



**STUDYING A MAP THAT** shows preliminary phases of the proposed sewer system, Sunset Beach town council members met last Thursday with engineers from the contracting firm of Powell Associates. In attendance were (clockwise from left) Council member Julia Thomas, Mayor Mason Barber, Sea Trail representative Dean Walters, engineers Joe Thombrough and Jim Billups, Council member Cheri Cheek, Town Administrator Linda Flugel, Council member Bud Scramton and Mayor pro tem Ed Gore.

## Sunset Beach Council Debates Need for Environmental Study

BY DORI COSGROVE GURGANUS  
Sunset Beach town council members have heard a preliminary report on their proposed sewer system, but will wait for attorneys and state environmental impact information until further action is taken concerning the project.

Joe Thombrough and Jim Billups, engineers with Powell Associates of North Myrtle Beach, met last Thursday with council members and a representative of Sea Trail Plantation to give early results of the study the town has hired the firm to perform.

They pulled out maps of rough drafts they designed for the system, which includes the island and one main line crossing over to the mainland as Phase I. Phase II covers more areas of the mainland, including part of Sea Trail.

The early figures for the cost of the sewer system are \$3.2 million for Phase I and \$3.3 million for Phase II.

Billups said that the study and cost calculations were "by no means complete," and that no completion date for the study was known by the engineers at that time.

The group discussed at length the need for Thombrough and Billups to perform a 201 Study that would qualify the town for more types of government loans.

A 201 Study, Billups explained, is the common name used to refer to a Facilities Planning Project which follows the specific requirements necessary to get a loan through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under Section 201 of Public Law 92-500, as part of the 1972 Clean Water Act.

Among other information, the 201 study consists of an engineering feasibility study, such as the type being performed currently by Powell Associates. An environmental impact study would be part of the remainder of the EPA requirements,

which would then qualify Sunset Beach for that and other government loans.

The preliminary paperwork for a Farmer's Home Administration loan, which does not require a 201 study, has been completed and sent in by the engineers. Billups told the group.

In lieu of performing an extensive environmental study, Billups and Thombrough suggested that they could also go to the state to obtain environmental impact data on the area dating back about five years.

Council members Cheri Cheek and Bud Scramton suggested to the council that time was an important issue concerning the proposed sewer installation and that waiting additional months for an environmental impact study would not be best.

An environmental study of coliform levels—proposed earlier by Scramton—would have to wait until the summer months, Thombrough said, when high residency and tourism would show more realistically whether or not the island's septic system is insufficient.

Last week Scramton asked two county officials about performing a coliform study, also learning that winter is not the time for such a study.

Michael Rhodes, county health director, also told Scramton that no bacteria problems have been found at Sunset Beach in previous studies.

Mayor Mason Barber noted that avoiding the complete 201 study would limit the availability of loans for the project, such as the state's revolving grant fund.

Council member Julia Thomas agreed with Cheek and Scramton, stating that "the time element does need to be considered."

Thombrough told the council that he would get back in touch with them in a few days, saying that it "would be more prudent" for the engineers to research environmental questions

with state information to determine if the 201 study was needed.

"I'd hate us to be in a position for a grant and then not qualify for it," Barber said. "We're coming into an election year, and I've got a feeling that Santa Claus is coming to town."

Barber added that he thought the results of an environmental impact study would be beneficial for the council to refer to. "We need this information to sell this to the public," he said, "but either way we will find evidence to support this system."

The council also agreed to meet with Thombrough and Billups one more time before the next regular town council meeting on Jan. 6.

### Sea Trail To Split?

A meeting has been set up between an attorney representing Sea Trails and Mike Isenberg, attorney for Sunset Beach, to discuss the possibility of staying together on the sewer project, or splitting apart.

Dean Walters, representative for Sea Trail principals, said the corporation is concerned about the time involved in getting the sewer system installed.

He asked the group if Sea Trail should wait for the town to install sewer and join with them as one unit, or if the golf community should go ahead on its own and provide that long-awaited service to its residents.

"Sea Trail's got a need. We need to proceed with this," Walters said, "or should we go on our own accord?"

In 1991, the town limits of Sunset Beach have been expanded to cover a large annexed portion of Sea Trail.

"Sea Trail doesn't want to go into the sewer business, but we will," he added, stating that the town "no longer encompasses just the island," and that the council needed to look at the needs of all areas involved.

The council agreed on a meeting between the two attorneys but have not set a date as of Tuesday afternoon.

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