

Calabash Gains Power Beyond Town Limits

BY DOUG RUTTER

If they didn't have it before, there's no question that Calabash officials now have the authority to enforce zoning ordinances and sign regulations within approximately one mile of the town limits.

Following a brief public hearing last Wednesday, commissioners approved two changes in the town code that make zoning ordinances and sign regulations apply in the town's extraterritorial area and not just inside the town.

The changes were made to clarify the town code, which Town Attorney Mike Ramos said was unclear as to whether zoning ordinances and sign regulations applied just inside the town limits or outside the town as well.

Ramos said the first section of the code said zoning ordinances applied to both the town and the extraterritorial area—a zone stretching about one mile out from the corporate limits in all directions where the town can choose to enforce its zoning and subdivision regulations and the state building code.

The second section of the code, however, said the ordinances were enforceable inside the town only, leaving some doubt about where the rules could be applied. The changes made at last week's meeting leave no question about how much authority the town has around its borders.

The code change relating to signs will have an immediate impact in the extraterritorial area, where officials say there are plenty of signs that do not comply with town regulations that haven't been enforced in the past.

Making zoning ordinances apply in the extraterritorial area should have more of a long-term effect in the Calabash area. The town Planning Board is currently mapping out zoning districts in the area to guide development of property that could become part of Calabash in the future.

Commissioners, expecting a large turnout for the public hearing, held the meeting at the Calabash fire station. Fewer than 20 people showed up, and most of those reside inside the town limits.

Bob Crocker, who lives in the extraterritorial area and serves on the

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—George Anderson
Calabash Mayor Pro Tem

town Planning Board, asked if existing signs that don't meet town standards would be "grandfathered" and allowed to remain standing.

Ramos said it's his legal opinion that the sign regulations have applied in the extraterritorial area since 1982, when the zoning ordinances were adopted. Signs put up over the past eight years, therefore, have to meet town standards.

He explained that if the town was changing the code and making the sign ordinance apply in the extraterritorial zone for the first time, existing signs that don't meet standards would be treated as non-conforming uses and would be allowed to stay where they are.

Calabash Code Enforcement Officer Ed Schaack said there are about 70 signs in and around town that violate the regulations. Approximately half are inside the town and half are in the extraterritorial area, he said.

Most of the signs in violation are either portable signs or off-premises signs, both of which are illegal in the Calabash area. Off-premises signs are those that advertise a business but are not located at the business site.

There are very few legal signs in the Calabash area. Schaack said the town has issued permits for only nine signs over the years and some of those are in violation of the ordinance.

Mayor Pro Tem George Anderson, who conducted the meeting in the absence of Mayor Doug Simmons, said many signs along N.C. 179 are "not in conformity with what we would like to see in the town of Calabash." Commissioners Phyllis Manning and Keith Hardee were also absent.

Town officials said last week they intend to use tact in enforcing the sign regulations outside of town. Schaack said he doesn't expect any problem from most violators.

Rather than "running up and down the street with an ax," Anderson said, the town will ask people to cooperate and work to improve the appearance of the area. "It's not the easiest thing in the world to remove a sign that has been up for a number of years," he said.

Commissioner George Taubel stressed last week that the town board was not adopting a new ordinance but was planning to enforce rules that have been on the books for eight years. "If we don't do it now and enforce what we have, it's going to be worse than it is now," he said.

Other Business

In other business last week, commissioners:

—Heard from Anderson that the Planning Board plans to mail surveys in the near future to all town residents to gauge public opinion on how the town should grow.

—Discussed a proposal about the town of Calabash taking over maintenance of streets and ditches in Carolina Shores with Carolina Shores Property Owners Association (CSPOA) President Jim Deehan. The CSPOA has spent about

\$65,000 a year over the past five years to maintain the 15 miles of roads, Deehan said. The town board hopes to accept the streets before the end of June, so the town can receive state Powell Bill money for them next fiscal year.

—Heard from Taubel that he plans to have an ordinance prepared by the May 8 town meeting that would prevent adult night clubs from locating in Calabash. His announcement drew applause from a few people.

Calabash May Change Way Schaack Is Paid

Calabash commissioners are considering changing the way Ed Schaack, the town building inspector and code enforcement officer, is paid.

Following a 30-minute executive session last Wednesday called to discuss personnel matters, the town board authorized Commissioners Stuart Thorn and Ed Rice to negotiate the method of compensation with Schaack.

Schaack, who currently receives 40 percent of the building permit fees and \$7 for each extra trip he makes to a building site and each violation he handles, said the method of compensation may be switched to a straight salary. He said he expects the matter to be resolved at the May 8 town meeting.

Four-County Head Start Marks 25th Anniversary

The Four-County Head Start Program—which actually now serves six counties, including Brunswick—joins with the national Head Start Program in marking its 25th anniversary this year.

A banquet was to be held Wednesday night at the Bladen County National Guard Armory in Elizabethtown to celebrate the event.

Head Start provides comprehensive health, education, nutrition, parent involvement and social services to the pre-school children of low-income families nationwide.

In 1989, the national program served 450,000 children and since its inception in 1965 has served more than 11 million children, according to Emily Oxendine of Maxton, director of Four-County Head Start.

The Four-County Program has a total of 21 centers in Brunswick, Bladen, Columbus, Hoke, Robeson and Scotland counties. In Brunswick County, centers are located in the communities of Longwood, Cedar Grove and Northwest, each of which serves 40 children.

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