners unanimously:

—Voted to name a proposed new industrial training facility at Leland Industrial Park the Brunswick Community College Industrial Education Center. The facility is expected to open this summer in advance of Exide Electronics' plant opening in the industrial park late this year.

—Heard "Save Our Shellfish" representatives' request for the county to help fund the proposed dredging of the Lockwood Folly River's eastern channel (see related story).

—Agreed to forward to the N.C. Department of Transportation a state road petition for Lexington Avenue in Parkwood Estates, Leland.

—Adopted a resolution to establish national standards for youth sports and coaches applications, as recommended by county Parks and Recreation Director Bobby Jones.

—Awarded low bids on a Caw-caw Water District clearing and snagging project to A.D. McLamb & Sons Construction of Shallotte for clearing travelways at a cost of

\$2,500; to Edwards Company and Dexter Hughes of Ash for clearing slopes and canal bottoms, \$32,000; and to Somerset's Landscaping and Construction of Shallotte for the purchase of galvanized pipe, \$2,341.03.

—Proclaimed May 6 through 12 as Extension Homemakers Week, and the month of April as Keep America Beautiful Month in Brunswick County.

—Endorsed the Town of Calabash's appointment of town Commissioner George Taubel to the Brunswick County Emergency Medical Services Advisory Board.

—Amended the county's solid waste ordinance to allow used tires to be accepted for disposal from municipal garbage collection systems.

—Amended the county's transportation development plan to reflect the Brunswick Interagency Transportation System's recent application for a \$102,900 grant to cover the purchase of four new vans and other transportation-related needs.

—Awarded a \$101,800 contract for an electrical distribution extension project in Leland Industrial Park to low-bidder Harris Electric Company, Wilmington. The county will be reimbursed by Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant funds.

—Passed a resolution to apply for \$337,333 in EDA grant funds for additional utility improvements at Leland Industrial Park.

—Adjourned until the board's regular May 7 meeting.

Normal Temps Are Forecast

Seasonable temperatures and slightly less rain than normal are expected in the Shallotte area over the next several days, according to Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady.

Temperatures through the weekend should average from the low 50s at night to the low 70s during the day. Rainfall should measure less than one-half inch, which would be a normal level for this time of year.

During the period of April 10 through 16, the daily average temperature in the Shallotte area was 62 degrees, which Canady said was normal for mid-April.

The daily average high temperature was 73 degrees, and the nightly average low temperature was 51 degrees.

The maximum high temperature during the period was 78 degrees on April 15, Easter Sunday. The minimum low temperature was 38 degrees on April 12 and 13.

Canady measured 0.4 of an inch of rain during the seven-day period.

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Corps Designing Test

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As chairman of the House subcommittee on natural and economic resources and vice chairman of the appropriations committee, Redwine said he will be working close with the proposal once cost estimates are obtained.

Meanwhile, local proponents of the dredging plan formally requested the county's financial support at the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners meeting Monday in Bolivia.

Wallace Smith, a member of the Lockwood Folly River preservation group Save Our Shellfish (SOS), presented the board with a letter from long-time Holden Beach resi-

dent John F. Holden, who first proposed the Eastern Channel dredging strategy at an SOS meeting in March 1989.

The one-page letter urges county commissioners to cooperate with state and federal officials and provide financial backing for the dredging project.

"All parts of this great country are competing for industry and tourism. Lockwood Folly River offers possibilities in both," wrote Holden. "It provides employment for many local people and has the potential of producing oysters for an increasing population at a time when worldwide shellfish production is decreasing."

Property Owners To Be Polled

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she felt that the SBTA should concentrate on "alternative creative ideas" to preserve the quality of life on the island, rather than keying in on just the bridge issue.

Durham attorney Jim Maxwell, who represents the SBTA in an ongoing lawsuit over public ownership of oceanfront property (Lot 1-A) just east of Sunset Beach Pier, noted that his firm has researched legal fights to stop bridge construction projects in other parts of the country and has found that none was successful once the government decided to build a particular bridge.

Emphasizing that he was not attempting to "solicit" the SBTA as a client by commenting on the matter, Maxwell said two possible benefits of legal action would be that a federal lawsuit might delay construction of the new bridge and further publicize the association's concerns about the potential impact of the high-rise bridge on the island.

The group's bridge fight garnered considerable attention earlier this month when Duke University Orrin Pilkey held a press conference at Sunset Beach Pier and announced that he had rated Sunset Beach as the "best" barrier island community in North Carolina. Association officials also were on hand to voice their opposition to a high-rise bridge.

SBTA President Cleve Waldmiller told members Saturday that the press conference was attended by

reporters from the Washington (D.C.) Post, Philadelphia (Pa.) Inquirer, and Chicago (Ill.) Tribune, in addition to reporters from local and state media outlets. Newspaper clippings on Pilkey's announcement and issues related to the bridge adorned one wall of the Sunset Beach fire station, where Saturday's meeting was held.

Waldmiller estimated that a legal fight would cost the association a minimum of \$5,000 and would require a fund drive. In a treasurer's report by Mrs. Pelletier, members learned that the organization's current bank balance is just under \$3,500.

However, Knapp later suggested that each family in the association contribute \$50 toward the "Save Our Bridge" campaign—a fund-raising effort which he said could raise at least \$25,000. When SBTA Director Minnie Hunt reiterated that the group "will not bring the lawsuit if we don't have sufficient money," several members stated that they would write checks for their contributions Saturday.

Mrs. Hunt, who also is secretary of the organization, indicated that association members probably will be given two weeks to respond to the poll after ballots are mailed. To authorize legal action, 66 percent of the membership would have to vote in the affirmative. Officials also noted that according to SBTA by-laws, ballots which are not returned are counted as affirmative votes.

VFD Sets Barbecue

Calabash Volunteer Fire Department will sell pork barbecue dinners in a fund-raiser at the fire station Saturday, April 21.

Plates will include coleslaw and candied yams in addition to barbecue, and will sell for \$3.50 each. Proceeds will benefit the department.

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