

USE OF FEDERAL MONEY RESTRICTED

Sunset Beach Will Study Possible Area-Wide Sewer Project, Funding

BY SUSAN USHER

Because much of the community lies within the 100-year storm floodplain, little if any federal money may be available to Sunset Beach to build a town sewer system, council members learned at a sewer workshop Monday night at town hall.

But the council plans to explore all options for funding and for cooperative efforts in obtaining sewer service for the Seaside to Calabash section of the county. Town Administrator Linda Fluegel and Councilman Bud Scrantom are to explore various alternatives for developing a town sewer system and report back to the board at its May 6 meeting.

Some of those other alternatives include one or more of these ideas:

- Seeking cooperation from other municipalities in forming a sanitary district or sewer authority;
- Seeking county leadership for the area's efforts to obtain service;
- Attempting to purchase the area's only private sewer utility, Carolina-Blythe, which serves Carolina Shores and has land available to expand its plant to serve additional taps, though not enough for the entire area;
- Entering into a cooperative venture with one or more area golf courses to accept limited quantities of treated wastewater for greens irrigation, with the town(s) to provide any required effluent storage facilities, should such a system gain state approval.

In any case, Councilman Ed Gore said it would be to municipalities' advantage to invest now in the preliminaries required in sewer system development, even if they had no immediate need for it.

However, the town may have to rely on primarily its own financial resources to finance a proposed town sewer project or its portion of an area-wide system.

"It will require cooperation with neighboring towns and strong leadership from a knowledgeable party."

—Councilman Ed Gore
On addressing sewerage needs

Coupled with Monday's news regarding federal funds, last month council members learned that little state money, in the form of grants or loans, is available.

Meeting Monday with council members, Ronnie Pope, assistant district director for the Farmers Home Administration, said that federal money—from his agency or any other—isn't to be used to encourage development in the 100-year storm floodplain, as in coastal barrier islands, or in areas designated as wetlands.

The policy is aimed in part at protecting environmentally sensitive areas and also reducing the future potential of flood damage and expenses to the Federal Flood Insurance Program.

Should a community meet other agency requirements, low-interest loans could be used to build a system designed to serve, within the floodplain, only existing town customers, structures that are in existence or under construction, he said. In non-floodplain areas it can be used to build a system that allows for moderate growth.

In Bladen and Columbus counties, where Farmers Home Administration loans are being used to build countywide water systems, towns have been required to adopt ordinances that prohibit growth and development in the floodplain, he said.

All of the island portion of Sunset Beach and the first row of houses on the mainland side of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway generally lie within the 100-year floodplain, indicated Town Administrator Linda Fluegel.

A 100-year storm is a storm that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. The floodplain refers to the area that would likely be inundated should such a storm happen.

Only if the floodplain area of the town was found to be "substantially" developed would the rule not seriously affect the town, Pope indicated. Then taps would simply not be placed on lines along undeveloped properties.

Mrs. Fluegel said that 60 percent of the island is developed at present.

While Pope said existing structures were "grandfathered" at the time the orders were issued, Councilman Ed Gore differed, saying he thought subdivided properties were also.

Gore said he thought the floodplain definition "too broad," not taking into account the environmental benefits of switching from septic tanks to a community sewer system. He questioned the current interpretation of the Congressional executive orders that set the rules.

"To put the ones that are in existence on sewer and the others on septic tanks—That's ridiculous," he said.

In response, Pope suggested the town let its congressmen known "the Catch 22" situation it finds itself in.

Pope, who returned last Friday from a weeklong workshop on administration of the orders, said Farmers

Home Administration was "probably skimming on thin ice for a while" in implementing projects under the orders, but no more, as reflected by the increased paperwork required when environmentally-sensitive areas are involved.

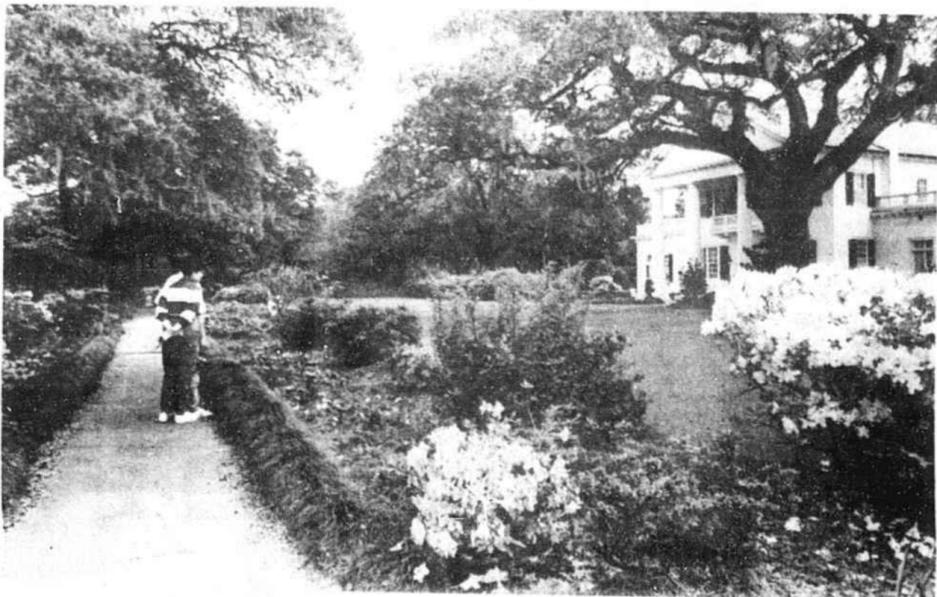
He suggested also that Sunset Beach may be stymied by one other eligibility requirement for Farmers Home Administration funding. The agency's low-interest loans—available presently at 5 3/4 percent interest rate—are available only when a municipality has exhausted other sources of revenue generation, such as its ability to sell bonds on the market through the Local Government Commission. "If you can borrow on the open market without us, then you don't need us," he said.

Sunset Beach has a property tax base of \$154.3 million and collected property taxes of \$253,000 this year, with occupancy tax collections accounting for almost as much of the town's annual budget.

Earlier this year the town's consulting engineer, Phil Norris of Andrew & Kuske, gave the council a working cost estimate of \$7.5 million for building a system, pending commission of a feasibility study that would identify the various alternatives and their related costs.

Gore encouraged the council to do its homework first, developing a feasible proposal, then seek the county's help in bringing the project off, if not with financial assistance, then by serving as lead agency for an area-wide project. If not, Sunset Beach could consider taking on that role, he postulated.

"I don't think politics will solve it," he suggested to Scrantom, who had said it might be good to make the need for sewer service a campaign issue. "It will require cooperation with neighboring towns and strong leadership from a knowledgeable party."



STAFF PHOTO BY TERRY POPE

Dial A Blossom

Some visitors to Orton Plantation and Gardens on N.C. 133 in Brunswick County stop to enjoy the spring blossoms. Travelers across the state can now call to find out what kinds of flowers are in bloom and where through a new service by the N.C. Department of Travel and Tourism by calling 1-800-VISIT-NC. "It tells what flowers, in a particular area, are in bloom as the peaks occur," said Milton Coleman, Brunswick County Agriculture Extension Service director. "It's an unique opportunity."

Session Will Train Senior 'Counselors'

A training session for Senior Health Insurance Information Program (S.H.I.I.P.) volunteer counselors begins June 5 at the Brunswick County Agricultural Extension Service office at Bolivia.

Seniors and other volunteers who complete the course may serve as "counselors" for senior citizens in their communities, helping them with their health insurance problems, said Pearl W. Stanley, home

economics extension agent.

The training sessions cover medical insurance, consumer education and related subjects. Hours will be from 10 a.m. to 12 noon June 5, 12, 19 and 26, and July 3 and 10.

Friday, April 26, is the deadline to register for the training, which will be held by a representative of the N.C. Department of Insurance.

To register, call the extension office at 253-4425.

Proposal To Locate Waste Dump Near Nuclear Plant Resurfaces

A move is afoot in the N.C. General Assembly to renew the idea of placing the state's low-level radiation waste disposal site in a county that has a nuclear power plant.

Rep. David Redwine says H.B. 643, introduced by Rep. Donald Dawkins of Richmond County, would limit the state's search committee site selection process to three counties: Brunswick, Mecklenburg and Wake.

Dawkins represents one of the existing areas identified by the committee as a possible site for the dump.

Several years ago Redwine successfully helped fight a similar measure.

"I believe such a measure would be devastating to Brunswick County both economically and environmentally," the local representative said in his weekly update. "It is my feeling that site selection should be based on scientific and environmental considerations, not on political wishes."

Bills Introduced

During the past week, Redwine introduced a number of bills, including several that relate to operation of the register of deeds office, as follows:

■ H.B. 819 would amend the act regulating the Brunswick Airport Commission by changing the make-up of the authority, deleting the town of Boiling Spring Lakes at its request and adding the town of

Yaupon Beach at its request. The bill provides that four commission members be appointed by the county commissioners and that one member be appointed by each member town of the authority.

■ H.B. 848 would change the requirements concerning the indexing and filing of certain Uniform Commercial Code statements, deleting the requirement that the register of deeds note in the index the address of the debtor.

■ H.B. 849 would require the register of deeds to record as separate instruments all subsequent entries regarding deeds of trust, mortgages and other instruments.

■ H.B. 850 would require the state Land Records Management Program to adopt rules specifying minimum standards and procedures in land records management. It would also require the register of deeds office to comply with those standards and procedures.

■ H.B. 851 would provide that to the extent a county provides liability insurance to county officers or employees it shall also provide liability insurance for the register of deeds.

In his weekly report Redwine makes reference to other bills he said might be of special interest to constituents.

These include: ■ H.B. 852, introduced by Rep. Karen Gottovi of New Hanover County, which would make it unlawful to sell

cigarettes to people under age 18. ■ H.B. 843, which would amend the Safe Roads Act to reduce, from 0.10 to 0.08, the Blood Alcohol concentration that triggers various penalties.

Redwine can be reached in Raleigh at 919-733-5787 or by writing to him at the Legislative Office Building, Raleigh, N.C. 27603-5925.

Bus Driver Training Set

Adults interested in driving a school bus for the Brunswick County Schools may sign up for a training class to be held May 1-3 at Bolivia Elementary School.

Vicki M. Jenrette, driver education specialist, said attendees must be on time and present all three days.

For more information or to register, contact her at 754-5098 after 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Drivers must be at least 18 years of age.

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