

Board Listens As Split Crowd Reacts To Budget

BY TERRY POPE

A mixture of supporters and angry opponents told Brunswick County Commissioners what they thought of the proposed 1991-92 county budget and related personnel decisions Friday.

It wasn't planned as a public forum, but Chairman Kelly Holden said he received so many requests from residents wishing to speak that the meeting format was amended to allow each speaker three minutes.

There had been rumors of a possible protest march at the government complex in Bolivia in response to the board's recent controversial budget decisions, but a march was not held. About 75 people were at the meeting, which was held in the Public Assembly Building rather than the board's usual smaller meeting room.

A public hearing attended by about 30 people was held on the budget June 4, but only four people spoke then. However, commissioners have since cut a number of county workers and trimmed department allocations from the \$35 million budget to cover an anticipated shortfall in funding from the state.

Jesse Bryant of Supply, past president of the Cedar Grove-Brunswick County Chapter of the NAACP, told commissioners the personnel cuts carry with them "a foul odor of discrimination".

Regina Alexander, a black and clerk to the board for 17 years, was among those fired. She had retained her duties as clerk when the new board took office in December, but she was never officially reappointed to her post.

In a 3-2 board decision June 17, her duties were reassigned for the coming year to Kelly Barefoot, County Manager David Clegg's secretary, who is white.

Ms. Alexander did not attend Friday's meeting.

Clegg, who is president of the Miss Brunswick County Scholarship Pageant, also was absent. He was at the Miss North Carolina Scholarship Pageant in Raleigh.

"We are disturbed, dumbfounded, flabbergasted and downright insulted by what we perceive to be racial unfairness," said Bryant.

However, not all of those speaking Friday criticized the board for its cuts in county spending.

Sunset Beach Developer Tom Pope praised the board for its "statesmanship" in making some unpopular and tough decisions.

"I appreciate the fact that we have businessmen on the board," said Pope. "We'll stand behind your decisions, the voters of Brunswick County."

Speakers from both sides of the issue drew rounds of applause.

Rosetta Short of Oak Island criticized the board for firing Gary McDonald of Supply, an environmental health supervisor I in the Brunswick County Health Department.

"If the knowledgeable people are cut," Ms. Short said, "then the health, safety and welfare are put in jeopardy."

She said the board should be attacking the N.C. Health Services Commission and not McDonald.

Ricky Parker, former chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Health, said if money was the reason for firing McDonald then three trainee positions at the health department should have been cut first.

New departments are being added to the budget at a time when people are losing their jobs, said Franklin Randolph of Supply.

"There's a lot of waste that can be cut," said Randolph. "There's more waste than all of these people that you let go and their salaries."

When Randolph's three minutes were up, Holden asked that he step from the lectern.

"When I start stepping on your toes, Mr. Chairman, you call time on me," added Randolph.

Speaking on behalf of senior citizens, Bernice Stanley of Bolivia criticized the board's decision to cut funding for the Department of Older Adults.

"Why would you want to cut the budget and keep them home?" she asked. "We want five days a week and we want transportation for those people that can't get around."

Commissioners cut the Older Adults' congregate meals program from \$65,740 in 1990-91 to \$7,135 in this year's budget.

Holden said the Older Adults program has grown to cost taxpayers one cent on the tax rate. He said Older Adults Director Ronnie Robinson was allocated enough state and federal funds to continue to operate the meals program.

People are walking in off the street to eat free meals at the senior citizens' centers, which wasn't the intent of the program, Holden said.

Funding for the senior centers has not been cut, he said. They should be able to operate five days a week.

"If he (Robinson) can separate the needy from the not so needy, the funds are there," said Holden.

Annie B. Sullivan of Leland also spoke against budget cuts for senior citizen programs.

"Why cut funds to give to newly-created things?" she asked. "If you take this away from us, we won't have nothing."

Warren "Bud" Knapp of Calabash said he was pleased commissioners are "interested and concerned in the efficiency of employees in various departments" and with the action the board has taken to make county government more effective.

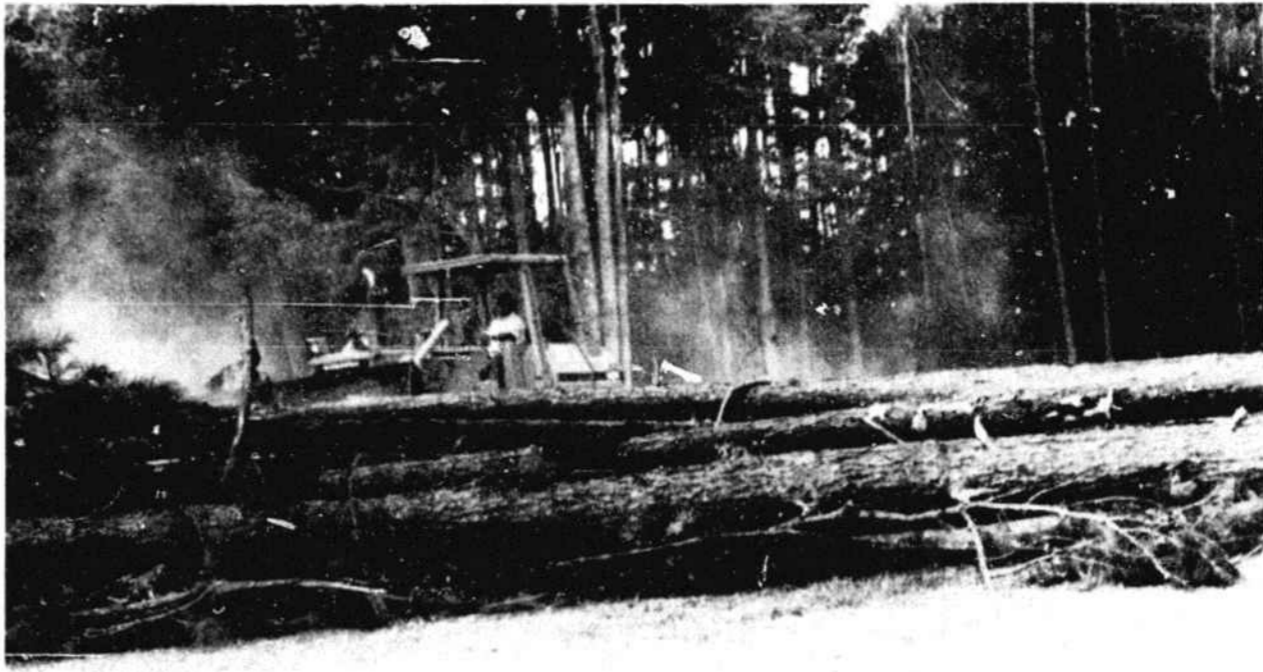
However, he criticized the county for not making public an organizational chart of county government employees.

Budget cuts have cost Paul Lawson his job twice in private industry, but he still praised commissioners for the cuts made.

"I know it hurts anytime you cut," said Lawson.

Praise was also given to the board by Bob Williams of Boiling Spring Lakes.

"We're in full support of what you're doing," he said.



PAID TREE REMOVAL for the county's 911 building was labeled by Commissioner Gene Pinkerton as an example of wasteful spending at a time when board members are voting to cut employees to save money.

Final Budget Vote Is Split

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ing to do or might do."

Rabon said it didn't make sense to fund a new \$1.5 million 911 building while cutting funds to local fire and rescue units.

"We're just trying to fool these people sitting out here and the other 55,000 people in the county," said Rabon, to applause from the audience.

The county will delay hiring six emergency medical technicians for six months. County Soil Scientist Walter Marley will be transferred to a technician post in the engineering department, along with his truck, eliminating the need for a \$16,000 vehicle for that department.

Personnel Cuts

At its June 17 meeting, the board voted 3-2 to fire three county employees, including Regina Alexander, 17-year veteran clerk to the board; Pearly Vereen, assistant director of operations/water management; and Gary McDonald, environmental health supervisor I with the Brunswick County Health Department.

Two other proposed positions were also eliminated, helping to create the \$153,000 transferred to solid waste. Board members voting for the cuts say it was to eliminate top-heaviness within the departments.

Rabon, who serves on the Brunswick County Board of Health, made a motion Friday to reinstate Mc-

"Unfortunately, I think the board's divided. We're not having any dialogue."

—Gene Pinkerton, District 3 Commissioner

Donald to his job.

It failed 2-3, with Rabon and Pinkerton voting for it.

"I feel that if this position is not reinstated in the budget, it's going to have a very, very serious impact on Brunswick County," said Rabon.

Rabon said McDonald is not only a supervisor but also a working field sanitarian.

Rabon's motion to accept the health board's proposed fee increases passed unanimously. The proposal raises fees for site evaluations for sewage systems by \$15 and will begin charging homeowners \$30 to obtain the actual septic tank permits, a charge comparable to those of most surrounding counties.

Currently, the health department charges \$35 for a site evaluation for single-family homes and \$50 for restaurants and shops.

A new sliding fee scale was approved for the adult health clinic. Fees for the general clinic and animal control department will also increase.

Following the meeting, Pinkerton said he wasn't ready to adopt a budget. If looking at the personnel cuts from a business standpoint, he said, the county will not save money in

the long run.

"I accept the politics of it," said Pinkerton. "If we get voted down, I accept that. But these people were not heard today. They might as well have not come at all."

County employees built the new Operations Services building at the government complex at a cost of \$27 per square foot, said Pinkerton. The new Department of Social Services building cost the county \$79 per square foot, he said.

"So how much are the employees really costing us?" Pinkerton asked.

Pinkerton said county officials should look beyond salaries to determine ways to save money. The county is paying someone to remove trees at the complex to make room for the new 911 building, when that timber should be sold, he indicated.

The county should raise the tax rate by three cents to pay for solid waste disposal rather than charge property owners a \$35 parcel fee, Pinkerton said. Parcel fees represent a greater tax increase for the average homeowner, he said.

"Citizens should realize that it's still a tax increase," said Pinkerton. "No matter what you call it."

'TOO EARLY TO THINK ABOUT NEXT YEAR'

Doing Personal Best At Pageant Pleases Miss Brunswick County

BY SUSAN USHER

She didn't place Saturday night, but for Miss Brunswick County that didn't matter.

Lisa Dale Young had done her personal best in the Miss North Carolina Pageant—and done it her own way.

"I gave it my all. I did the best I could possibly do," she said Monday after resting from a fast-paced but exciting week in Raleigh. "That was my main objective going up there."

Neither she nor her business manager, David Clegg, president of Miss Brunswick County Scholarship Pageant, would change a thing if she were to go back and do it over again this week, the Long Beach resident said.

Jennifer Smith, Miss Greater Raleigh, won the pageant, while Michelle Johnson, Miss Greater Goldsboro, was first runner-up. An area woman, Patricia Ann Parker, Miss Greater Wilmington, was second runner-up.

Miss Young, who is a junior at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, said she went to Raleigh with the idea of doing her best and enjoying and learning from the overall experience. She enjoyed it all—except for the cafeteria quiche. "I met so many new friends," she said. "It was an incredible experience. If anyone has ever considered entering a preliminary pageant, I'd encourage them to do so. You learn so much about yourself and others."

Miss Young said she and nine other contestants from "Group B" traveled together to and from Peace College and Memorial Auditorium and had a good time together at rehearsals and other activities.

"We stayed up until 2 a.m. chatting. We sang oldies driving to and from campus to Memorial and on stage we kidded around some and practiced eyeing the judges' table," she said.

"I think it is important not to take

the whole event too seriously. If you're so intent on the competition, preparing for interview every spare second, I think you miss out on the friendships and fellowship to be had."

Miss Young, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James R. Young of Long Beach, plans to major in art at UNC-W. She also is a licensed private pilot with a high performance rating. Both topics came up in her judges' interview, as did questions about her third area of interest, cancer. Judges "played a name game" with acronyms related to flying and questioned her about the distinction between art and obscenity, and what she would say to a child with terminal cancer.

Preparations for the pageant and the pageant itself have been part of a year-long, self-improvement program in all areas.

"From all this preparation I obviously am a much better public speaker, which is one of the main emphases for Miss Brunswick County," she said.

Some of the changes have occurred gradually over the past year, such as her increased poise and confidence.

"My parents were proud. They didn't even recognize me when I first came out. It was just a wonderful time for everybody," she said.

"People came up and said I've changed so much," she reflected. "One judge for the Miss Brunswick County Pageant, Sandy Chambers, told me it was obvious the work I had put into it."

Some changes were more sudden. For the Miss North Carolina Pageant, Lisa Young left Brunswick County a honey blonde and returned a platinum blonde.

Her aim: Something other than the traditional "pageant do". Something very Lisa Young. Something original.

A coil of Grecian curls for the evening gown competition, a

Fire, Rescue

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noon. If HB 86 passes, a budget amendment would return the \$1.2 million to its original sources.

Pinkerton and Commissioner Frankie Rabon voted against the county budget Friday that took the \$250,000 from the fire and rescue districts.

"Those balances are a little more crucial than they look," said Pinkerton.

Finance Director Lithia Hahn told Commission Chairman Kelly Holden that the board could legally adopt a budget amendment to pull the money from the fund balance.

According to figures released by Clegg, no district is currently below \$37,000 in their contingency fund balance. Those figures are: District 1, \$57,920; District 2, \$44,161; District 3, \$81,344; District 4, \$80,797; and District 5, \$37,476.

Nord said it costs each department \$2,250 to properly equip each fire fighter. Improper equipment can hurt a fire department's rating, he said.

"If a fire department loses its rating, it's the homeowner that suffers," said Nord, noting the resulting increase in insurance premiums.

Rural departments depend on the contingency fund to survive, he said.

Many of the fire and rescue personnel attending Monday's meeting had left the chambers before Pinkerton's motion. When word of the vote reached them outside, there was a loud applause heard inside the chambers.

"Please do not cut our funds," Nord asked the board. "Our departments are barely holding on as it is."

Commissioner Jerry Jones volunteered to attend the Fire and Rescue Association's Board of Directors' meeting July 25, 7:30 p.m., at the Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad building to serve as liaison for commissioners.

In other business Monday, the board appointed Deiores J. Wilson to the Keep America Beautiful Board of Directors and Steve Stanley to the 4-County Community Services Board.

Probe

(Continued From Page 1-A)

race or political affiliation played a role in their decision. Instead, the cuts were made to reduce top-heaviness within departments and to reduce costs, they stated.

The board is composed of all Republicans. Commissioners Frankie Rabon and Gene Pinkerton voted against the cuts.

Gore, who represents Brunswick, Columbus and Bladen counties in the 13th Judicial District, said if affidavits are presented to his office he would study them. As of Friday, no documents had been filed by workers who feel they have been wronged.

"Under the law, we're required to look at anything that anybody brings in," said Gore.

To conduct a criminal investigation against elected officials, probable cause would have to exist that someone has violated the law to receive personal gain and did so with a criminal intent, Gore said.

Personnel complaints such as those raised last week are more typically addressed through another agency such as the U.S. Justice Department, he said.

For the State Bureau of Investigation to enter a probe against elected officials, the DA's office would have to request an investigation.



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