

Sunset Beach Benefits From Growth

BY DORI COSGROVE GURGANUS

The town of Sunset Beach has been growing in 1991, annexing numerous neighboring areas and planning for more of the same in 1992.

Town Administrator Linda Fluegel helped lay out the figures last week that demonstrated just how much has been added to Sunset Beach in terms of population and geographic area.

The area around the Food Lion on N.C. 904, a portion of Sea Trail Golf Links, Kings Trail subdivision, and Oyster Point I and II have all been annexed into the town boundaries this year, adding an extra 1,211.16 acres that the town can count on for property tax revenues in future years and several hundred new residents and/or property owners.

Ms. Fluegel said the town got into the annexation business not because of an aggressive growth policy, but because residents of these areas came to the town commissioners with petitions asking to be annexed.

"It was all voluntary," she said, so the town took a "why not?" attitude towards annexation.

"I wouldn't call it aggressive," Ms. Fluegel said. "It's more of a case that they came to us and we can benefit from the tax income."

She said more areas are on the agenda for annexation in 1992, including additional sections of Sea Trail development.

Taxable property in Sunset Beach was valued at \$162,133,539 in 1990, which, when calculated by the tax rate, means that the town took in \$270,763.01 in taxes.

This year, the assessed value of taxable property is \$180,177,408, yielding \$300,896.27 in revenues for the town.

The town's tax rate of .167 per \$100 valuation has not changed in at least four years and the town has one of the highest collection rates in the county, 97 percent.

The majority of the town is still zoned as residential. Of the land area added during the previous year, only a 8.95-acre area around Food Lion is zoned for business.

Ms. Fluegel used requests for garbage collection to estimate the town's permanent population. The official 1990 U.S. Census figure of 313 for Sunset Beach was "right around what we counted," she said.

In December 1990, 139 residents requested year-round service. Another 796 were served on a seasonal basis.

One year later, 199 full-time residents are being served, and 908 part-time residents requested seasonal garbage pick-up.

"If you estimate two people per household (not counting apartments and condominiums), you've pretty much got our population," Ms. Fluegel said, which puts Sunset Beach at around 400 full-time residents this year, as opposed to the town's count of around 270 last year.

Of those full-time residents, some apparently don't want the growth the town seems headed for.

Cletus Waldmiller, president of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association, said that "most of us on the island would have preferred no annexation".

"I have less and less voting power living on the island every time the town annexes a new area on the

"I wouldn't call it aggressive."

—Linda Fluegel
Town Administrator

mainland," Waldmiller continued.

Waldmiller said he thinks the reason behind the abundance of annexation in the past year is that town officials want more support for installing a municipal sewer system.

"If the board (the town council members) can get a larger tax base, they can have reason enough for a sewer system, which is what they really want," he said. "But I wish they'd have proved the need for it first. Now it looks like they're going to put one in anyway."

Mayor Mason Barber is not surprised to hear that some residents feel that the town has been growing too rapidly, but is certain that more annexation and development will occur in the future.

"I've heard this sort of thing before," he said, "but things are indeed going to change."

Mayor Barber explained that town growth is "for the best".

"If it makes sense, if it looks to be good for the town, then we'll annex it," he concluded.

But Barber said council members have acted with deliberation in choosing which areas to allow into the town limits. Those areas annexed are ones that can benefit the town through increased revenues.

"There are many other areas out there that qualify (for annexation) that we haven't looked at, and we don't intend to," he said.

Calculating whether annexation of a particular area would be beneficial to the town is relatively simple, Ms. Fluegel indicated.

For starters, an area must be 60 percent developed, with water lines and suitable streets that are up to town standards.

Once the area is annexed, all the town must provide is police coverage and garbage collection.

"The revenue outweighs the expense," Ms. Fluegel said.

For example, \$47,000 in tax income was realized from Sugar Sands and Oyster Bay Colony alone this past year. The cost of adding a

new police officer to the force with full benefits package from December 1991 to July 1992 will cost the town \$20,000.

"When people were moving into Sea Trails and Sugar Sands, all we heard was 'I thought we were in the town limits, why aren't we?'" Ms. Fluegel said, so the town believed that the annexation was desired.

"All we got were positive comments from citizens about the idea of being annexed."

Ms. Fluegel said that the square-acreage of Sunset Beach's town boundaries has "never been known," but will be known in the near future. A surveyor has been commissioned to determine the actual size and boundaries of the municipality.

Broken Cable Delays Traffic

A cable broke Saturday evening on the pontoon bridge that connects the island to the mainland at Sunset Beach, according to Town Administrator Linda Fluegel.

She said the bridge was out of service from 4 p.m. to about 7:30 p.m., causing traffic to back up on the island.

Ms. Fluegel said that Police Chief Buell reported no real problems with traffic on the mainland past the intersection at the bridge.

People appeared to be heading to holiday parties, she added, saying that Chief Buell noticed people sitting in their cars "all dressed up nice."

Until the operators learn to guide and control the new hydraulic system recently installed on the bridge, incidents such as this might occur, she said.

The new system was intended to decrease the number of cable breaks, but it's bound to break sometime, Ms. Fluegel said.

"It's a learning experience for all of us," she said, "and soon it'll be running smoothly."

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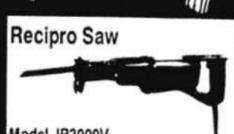
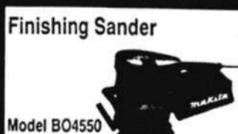


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