MOST TRYING TO AVOID RATE HIKES

17 Towns Take Different Approaches In Adopting Budgets For Coming Year

BY SUSAN USHER

June 30 is gone and a new fiscal year has begun, but the N.C. General Assembly has yet to adopt a budget, leaving local towns wondering where they stand in terms of state revenues.

A lack of certainty of what to expect in shared revenues has led at least three Brunswick County towns to delay setting a tax rate and adopt an interim budget of their own. Instead they've adopted interim appropriations so they can continue operating without a budget.

"It's been a difficult budget time," said Jean Yates, finance officer and tax collector for Yaupon Beach, one of those taking a wait and see attitude.

Nine other towns are holding the line for the 1992 fiscal year, keeping tax rates the same as this year. These include most of the South Brunswick Island communities—Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle Beach, Holden Beach, Shallotte and Varnamtown, as well as Bolivia, Belville and Leland.

At Sunset Beach, Mayor Mason Barber attributed the town's "good budget" in part to increased accommodations tax revenues, a source of revenue also enjoyed within the South Brunswick Islands area by Ocean Isle Beach and Holden Beach.

"It's higher than normal as a result of the occupancy tax," said Barber when the budget was adopted last month. " The good Lord willing the people will keep on coming." For the coming year the town is "conservatively" estimating it will receive $150,000 in accommodations tax revenues.

Long Beach didn't raise taxes, but looked for other ways to hold costs down, said Cathy Harvell, finance officer. These included a "lease-purchase" package for a group of five or six replacement vehicles.

One town, Calabash, cut taxes by 4.5 cents to 10.5 cents per $100 valuation instead of expanding services as some of its residents had suggested. Commissioners had proposed an 8-cents decrease at the public hearing on the budget, but then increased funds for roadside mowing and several other line items.

Two towns have increased their tax rate, while several others anticipate increases to offset projected losses in state revenues and higher costs of providing service.

The highest tax rate increase by far is the Village of Bald Head Island's 7-cent hike.

Staff had recommended a tax cut from 55 cents to 50 cents per $100 valuation, said Cathy McDowell, finance officer. Instead the governing body increased the tax rate to 62 cents to cover a portion of the town's share of a proposed beach renourishment project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Figures were not available for Navassa, whose staff did not return phone calls last week, or from Sandy Creek, whose mayor could not be reached by telephone.

Yaupon Beach, which has posted a 100 percent tax collection rate for the past four years, did not increase its water rate, absorbing a 5-cent increase in the county wholesale rate for water. But it expects to increase the tax rate by three cents.

Several other towns, including Shallotte and Sunset Beach, passed along the cost hike to their customers. The towns said increases were needed to not only cover the increase but to set aside more funds for upkeep of their aging water distribution systems.

Southport, Yaupon Beach and Caswell Beach are waiting to get firm figures from the state before locking in a tax rate for the coming year.

Rob Hites, Southport town manager, said he was following the recommendation of the N.C. League of Municipalities, which sent out a memo regarding budgets last week.

It suggested towns that didn't "feel comfortable" estimating state revenues consider adopting an interim appropriation instead.

"I'm following their recommendation," said the manager.

The interim budget allocates $540,000 for a six-week period.

Before that period ends, at the city's July 11 regular meeting, the board of aldermen is hoping to adopt a budget.

Yaupon Beach officials adopted an interim budget for July and expect to adopt a budget for the full fiscal year on July 8. Jean Yates, finance officer and tax collector, said she is expecting a 33-cents tax rate, an increase of 3 cents, and a total budget of $530,118.

Based on projections in state funding she said she expects most receipts from the state to be frozen at their 1990-91 levels, while operating costs have increased.

Caswell Beach expects to firm up its operating budget for the coming year on July 11, hoping by that time the state has a budget of its own. Meanwhile the town is running on an interim budget.

Linda Bethune, town clerk, said she expects a 3-cents increase in the tax rate to 21 cents, up from the 18 cents levied for the past four years. The town has adopted a water fund budget of $76,400.

Most Towns Hold Firm On Tax Rate

TOWN	RATE	CHANGE	BUDGET	VALUATION
Calabash	10.5	-4.5	$ 438,809	$ 88.0 million
Sunset Beach	16.7	N/C	1.36 million	17.1
Ocean Isle Beach	17.0	N/C	3.1	305.0
Shallotte	47.0	N/C	1.2	71.5
Holden Beach	18.0	N/C	1.5	230.0
Varnamtown	4.5	N/C	79,321	10.0
Bolivia	25.0	N/C		5.0
Sandy Creek			Information not available	
Belville	15.0	N/C	218,100	1.8
Leland	5.0	N/C	405,635	34.0
Navassa			Information not available	
Boiling Spring Lakes	40.0	+3.0	749,910	59.0
Southport			Adopted interim budget	
Bald Head Island	62.0	+7.0	1.85	125.0
Caswell Beach			Adopted interim budget	
Yaupon Beach			Adopted interim budget	
Long Beach	39.5	N/C	3.87	364.0

Note: Tax rate is shown in cents per $100 valuation.

ORDINANCE PASSES ON FIRST READING

Holden Beach Inches Closer To Nudity Ban

BY DOUG RUTTER

If the ordinance goes through, Holden Beach would be the third South Brunswick Islands community to adopt a public nudity ordinance this year.

Holden Beach is a step closer this week to joining the list of local beaches that have outlawed risque swimsuits and sunbathing "au naturel."

Town commissioners voted 3-0 Monday night in favor of an ordinance that would prohibit public nudity.

However, a second reading is required before the new rules take effect. The town board cannot pass an ordinance on the first reading without approval from at least two-thirds of the board.

With a five-member board, that means four of the five commissioners have to vote in favor of an ordinance to pass it on a first reading, according to Town Attorney Ken Campbell.

Commissioners Kenner Amos and Judy Bryan were absent from Monday night's regular monthly meeting. Mayor John Tandy said Amos wasn't feeling well, and Mrs. Bryan was out of town.

If it's approved, the ordinance would make it illegal for any female over the age of nine "to willfully expose her breasts in any public area."

The proposed rule defines exposing as "the revealing of the female breast with less than a fully opaque covering on any portion thereof lower than the top of any part of the areola."

Anyone over five years old would be prohibited from appearing in public "in such a state of dress or undress so as to expose to the view of others the human male or female pubic area, pubic hair, anus, vulva or buttocks with less than a fully opaque covering."

Public areas are defined as any areas in town that are "ordinarily open to public use." That includes the beach strand, commercial premises and parking areas, public parking and access areas, town rights of way, public parks and town-owned property and any areas in town that are "visible under normal and usual lighting conditions to anyone making normal use of those areas."

People who violate the rules would be fined $25 for each occurrence. They would have 72 hours from the time they were cited to pay the fine at town hall.

Commissioners first reviewed an ordinance addressing public nudity last week, and this week's version was expanded to define public areas and clarify the penalty.

Seated in the audience, resident Daphne Fournier asked if the ordinance would apply to an adult girl dancing topless on a deck—a sight she has seen from her Lion's Paw Drive home. "Our renters do get kind of wild," she said.

Campbell said the ordinance would cover anything that is visible from a public area, such as a street or finger canal.

If the ordinance goes through, Holden Beach would be the third South Brunswick Islands community to adopt a public nudity ordinance this year.

Ocean Isle Beach officials imposed a ban on public nudity in May. Sunset Beach Town Council adopted a similar ordinance in January.

Town officials at both beaches passed the ordinances partly because of complaints about a scantily-clad jogger.

Mayor Tandy said last week that he hadn't seen or heard about the jogger showing up at Holden Beach.

He said the ordinance was prompted by thong bathing suits, which make wearers appear nude from the back. "I haven't seen it, but I'm sure it's out there," Tandy said.

Discussion Delayed

With two board members absent Monday, commissioners delayed discussion of three items on the agenda.

Town officials did not talk about the 35-foot building height limit as it relates to recent changes in federal flood rules.

Some builders have said the combination of the height limit and flood rules could prevent some people from building two-story homes and others from rebuilding storm-damaged homes.

Commissioners also postponed discussion of a proposed change in the bulkheading requirements on canal lots and membership in the Cape Fear Council of Governments.

Other Business

In other business Monday, commissioners:

■Met in executive session for more than two hours to discuss legal and personnel matters. Following the closed session, the board voted to promote Police Officer Robert Cook to sergeant.

■Set a public hearing for the Aug. 5 meeting on a proposed change in the fee for appealing a building inspector's decision to the board of adjustment. Town officials are considering raising the fee from $35 to $50.

■Briefly discussed sidewalks and made plans for two commissioners to visit Ocean Isle Beach for a look at their reinforced concrete walkways. Holden Beach officials are considering concrete, wood, marl or grass sidewalks. The town has had $40,000 in the budget for sidewalks since the 1989-90 fiscal year.

■Voted to send a letter to the president of Vision Cable objecting to the way the company switched its channels without notifying the town or its customers ahead of time.

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At St. Brendan's Catholic Church in Shallotte, class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and are taught by Elena Foster.

For more information, contact BCC's Continuing Education Department at 754-6922, 457-6329, or 343-0203.

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