

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

Edward M. Sweatt and Carolyn H. Sweatt.....Publishers
 Edward M. Sweatt.....Editor
 Susan Usher.....News Editor
 Terry Pope.....Staff Writers
 Doug Rutter.....Sports Editor
 Peggy Earwood.....Office Manager
 Carolyn H. Sweatt.....Advertising Director
 Timberley Adams, Cecelia Gore
 and Linda Cheers.....Advertising Representatives
 Dorothy Brennan and Brenda Clemmons Moore.....Graphic Artists
 William Manning.....Pressman
 Lonnie Sprinkle.....Assistant Pressman
 Tracy Smith.....Photo Technician
 Phoebe Clemmons and Frances Sweatt.....Circulation

PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 1992

What Does It Take To Buy An Island?

A lot of people, including me, would like very much to see Bird Island publicly owned and preserved.

What we sometimes forget, though, what's involved. For a property to be sold, there must be not only a willing buyer, but a willing seller—and a deal that satisfies both.

Bird Island, of course, is the small, quite privately owned island off Sunset Beach, across Mad Inlet. At one time the island had a road, electricity, a dock, a bridge and perhaps a cabin of some kind—few remnants remain of that previous development.

It's a special place, a retreat for humans—and for wildlife. All sorts of shore birds, a few big cats, otters, a few small deer, wild boar and other creatures either live there or are frequent visitors. Piping plover nest in the marsh at the rear; sea turtles lay eggs in the sand. An occasional bald eagle has been spotted soaring overhead.

The island's owner, Janie Page Price of Greensboro, has for years said she would like to have a home on the island. At one point she talked about allowing four to six friends or family members to also build. In part, for company, I think, and in part, to make building on the island more practical. After all,

Susan Usher



you're talking about a bridge, a road, electric service, etc.

In the past she's shown little or no interest in selling the island to anyone, and there have been offers.

Anyone interested in developing the island would have to have money, and to be gamblers at heart, because Bird Island is covered under the Barrier Island Act. That means no federal money is available to support construction (or future replacement) of roads, bridges, electrical service. Property owners wouldn't even be eligible for the federal flood insurance program or post-disaster aid, as I understand it.

The latest episode in the Bird Island saga has Mrs. Price applying for state permits to replace the old bridge to the island and includes subdivision of the island into 15 lots.

For some obvious reasons, concerned environmental activists are

exploring ways to politely block issuance of the permits. The diverse wildlife on the island, and potential navigability of Mad Inlet are expected to be the keys to that grass-roots effort.

Mrs. Price asserts the division of the island into lots isn't because she wants to develop it, but so that she can show the government the land has monetary value.

Why would she want to show the government the land has value? I doubt it's because the island is coveted as a spoil area, as was suggested to one reporter. For every person you meet, there's another theory. I dare not speculate.

In several conversations over the years, Mrs. Price has never mentioned the possibility of selling the island for development or preservation. It simply hasn't been for sale. She also hasn't discussed giving all or a portion of the island to either the state or to a private group such as The Nature Conservancy; still, I'd like to think such a venture possible.

I wouldn't blame Mrs. Price for not wanting to give it to a government agency.

Part of the island complex was condemned for the Little River Inlet Jetty project back in the 1970s. That deal involved the federal government, both Carolinas, Horry County,

S.C., and Brunswick County. Mrs. Price and her late husband, Ralph, didn't want their property taken in the first place. Furthermore, they never felt they were compensated for its true worth.

To add to the rub, locals haven't always treated the island or its owners well; there's been a dock fire and other property damage.

Despite all that, Mrs. Price has been pretty tolerant—both of the widespread interest in her property and of trespassers on it.

Fortunately, most visitors stay on the public beach and leave the island as they've found it, minus a shell or two perhaps. I think that's because they think of the island as a shared treasure, a resource, not as a place that's "owned".

Current sentiment for public ownership of Bird Island, one of the last remaining undeveloped barrier islands along the East Coast, symbolizes the better side of human impulse—our occasional yearning to protect and nurture God's work just as we find it, without putting our own "man-made" stamp on it.

We can only hope that the widespread concern and love for this special island touches an altruistic spark in both its current owners and those who want to ensure its preservation in a natural state.

Height Limit Act Would Add 'Muscle' And Peace Of Mind

There's a move afoot at Sunset Beach to seek a local act in the North Carolina General Assembly that would set a 35-foot height limit on structures built on the town's island, a limit that would be subject to change only by a referendum of voters of Sunset Beach.

Such a limit is being sought to add "muscle" to the existing height limit in the town's zoning ordinance.

Why? Because the town is pursuing development of a sewer system that would serve the island as well as the mainland. A sewer system would allow higher-density development of the island, possibly in the form of high-rise multifamily structures. Where allowed, this type of development tends to occur, though not always immediately.

More than anything else except cost, fear of such development is likely to block efforts to develop a town sewer system. Concern about high-rise development appears to be shared by mainland residents and island residents; resident taxpayers and non-resident taxpayers.

Last week, the first of several meetings was held to hear from the public on the town's land use needs. Fourteen island households and 17 mainland households were represented by the approximately 50 people at the hearing, including resident and non-resident property owners.

Given a chance to pool their concerns in a list and then "vote" for the top five, 29 chose the need for the height limit bill as one of their top concerns; the next closest issue received only 18 votes. Voting on whether to maintain or replace the bridge to the island was split almost even, 16-15.

More than deed restrictions, more than a zoning regulation, the height-limit bill would reduce the likelihood that high-rise development would occur on the island unless the people who live in Sunset Beach actively choose to allow it. The bill would put voters in the position of being proactive, rather than reactive. It would put them in the driver's seat.

The idea isn't new. Elected leaders of two other local towns, Long Beach and Holden Beach, have honored similar requests, sometimes going against board members' individual feelings in doing so. Both towns have in place local legislation that requires a referendum of voters before the height limit can be changed. For residents of the community the bill is simply added peace of mind.

Twice now the Sunset Beach Town Council has chosen not to act on a request to seek a local bill for that purpose. The town's attorney has advised council members to consider such action carefully, that agreeing to such a request would mean giving up a piece of its power and authority.

He's absolutely right. Council would be giving up a small piece of its power and should consider that carefully.

But to whom would the Sunset Beach Town Council be giving up its power on this issue? Not to the far-off bureaucrats of state government; not even to the town's non-resident property owners/taxpayers. The council would be giving up that power to the people who would be most affected by any changes in how the community is developed: the people who actually live there.

Opponents of the local legislation might argue that these are the same people who elect the town council.

That is true. But that doesn't mean that a majority of council members might always act in the same fashion as a majority of the town's voters might on a given issue.

The height limitation as now provided in the town zoning ordinance could be changed with comparative ease, though not without the benefit of public comment and debate.

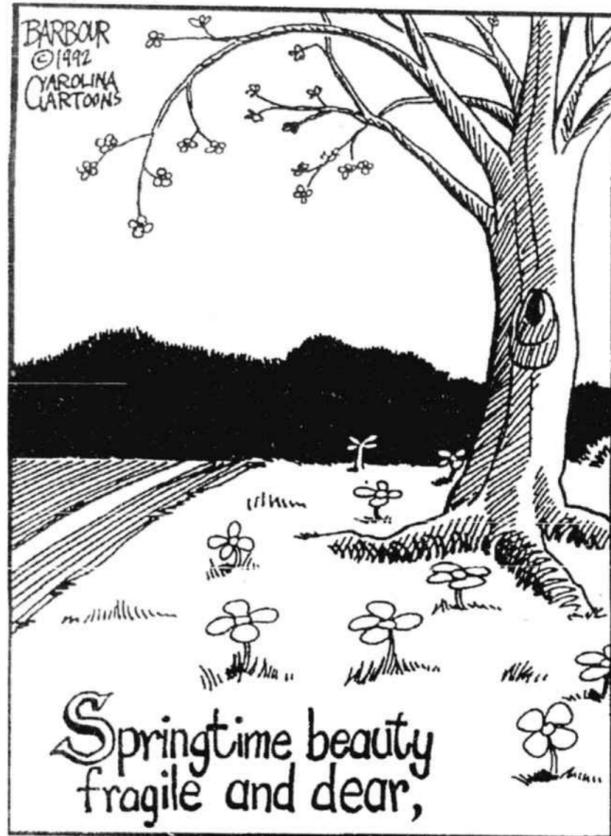
It's entirely possible, argue advocates of the legislative limit, that the personal sentiment of those serving on the council at any given time might change, creating a majority of three that favors higher-rise development on the island and would vote for it regardless of the wishes of the majority of the townspeople.

Certainly those offending members might later be voted off the council, but by then the damage might already have been done.

Most days and on most issues, voters are willing to take such chances with their elected representatives; it's a risk that comes with our representative form of government.

But those affected sometimes consider an issue too important, too far-reaching in impact, to leave to elected representatives to decide. We have examples of that at both the state and federal level. Why not at the local level as well?

If support for the 35-foot height limit legislation is as broad as it appears to be, Sunset Beach Town Council would do well to listen and to act accordingly.



Double The Cars And Double The Trouble

When my 1987 Pontiac rolled past 120,000 miles and the air conditioner quit working, I bought a new car—as a backup.

The Pontiac now has 127,000 miles and is still my favorite car. It has been to Chapel Hill and back many, many times.

Juggling life and work between two automobiles has been like raising a family. I spend more time in my car(s), it seems, that I do at home. A glimpse at the odometer proves that.

Like children, I try to give each one equal treatment, but the new one knows it is still playing second fiddle. They are both American brands, but there are some key differences, or maybe I just haven't given the new one a fair chance to fit in.

Last week I had to replace the windshield wiper blades on the Pontiac. It would have taken less time to rebuild the engine. I've never seen so many pins, screws, adapters and brackets for such a tiny task.

When it was all over, I used the pins that were already on the wiper arms and had a pocketful of parts left over. I had to lift a spring on the new arm and stick an adapter through a tiny hole just right so that the spring would clamp down securely onto the pin.

It took a hammer and screwdriver to pry the old wiper blades off. It was the equivalent of pulling teeth, if a car had teeth.

Six months after buying the new car, which isn't a Pontiac by the way, a postcard arrived in the mail asking me to please take the time to fill out a questionnaire that was sent the previous week. Busy, I had not even looked at it.

If it was a USA Today or Newsweek poll I would have mailed it back the same day. I've always wanted to be part of those national polls, and I just couldn't get that excited about a survey which begins, "Congratulations on the purchase of your new automobile!"

Congratulations? I didn't win it in a sweepstakes. Nobody gave it to

Terry Pope



me for a Christmas present. I went into debt over this thing, this second child.

The first question asked, and I am not joking, "Do you still own the car?" If I didn't, would I be answering the crazy survey? If I didn't own the car—just six months later—wouldn't that tell you guys something?

There are categories to check for

each question, ranging from extremely satisfied, very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, satisfied, not too satisfied, less that satisfied, to not satisfied at all, or something like that.

So how satisfied was I with the salesperson who sold me the car? Good question. Are there really people who would buy a car from a lunatic, someone they find obnoxious and insulting? The person who wrote the survey seems to think so.

There is almost a whole page devoted to questions about warranty service, for when things go wrong or when factory defects force a recall of cars to the service center. Did they fix the defect quickly? Did you have to wait on parts?

Then the last question asks if it's okay to send my answers to the car

dealership. If it doesn't get the answers, then why should customers even bother?

I could have avoided the second-child syndrome, but I gave in. I just couldn't get rid of my Pontiac. We've been through a lot together—including three sets of wiper blades, pulling teeth. At times, having a second car has been a lifesaver, too, for they do sometimes get sick.

But many people have asked me how in the world did I put 127,000 miles on a car that I purchased new in 1987.

I really don't have an answer for that. I just do a lot of highway driving, I tell them, but the cars are cared for.

Now watch them read this column and conspire to have me walking next week.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Register Now, Vote In Primary

To the editor:
 People don't have to look far to feel angry, let down, frustrated and disgusted.

The national debt is rocketing toward \$4 trillion—that's a four and 12 zeroes.

Congress has spent \$105 billion to bail out the savings and loans, with the cost to the taxpayers to hit \$500 billion.

More than two dozen South Carolina government officials and lobbyists were convicted or pleaded guilty to corruption charges stemming from a FBI sting hearings that featured videotapes of lawmakers taking bribes.

Hordes of aides and office workers around the Washington beltway—38,000 employees serve 100 senators and 435 representatives. Members of Congress get free day care, free medical care, a private bank, post office and a private police force.

Running Congress for one year

costs us taxpayers \$24 billion. That's \$12,200 per day per member of Congress.

Members of Congress bounced their way to "Rubbergate" by writing 8,331 bad checks at the House bank between July 1989 and June 1990. A House committee on ethics is presently investigating charges of illegal drug sales, embezzlement and check kiting in the House Post Office. Congressman Charlie Rose is its chairman.

The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and the chairman of the National Republican Committee since 1975, took a 15-day, \$100,000 Caribbean junket at taxpayers' expense to frolic with lobbyists in Barbados—power skiing, golf, touch football on the white beaches—all were videotaped and aired on ABC's "Prime Time Live."

As past president of the South Brunswick Isles Civitan Club, whose motto is "Builders of Good Citizenship," I urge you to register

to vote! The deadline is April 6 in order to vote in the May 5 primary. If you want to exercise your right, register now and vote May 5.

Bob L. Johnson
 Ocean Isle Beach

Rescue Squad Members Included

To the editor:
 On behalf of all those involved, I would like to thank the Beacon staff for their support and coverage of the Holden Beach Day at the Docks.

There was one oversight on either my or the reporter's part. The Holden Beach Water Rescue Team is made up of members from the fire department, police department and Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad. If it were not for these members and their ideas, HBWR would not be where it is today.

Keith O. Sawyer
 Holden Beach
 (Letters Continue Next Page)

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address. Under no circumstances will unsigned letters be printed. Letters should be legible. The Beacon reserves the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to The Brunswick Beacon, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.