

# Holden Beach Sends Controversial Light Law Back To Planning Board

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners tossed a scalding hot potato to the town's planning and zoning board Monday.

The controversial outside lighting ordinance that's been debated since it took effect last fall has been sent back to the planning board for review.

Reacting to growing opposition from homeowners and residents, the town board asked for a re-evaluation of the rules at their meeting Monday night.

Among other things, the rule says security lights must be shielded so they don't shine on neighboring property and yard lights can't be more than 10 feet off the ground.

Since the ordinance took effect, town officials have forced several homeowners to lower security lights that were more than 10 feet off the ground on utility poles.

Holden Beach filed a lawsuit in July seeking a court order to have a security light on Brunswick Avenue

*"I feel that one ordinance has caused this town more problems than any other ordinance."*

—Mayor Pro Tem Gloria Barrett

lowered to the 10-foot limit.

Mayor John Tandy said Monday the outside lighting ordinance has created almost as much controversy as the leash law.

But he said some people are under the impression that the town doesn't allow any yard or security lights. The ordinance allows outside lights as long as they meet certain guidelines.

The Holden Beach Property Owners Association, which is made up of 850 landowners, voted at its Labor day weekend meeting to ask town officials for a re-evaluation of the rules.

At Monday's town meeting, resident Bob Rohde asked for specifically that the rules be changed so yard lights have to be shielded like security lights.

Several other residents seated in the audience also asked for a review of the ordinance, which was adopted by a previous town board in November 1989 and took effect a year later.

Berle Walker, who has owned a house on Tarpon Drive for 28 years, said she's had problems with vandalism, and neighboring houses have been broken into since the light ordinance took effect.

"The town commissioners are elected to serve the people, and I think this is what they should do," she said.

Alan Holden said three of the four businesses he

owns at Holden Beach have been broken into since the town started enforcing the new lighting rules.

He said doors have been kicked in, products have been stolen and money has been taken from machines. Holden said he didn't have any problems with break-ins before the new rules took effect.

Also, Holden said the 400 homeowners who rent their cottages through his real estate agency and want the rules changed.

Holden has appealed a town ruling regarding lights at Surtside Pavilion and is scheduled to appear before the Holden Beach Board of Adjustment Monday.

Mayor Pro Tem Gloria Barrett made the motion to send the rules back to the planning board, saying she doesn't think the town should prohibit someone from having a light if they need it.

"I feel that one ordinance has caused this town more

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# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

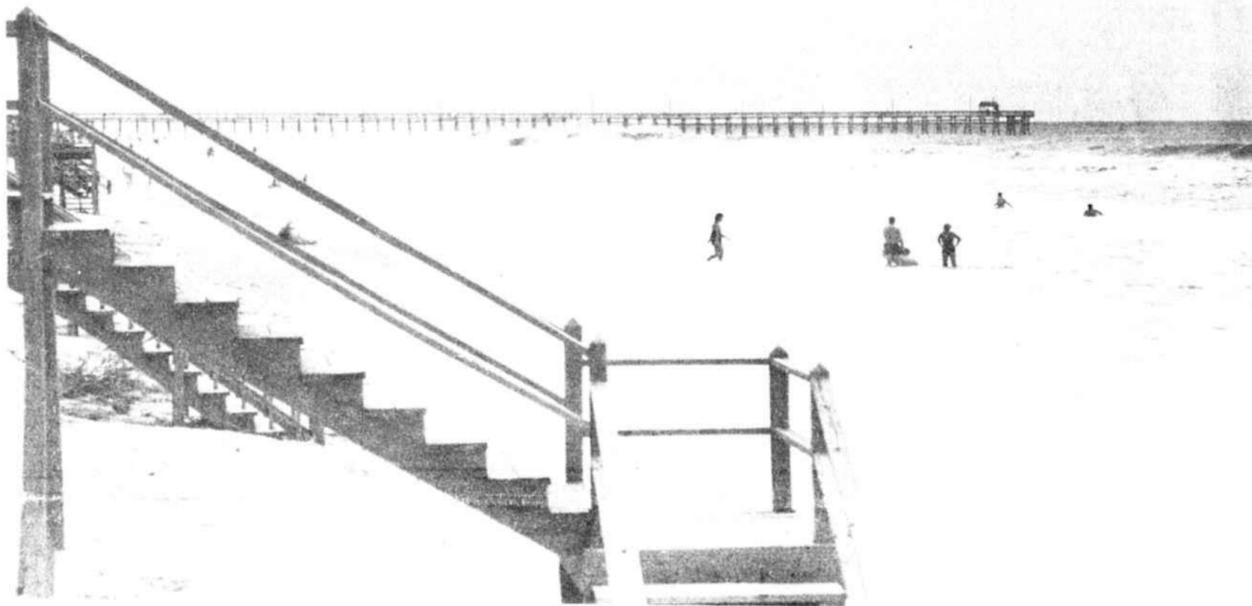
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## Fewer Folks But Just As Much Fun

Crowds have thinned out these days along the South Brunswick Islands beaches, but a growing number of vacationers are discovering that late summer and early fall are best of all at the beach.

STAFF PHOTO BY EDDIE SWEATT

## Shallotte Reinstates Suspended Policeman

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte Patrolman Keith Croom is back on the job after town aldermen voted last week to reinstate the officer following a two-week suspension.

Croom, who was suspended with pay Aug. 22 following an allegation that he allowed a minor to possess alcohol, was reinstated last Wednesday to the applause of about 50 people who packed town hall.

The vote to lift the suspension was unanimous, and came after the second of two executive sessions called during the meeting for board members to consult with Town Attorney Mark Lewis.

Police Chief Rodney Gause had suspended Croom for four days in June after he allegedly provided a 15-year-old girl with beer at his residence, thereby contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Gause said a majority of the town aldermen approved of the disciplinary action at the time. In addition to the suspension, Croom was ordered to apologize to the parents of the minor involved.

But the town board ordered the police chief to suspend Croom again at the Aug. 21 meeting. The suspension with pay continued through Sept. 4, when Croom had a hearing before the town board.

Mayor Pro Tem Paul Wayne Reeves, who was absent when aldermen approved the original suspen-

*"I felt like he was treated unfair. He was punished twice for it, and I didn't think it was right."*

—Chief Rodney Gause on Croom's suspension

sion, introduced a resolution three weeks ago seeking Croom's dismissal. He withdrew it following an executive session.

The police chief said last week he opposed the second suspension. "I felt like he was treated unfair," Gause said. "He was punished twice for it, and I didn't think it was right."

Although the two-hour hearing was held in open session, aldermen met in executive session twice during the proceedings to talk with their attorney.

Croom and his attorney, James Payne, had requested the open hearing. They met briefly with aldermen during the second closed session, after which the board voted to reinstate the officer with full pay and benefits.

Following the first closed session, the town board agreed to hold the hearing in open session

until the parents of the minor were called to testify. However, the matter was resolved without testimony from the parents.

### Motions Submitted

Payne submitted two formal motions last week to dismiss the case, arguing in both that the police officer's right to due process would be violated if he was fired.

One called for dismissal on the grounds of "double jeopardy." Payne said punishing Croom twice for the same incident would be a violation of rights guaranteed him in the U.S. Constitution.

In a separate motion, Payne argued that the alleged violation is a "type 4 violation" under the police department's policies and procedures manual.

Those types of violations are punishable by a reduction in pay or grade or suspension for a period in excess of three days. Payne said firing Croom would violate his right to due process.

Payne also said the attempt to fire Croom was against the policy manual, which says the police chief is the only person who can initiate the firing of an officer.

Although all firings must be approved by the board of aldermen and mayor, Payne said the policy manual doesn't give town board members the authority to fire police officers.

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## Board Supports Use Of 'Quest' In Middle School Drug Program

BY SUSAN USHER

Two parents who object to the use of Quest in the Brunswick County Schools' drug abuse prevention education program pushed without success Monday night for its removal.

Brunswick County Board of Education members, citing parental, community and educators' support for Quest, said they plan to continue using the self-esteem building program.

Janet Pope of Thomasboro told the board that Quest should be done away with because it undermines parental authority by teaching students to set their own values and promotes New Age ideas and humanistic values.

After hearing comments for and against the program, board Chairman Donna Baxter told the group of about 60 people she had received 29 calls in support of Quest and none against it.

Board member Polly Russ said she would like to see the program expanded because it teaches key skills students need to acquire by the middle school grades. "You don't have to have your children in this program, but please don't deprive other children from participating in it," she asked the objecting parents.

Faced with a long agenda and lengthy discussion of Quest and another student self-development program, Pathways to Excellence, the board cut its meeting short Monday. After an hour-long session behind closed doors discussing personnel and attorney-client matters, the board recessed until the following night.

Board chairman Donna Baxter said the board would like administrators to find a way to accommodate parents who do not want their children in the Quest program and that they will explore the use of parental permission slips.

Mrs. Pope told the board she thinks the Quest program teaches students that they can determine their own values, even if contrary to those of their parents. She said it introduces students to New Age ideas and Eastern mysticism, and by asking "intrusive questions" and requiring private journal-keeping, subjects them to psychological testing without parental knowledge or permission, in violation of federal law.

She objected to students in Quest "conversational circles" being told to allow other students to freely ex-

press their views and opinions on issues without criticism or judgment from their peers. She said she was afraid that the experience could generate peer pressure for a student to accept others' ideas even if contrary to his or her own beliefs.

Hinting at potential litigation, Mrs. Pope claimed Quest violates federal regulations requiring separation of church and state because it incorporates relaxation, a technique associated with Eastern religions, and visualization, which she said is associated with the occult.

Instead of using Quest, she asked that the board adopt a curriculum called Building Drug-Free Schools for grades K-12, developed by the American Council for Drug Education.

When told the program will continue, she cautioned the board that with its "great responsibility comes great accountability."

Lion's Quest, a special project of Lions International, was first introduced to the school system at Shallotte Middle School three years ago, with the continued financial backing of Shallotte Lions Club and numerous local businesses and individuals. Lions Club President Mike Blandino told the board that Quest is considered the "Cadillac" of anti-drug programs.

"In an ideal world programs like Quest and Pathways would not be needed," he said, but in today's society they are. "But today they may be the only exposure some children have to developing positive social behaviors and decision making skills."

Because of its successful use at Shallotte Middle, Quest is now used in other county middle schools as well as part of the K-12 drug education prevention program.

The schools use a curriculum provided by the state in grades 9-12 and a combination of state and private programs in grades K-5, including DARE at the fifth grade level, in cooperation with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

Shallotte Middle School Principal Mark Owens said the school chose Quest because it was being used by all of the model middle schools staff visited when the school began its conversion to a "middle school" plan of organization and was seeking a curriculum to use in the "advisor/advisee" (A/A) program, a small group session that is part of the

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## FIRED ENGINEERS SUE COUNTY

# Controversy's Nothing New For Shallotte Point Water Project

BY TERRY POPE

Like many Shallotte Point residents, R.C. Eaton has heard many promises but seen few results from plans to install county water lines in his community.

"There's not a stake driven and not a pipe in the ground," said Eaton.

Delays were cited by Brunswick County Commissioners as the reason Houston and Associates of Shallotte was fired Aug. 5 as the engineering firm at work designing that project.

Now the engineers have filed suit against the county, claiming they were deliberately forced to miss their deadlines.

Their lawsuit filed in Brunswick County Superior Court claims the county continued to drag its feet in obtaining access to

the proposed site for a 300,000-gallon water tank to be built at the Point.

Because land entry rights were not promptly obtained by the county, Houston and Associates suffered a two-month delay, it claims, in what is projected to be a bitter legal case over the county's alleged breach of contract.

County Attorney David Clegg said the county is preparing to file its own lawsuit against the engineering firm, which was hired in February to design six projects for the county.

"We will be counterclaiming," said Clegg.

Commissioners voted 3-2 to terminate the contract with Houston and Associates. At the time, commissioners said the county

had in no way impeded in the firm's progress.

The contract states that it may be terminated by either party without cause by 30 days written notice and that all engineer's work in progress shall be turned over to the county upon payment for the work. Clegg would not discuss how contract negotiations between the county and the firm following the commissioners' vote ensued.

"The action of the board spoke for itself," said Clegg.

A July deadline on plans for the Shallotte Point project was delayed twice by the firm, to the fall of 1991 and again to February 1992, said Clegg. Plans are to bid the project out to a contractor in early 1992 and allow 11 months for construction.

Camp, Dresser and McKee of Raleigh has been hired to replace Houston and Associates to finish design work on the estimated \$7 million in water projects. In addition to designing water lines for Shallotte Point, the engineers were charged with designing a line down Thomasboro Road, down N.C. 904 to Seaside, along U.S. 17 from Shallotte to Grissetown and a U.S. 17 pump station south of Shallotte.

According to the lawsuit, Houston and Associates delivered designs for the Thomasboro Road and N.C. 904 project to the county on Aug. 2, just three days before they were fired.

On that date, County Engineer Robert Tucker told the firm that access to sites for the pump station and water tank at

Shallotte Point would not be available until Aug. 11, the claim states.

The county has paid the firm approximately \$84,000, which amounts to about 30 percent of the project, said Clegg.

On Aug. 11, Houston and Associates submitted copies of the engineering plans for the projects to the NCNB Shallotte office to be held in escrow pending a determination of the rights of both parties. Included in the package were completed plans for all projects except for the Shallotte Point water tank and U.S. 17 pump station, the lawsuit claims.

The claim is asking a jury to award Houston and Associates \$187,000 plus interest for work completed, which the county

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