

Near-Tragedy Raises Concern About Sunset Beach Bridge

It was approximately 11 a.m. Monday when the call came through: a possible drowning off the west end of Sunset Beach.

Sunset Beach Patrolman Lisa Hoagland, a strong swimmer, headed from the mainland toward the island in her squad car, a quick response in mind. "If I couldn't have gotten to her myself, I would have called rescue," she said later.

Instead, the young officer received a lesson in frustration. During the summer season, the Sunset Beach Bridge opens on the hour during the day to allow passage of boat traffic along the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. Mrs. Hoagland waited what seemed to her a very long seven minutes at the pontoon bridge, helpless to act.

Then she proceeded across the causeway to the island's west end. "Time was important," she recalled later that day.

Potentially critical minutes had already been lost, as the people on the strand had had to first get to a phone to report the emergency. That call was answered by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, whose dispatcher then radioed Sunset Beach Police Department to respond.

"Every minute counts, especially in a life-threatening situation like that," Mrs. Hoagland said. "It upsets me really that people want to keep this bridge."

The pontoon bridge is scheduled for replacement with a high-rise fixed-span bridge, with construction to begin in the fall. However, island property owners are divided on the fate of the pontoon bridge. For 10 years those who want the pontoon bridge to remain in use have fought its replacement, citing the high cost, potential environmental damage and the rapid growth and higher density they associate with the proposed bridge.

"But what if a child were struck by a car and you couldn't get there?" asked Mrs. Hoagland, the newest member of the town's small police force. "Opponents say the bridge could be closed in an emergency. But you can't close the bridge when a barge is going through. They can't stop that fast."

Mrs. Hoagland figures she was lucky Monday. No one drowned. A strong undertow had caught a swimmer and swept her out into the Atlantic Ocean.

By the time the officer reached the west end beach, the rescue was complete and the swimmer was recovering from her ordeal.

"Thank goodness there were people there who were good swimmers and went out and got her," Mrs. Hoagland said.

Holden Beach Continues Search For New Manager

Holden Beach Commissioners continued their search for a new town manager last week, interviewing six candidates but making no decisions at a special meeting Tuesday.

The town board met in executive session for nearly two hours Tuesday morning to discuss the hiring of someone to replace outgoing Town Manager Gus Ulrich, who announced his plans to resign in early May.

Commissioners interviewed six applicants during closed-door sessions last Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The people interviewed were chosen from a field of about 65 applicants, said Commissioner Gloria Barrett, a member of the town's personnel committee.

Town officials planned to meet Friday at 10 a.m. for another interview and might make an offer at that time, Mrs. Barrett said following Tuesday's meeting.

Commissioners had originally scheduled three interviews for this Friday. But Mrs. Barrett said all three applicants wanted more money than the town board is willing to offer, and all three decided against interviews.

Ulrich is paid \$32,500 per year. The salary of the new town manager will be negotiated, according to a career opportunity notice published in the June N.C. League of Municipalities newsletter. An identical advertisement was placed in the International City Managers Association publication.

Holden Beach officials are searching for a person with a masters degree in public administration and at least five years experience in municipal government, according to the advertisement.

It described Holden Beach as a resort community with a permanent population of 360 and seasonal population of 6,000. The town board accepted applications through July 15.

Ulrich, who originally said he would resign July 12, is still working for the town. He announced in late June that he would stay on as town manager through the manager search process.

Ulrich, who is Holden Beach's first town manager, started working for the town in January 1989. He turned in his letter of resignation May 7, saying the responsibilities of the job required more working time than he would like to spend and the job was "more absorbing" than he anticipated.

Several changes have been made in the map since it was first proposed, in response to property owners who complained about changes in the zoning of their individual lots.

Aldermen approved one such revision last week, changing the zoning of Main Street property between the Shallotte River Bridge and Tripp's Jewel Shop from Highway Business to Central Business.

The change was requested by C&S Development Inc., and it will allow the corporation to sell individual lots in the old Lewis Shopping Center. The owners of those lots will be able to build shops without having to meet side yard setbacks that are required in the Highway Business district.

LETTER STIRS CONTROVERSY

County Planning Board Tables Request For Elevation Variance In Sea Breeze

BY BOB HORNE

The Brunswick County Planning Board last Wednesday night decided it needed more time to think about the first-ever appeal for a variance of elevation requirements under the county Flood Prevention Ordinance.

W.A. Roach of Roach Realty requested the variance for six lots in Sea Breeze subdivision off N.C. 130 in the Holden Beach area. The Planning Board tabled action on the request until its next meeting.

Roach requested the variance on "justifiable hardship grounds."

All six of the lots are sold, Roach said. When a member of the Planning Board asked what the hardship was, he answered, "The hardship is that I'll have to buy them back. And if I have to buy them back, I'll have to see if someone else doesn't buy them back."

Roach produced a letter dated May 6, 1986 in which Don Eggert, of the county Planning Department, stated: "According to National Flood Insurance Maps, Lots 92 through 99 of Sea Breeze Subdivision are located in the flood hazard area. No other lots in this subdivision are located in the flood hazard area."

In that letter, Eggert wrote that the flood elevation of lots 92 through 99 is 13 feet above mean sea level and that the first-floor elevation

of any structure must be 14 feet above mean sea level.

"Mr. Harvey, you told Don to write that letter," Roach said during the Planning Board meeting. "So don't try to put it off on Don."

After the meeting, Harvey said he had no knowledge of the 1986 letter until it was called to his attention last month after he performed a "flood check" of Lot 100 in Sea Breeze and determined the elevation to be 13 feet and the finished first-floor elevation of any structure would have to be a foot above that level, or 14 feet.

However, Roach says Harvey instructed Eggert to write the letter. "I was standing in his office when Mr. Harvey told Don to write it," Roach said after the meeting.

Roach also said permits have been issued for four other lots in the subdivision that were lower than some of the lots that have now been flagged and said one was issued as late as March of this year, and questioned why. Planning Director John Harvey said it's possible a mistake was made in his department.

Of the six lots—numbers 85, 86, 88, 90, 91, 100—Lot 100 is the lowest, according to Harvey. It is at building site ground elevation of 7.9 feet. The minimum 36-inch elevation and the eight-inch minimum chassis thickness of a mobile home bring it to 11.6 feet when rounded off, or 2.4 feet below the 14-foot minimum.

Lot 91 is seven-tenths of a foot below the 14-foot minimum, while Lot 88 is 1.5 feet below, lot 85 1.8 feet below, Lot 90 1.9 feet below and Lot 86 2.0 feet below the 14-foot minimum. Eight other lots that have building site ground elevation at or below 100-year flood elevation exceed the finished first-floor elevation requirement of 14 feet when the 36-inch and minimum chassis thickness are applied.

County Attorney David Clegg attended the meeting and, from a legal standpoint, recommended that the Planning Board approve the variance. Clegg said this is the first variance request since the county Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance was adopted in March 1987. "But I think it will be used again and again," he said.

Board members John Barbee and Alan Holden expressed concern regarding flood insurance rates for anyone purchasing such lots without the lots being filled.

"I think this just shows another reason why these subdivisions need elevation put on them," said Barbee, an insurance agent. "I think it would be a disservice for us to allow people to build on lots that are below the flood level."

The Planning Board approved five preliminary plat proposals and replats, Section 2, Stone Chimney Ridge; Ocean Haven Subdivision; Lakewood Estates; Gooseneck Farms Subdivision and Cape Plaza Subdivision.

Shallotte Hikes Development Costs

(Continued From Page 1-A)

Minimum fees have jumped from \$500 to \$600 for residences and from \$600 to \$1,125 for businesses. Fees are double outside the town limits.

Acreage fees have been set at \$500 per acre for water and \$500 per acre for sewer for land zoned residential and conservation. Owners of commercial land will have to pay \$1,000 per acre for water and \$1,000 per acre for sewer. Fees for property zoned for industrial use are \$1,250 per acre for water and \$1,250 per acre for sewer.

The water and sewer acreage fees outside town will be \$1,000 per acre for property zoned or otherwise restricted for residential or conservation use. Fees for all other land out of town will be \$2,000 per acre for water and \$2,000 per acre for sewer.

The town originally proposed combining the water and sewer acreage fees, which would make the fee \$1,000 per acre for residential property. Following the public hearing, however, officials split the two fees to make it less costly for property owners who only want water or sewer.

Ordinances setting the fees were adopted without discussion last week following an hour-long executive session called at the start of the meeting to discuss attorney-client matters.

Once they returned to open session, aldermen went quickly through the seven-item meeting agenda. The town hall air conditioner was inoperative for the meeting, and electric fans were used to try to keep the meeting room cool.

At the public hearing on the fees, Shallotte area developers, including Larry Shreve, who is developing Brierwood Estates, said the proposed fees were so high that they would discourage building and restrict future growth of Shallotte.

Mayor Jerry Jones said following last week's meeting he doesn't expect growth to stop. "I don't think it will have any drastic impact on development, but that's yet to be seen. I certainly hope we'll keep growing."

"The town has to raise money somehow, he said, so it can expand the sewer system when current capacity is reached and expansion is needed. "If we don't do something, when that sewer's used up we'll have to stop growing."

Besides approving the new fees last week, aldermen adopted a new policy on handling voluntary annexation, or annexation requested by the landowner, aimed at ensuring orderly growth.

The policy says the town only will consider annexation of improved or planned developments. The town board will not consider annexation of vacant property where there are no specific plans for development.

Developers or property owners are required to extend water and sewer lines to the land to be annexed and then turn those lines over to the town. The landowner also is required to construct streets that comply with town specifications and pay for surveys needed for annexation.

Before the land is annexed, the owner will have to pay out-of-town acreage fees. Capital reserve fees, permit fees and tap-on fees would be paid following annexation.

Adoption of the fees and the annexation policy have melted a "freeze" on annexation that the board of aldermen imposed last fall. Officials established the freeze to give them time to get the new policy and fees in place.

Shallotte has received four requests for annexation since the freeze was adopted last October. The planning board has been asked for recommendations on the requests. Aldermen will hold public hearings on the requests Wednesday, Aug. 15, at 7:30 p.m. in the town hall.

Jerry McLamb asked for annexation of four tracts located on both sides of the U.S. 17 Shallotte bypass at its intersection with Mulberry Street. The four tracts make up about 31 acres.

John Parker and LaDane Bullington requested annexation of about seven acres they own at the intersection of Smith Avenue and the bypass.

Certified Construction Inc. and Philip W. Brown each requested annexation of single lots on Country Club Drive in Brierwood Estates.

Longwood Man Critically Injured In Tuesday Wreck

A Longwood man was critically injured Tuesday afternoon when the tractor of a tractor-trailer slid into his automobile about one-half mile north of the Shallotte city limits on U.S. 17.

J. D. Hewett, 65, was in critical condition in New Hanover Memorial Hospital Tuesday night, according to state Highway Patrol Trooper W. H. Thompson.

Douglas L. Roach, 30, of Wilmington, was driving a 1986 Freightliner, owned by D and L Trucking of Wilmington, north on U.S. 17 during a rain when a vehicle in front of him slowed to turn into Rainbow Video, Thompson said.

Roach lost control of his truck and slid sideways into the southbound lane of U.S. 17 and struck the 1986 Pontiac driven by Hewett, Thompson said. Roach was uninjured, according to the trooper.

Thompson estimated damage at \$3,500 to Hewett's car and \$500 to the truck. Charges are pending, he said, but he added that the wet highway "was what caused him (Roach) to slide."

Man Charged With ABC Store Break-In

A Shallotte man arrested Tuesday was being held in Brunswick County Jail under \$10,000 bond after being charged with breaking into the Shallotte ABC store.

Authorities charged 23-year-old Brain Lloyd Wheeler of Shallotte with breaking and entering Tuesday at 10:30 a.m., about a half hour after receiving a report of the break-in, said Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause.

Gause said someone tried to break into the ABC store sometime Monday night or Tuesday morning.

Nothing was stolen from the store.

The person first kicked the store's front glass door, which cracked but didn't shatter, and then apparently punched through a small glass window on the Wall Street side of the building, according to Gause.

Blood was found near the broken window, Gause said. "We traced the blood almost back to the residence (of the suspect)," he said.

Wheeler lives close to the ABC store, Gause said, and had moved to town a few weeks ago. He said Wheeler was seen walking outside the store while police investigated the break-in.

County ABC Store Grand Opening Set

The first store for the Brunswick County ABC Board will have its grand opening Friday at 4 p.m.

The store, which actually opened June 30, is located on Holden Beach Road about 1 1/2 miles from the Holden Beach Causeway.

Remarks at the grand opening will be made by ABC Board Chairman Joyce Vereen, board members John Ramsey and Clyde Babson, county commission Chairman Gene Pinkerton and Guy Potts of the state ABC Commission. Miss Brunswick County, Wendy Williams, will cut the ribbon.

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Established Nov. 1, 1962
Telephone 754-6890
Published Every Thursday
At 4709 Main Street
Shallotte, N.C. 28459

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