

Holden Wants Outside Company To Study County Water System

BY TERRY POPE

An outside consulting firm will be hired to evaluate the Brunswick County Water Department to determine how its personnel problems can be eliminated. Brunswick County Commissioners voted 3-1 Monday to seek proposals from consultants to conduct what Chairman Kelly Holden called a "position management time analysis study" as soon as possible. Commissioner Frankie Rabon voted against Holden's motion while Gene Pinkerton did not attend the meeting.

Holden said the department's request for additional employees, its vagueness of job descriptions and the increasing number of personnel grievances coming to the board from within the department are reasons he would like an outside consulting firm to investigate.

"While I would probably tend to agree," added Commissioner Jerry Jones, "it might be best to hire professional people to operate those departments rather than spend that money on the study."

Rabon said he did not want to spend money on an outside consultant. He asked Holden to restate his reasons for wanting an evaluation of the water department personnel.

"I think instead of hiring someone outside that we should use our engineer or our county attorney to come up with job descriptions in-house," Rabon said.

Commissioner Donald Shaw said County Manager

"I think it's created quite a rash of personnel problems and I'd like to get to the bottom of it."

—Kelly Holden
Board Chairman

David Clegg, who is also the county attorney, could "only be pushed so far. He's doing a good job, but he's wearing two hats already," Shaw said.

Holden said the ill-defined job descriptions within the water department have meant headaches for commissioners.

In January, the board voted to reinstate two water system employees to their jobs following an open grievance hearing. Another personnel grievance had been requested for Monday night's meeting, but the employee chose not to carry the matter to the board.

"I think it's created quite a rash of personnel problems and I'd like to get to the bottom of it," Holden said.

Clegg said the last time a personnel classification issue came before the board was in 1986, when an out-

side consultant was hired to conduct a reclassification study. "It was not done in-house then," Clegg added.

In a report given to the new board of commissioners in December, Director of Public Utilities Jerry Webb stated that an area requiring immediate attention within the department is the need for additional employees.

"We simply cannot continue to operate this system on what I consider to be knee-jerk operations and maintenance," Webb stated, "but must staff sufficiently to be capable of setting up a true preventative maintenance program for our system."

The water department operations now also includes management of the government complex wastewater collection and pumping station and the wastewater treatment system at the Leland Industrial Park.

"Staff training cannot be accomplished overnight," Webb reported, "and we must have sufficiently trained staff to operate this utility with the integrity it not only deserves, but requires."

In his report, Webb stated that the number of employees within the department has remained the same since the 1986-87 fiscal year despite tremendous growth of the water system and its number of customers. The department employs about 48 persons.

In January, Wade Robinson of Supply and Philip Russ of Longwood were reinstated by the board to their jobs as maintenance mechanics after being fired in November for failing to report to work on a

Saturday to repair a broken sewer line that serves Leland Industrial Park.

Clegg had upheld the firings based on testimony received at personnel hearings. Both men complained to commissioners about unfair treatment given to selected employees within the department. The board voted unanimously to overturn Clegg's ruling.

In other business Monday, the board:

■ Made the following appointments, with the commissioner making the nomination in parenthesis: Beth McLean of Leland (Shaw); Arthur Clawson of Shallotte (Jones); and Leslie Myrie of Southport (Holden) to the Resources Development Commission.

■ Appointed an optometrist, H.J. "Skip" Davis, (Jones) to the Brunswick County Board of Health.

■ Reappointed Kenneth Bellamy (Jones) to the Brunswick Hospital Authority.

■ Appointed Gladys Lutz of Shallotte (Holden) to the Nursing Home Advisory Board.

■ Declared Feb. 17-23 as engineer's week in Brunswick County to coincide with National Engineers Week.

■ Adopted a resolution supporting House Bill 20, cosponsored by State Rep. E. David Redwine, which ties motor vehicle registration to county property tax payments, thus improving collection and assessing of property taxes.

Calabash Seeks Ruling

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around was an oversight, caused in part by the fact that both members had served on the board before. "Because it was the same people, I guess it was overlooked," he said.

Holden said it doesn't matter that the men had served on the planning board in the past. "I don't care if they were on there when Columbus came over. The provisions weren't followed."

Ramos said he thinks any actions taken by the planning board over the past year are valid because the only role of the board is to make recommendations to the board.

He said the ETA representatives, Crocker and Rate, should continue to sit on the planning board while the matter is being resolved so they can stay informed.

The town attorney said he thinks the whole issue was brought up just so somebody could question the validity of the town's efforts to enforce zoning regulations in the ETA.

"I really don't see any kind of material issue at all," he said.

The legality of the appointments was first discussed in public at the Calabash commissioners' meeting Feb. 12.

William Earl Benton, who lives and runs a business on Thomasboro Road in the ETA, said at the meeting that the appointments were not legal because the town board didn't follow the proper procedure.

Benton, who was forced to remove two off-premises signs promoting his business because they violated a town ordinance, said he wanted somebody on the planning board to represent him.

"We're asking for fair representation in the extraterritorial district," Benton said. "You're ordinance is breaking us up."

Benton, who also attended Monday's meeting, said he thinks existing uses in the extraterritorial area should be "grandfathered" so they don't have to comply with the zoning ordinances.

County May Go Smoke-Free If Board Agrees On Policy

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County may be going smoke-free.

County Manager David Clegg was asked Monday by county commissioners to draw up a proposed policy on ways to eliminate or restrict smoking at the county government complex in Bolivia.

The policy is to be brought back to the board for further review.

Board Chairman Kelly Holden said he believes discussion of the policy will turn heated before it is either passed or defeated.

Commissioner Jerry Jones of Shallotte surprised the board Monday by asking fellow board members to possibly place a ban on smoking inside county-owned buildings.

"It's not that we're going to do that right away," Jones said.

Jones said that some county employees have complained about smoke at the county complex affecting their health. Smoke is especially thick inside the lobby at the courthouse, he added. "I've had some members of the public ask that it be looked into, too."

A no-smoking policy might allow designated smoking areas for employees or eliminate smoking inside buildings altogether, Jones said. "I don't know what it would be exactly."

One board member made his views clear Monday. Commissioner Frankie Rabon, who has recently

"I'd like to go on record opposing that."

—County Commissioner Frankie Rabon

quit the habit of smoking, said he did not favor a ban, that people deserve the right to smoke where they choose.

"I'd like to go on record opposing that," Rabon said, "concerning smoking, chewing or anything else."

Holden said there is only one board member who does smoke, Gene Pinkerton, who did not attend Monday's meeting.

"I expect there will be a lot of discussion on this one," Holden said.

Commissioner Donald Shaw favors a no-smoking policy in county buildings.

In other business Monday, commissioners:

■ Received no comments from the public on a hearing held for New Hanover Regional Medical Center of Wilmington, which has applied to operate a mobile intensive care unit from the county's two hospitals, Doshier Memorial in Southport and The Brunswick Hospital in Supply. County Emergency Medical Services Coordinator Doug Ledgett said the unit would benefit the county.

■ Agreed to advertise a sale of county surplus property. Sale date is

March 16.

■ Tabled a request from the town of Leland for an additional sheriff's patrol car pending a determination later if a car will be available when the department replaces 10 to 12 of its vehicles before June. One car has already been promised to Leland and one to Navassa. Leland would like two cars by June so it can form its own police force.

■ Approved budget amendments to reflect a grant received by the Parks and Recreation Department for its construction of the boat ramp at Navassa and to reflect funds from

Near Normal Weather Ahead

Weather conditions are expected to hover at near normal over the next few days.

Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said temperatures should range from about the upper 30s at night into the upper 50s during the daytime, with approximately a half-inch of rainfall.

For the period of Feb. 12-18, temperatures averaged about nor-

mal, he said, with an average daily temperature of 46 degrees.

The maximum high, 74 degrees, occurred Feb. 14, while the minimum nightly low of 19 degrees occurred Feb. 17. The average daily high was 58 degrees and the average nightly low, 34 degrees.

The area received .3 inch of rainfall.

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Ash Man Accepts Plea Bargain

(Continued From Page 1-A)

script of plea stated that Collins had agreed to plead guilty to kidnapping charges, but Collins disagreed.

"I didn't kidnap anybody," Collins told Judge Gore, who ordered that the defendant be allowed to leave the courtroom to discuss the charges. When the matter continued, the kidnapping charge was dismissed.

All three men were indicted by a Brunswick County Grand Jury Feb. 4 for the incident that occurred Jan. 30.

At the sentencing hearing Monday, Rex Gore read from a statement that Collins had given detectives at the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department following his arrest.

It told of how the three men had planned to break into the woman's house where they thought she kept about \$6,000. The woman was half-blind and didn't trust banks, making it "an easy score," Collins statement said.

According to Collins' statement, Whaley stated that he didn't want to go inside because he knew the elderly woman and that he would be identified. Collins told officers how he and Gore had allegedly cut the screen on a window and broke in while the woman was inside.

When the woman approached, Gore pointed a flashlight in the woman's eyes while Collins grabbed her and held his hand across her mouth, telling her that she would not be hurt if she didn't scream. Gore al-

legedly hit the woman on the head with the flashlight when she refused to tell them where her money was kept.

The men allegedly left the home with around \$1,100, the indictment states.

Judge Gore ordered a prayer for judgment continued in the case against Collins until the other two defendants are tried in Superior Court. On the charges facing them, both Gore and Whaley face a possible maximum of life in prison plus 40 years.

Bolivia Men Sentenced

(Continued From Page 1-A)

mother in Bolivia burned. As a committed youthful offender, Henderson will be allowed to work toward a high school diploma. He was to attend 11th grade at South Brunswick High School before the incident, Trest said.

"I've very sorry for what happened," Henderson turned and told the Johnson family before he was sentenced and led from the courtroom. "That's all I have to say."

Maggard also turned to the family in the courtroom before he was sentenced Monday, stating, "I just wanted to tell his family that I'm sorry it happened."

Joyce Daniel, the victim's sister, said after the sentencing Monday that the family wished to make no comment on the outcome of the trial. She added that she was glad the incident was now behind them.

Board Upholds Suspension Of Employee Without Pay

BY SUSAN USHER

The Brunswick County Board of Education has decided to uphold the suspension without pay of a school system finance department employee.

Payroll Supervisor Jewel McCumbee of Ash filed an employee grievance with the board after she was suspended last Nov. 2 while an investigation was conducted of insurance payments that had been made through the school system for employees who were no longer eligible for that coverage.

That administrative decision was upheld first by a grievance committee of the board and then by the full board. The suspension was recommended by Mrs. McCumbee's supervisor, Finance Officer Rudi Fallon.

During the time period covered by the ineligible payments, Mrs. McCumbee was responsible for handling both employee payroll and benefits. Those jobs have since been separated with a benefits coordinator position added.

After a four-hour hearing on Feb. 4 the board decided to uphold the earlier decision to suspend Mrs. McCumbee without pay. The hear-

"It's in the hands of our attorney."

—Board Member Doug Baxley

ing was open at Mrs. McCumbee's request. The board had the option of revising the decision or upholding it, noted school board member Polly Russ. "We upheld it."

Board member Doug Baxley said members had been advised by board attorney Glen Peterson not to comment any further on the grievance. "It's in the hands of our attorney," he said.

Peterson, when contacted, declined to announce the board's decision, but said Mrs. McCumbee could do so if she chose to. Blue Cross & Blue Shield, the system's insurance carrier, is at some point supposed to provide a report detailing its own investigation of the matter, he said. "That's what the board is waiting for."

Mrs. McCumbee, who had requested that her name be cleared and that she be reinstated and paid for the period of the suspension, said she received a letter from the board last Friday announcing its decision.

"It really didn't say anything,"

she said.

Ricky Parker, who represented Mrs. McCumbee, his mother-in-law, through the grievance process, said the board also pointed out that the superintendent of schools would make the decision regarding her future employment status with the county. That determination is to be made after the Blue Cross & Blue Shield report is received.

The insurance carrier is expected to notify the school system, among other information, of any sums that it may be due for benefits provided ineligible past employees.

Based on a special study of the insurance fund commissioned by the board, approximately 30 individuals continued to receive insurance coverage through the school system's plan for varying lengths of time after leaving employ of the system—at least one for a period of approximately five years.

When they leave the system, employees have an option of continuing coverage for a maximum of 18 months, but are billed directly for that and pay the full premium plus

another 2 percent. Records show some former employees continued to pay for the premium through the school system, and at the lower rate afforded group members, and to receive benefits.

Parker has said the suspension without pay is a financial hardship for Mrs. McCumbee. He said she plans to consult an attorney.

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