

SBTA Pushing Bird Island Protection

BY SUSAN USHER

In a 10-page letter to state and federal permitting agencies, the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association and the N.C. Coastal Federation are pointing out deficiencies they perceive in an application seeking permits for development of Bird Island.

In a related move, the SBTA board is asking the group's 776 members to write letters of their own expressing concerns regarding those development plans.

"If you're really concerned about Bird Island, we ask you to write letters," said SBTA President Cleve Waldmiller of Sunset Beach, referring to a list of permitting agency addresses provided at the meeting.

Island owner Janie Price of Greensboro has submitted an application to the N.C. Office of Coastal Management seeking a major CA-MA development permit to build a bridge, dock and causeway to support construction on the island.

The application was incomplete, however, and has been returned to the owner for more information. As of last week it had not been resubmitted to the state.

Waldmiller said the letter, and attached addenda, were developed after two months of examining the application and related coastal management regulations.

Objections to issuance of the permits focus on three key areas: threat to endangered species and wildlife habitat; impediment of navigation and recreation in Mad Inlet, which separates the island from the island of Sunset Beach; and threat to water quality and primary nursery areas.

Waldmiller also urged members to write to William Colby, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources, urging the state to take steps to acquire Bird Island and preserve it in its natural state.

Legal Fees Recovered

Waldmiller announced that the SBTA succeeded in recovering fees expended in legal action aimed at slowing or stopping construction of a high-rise bridge to the island of Sunset Beach.

The federal government settled out-of-court, he said, paying \$38,000. That was enough to cover the SBTA's costs for legal services and expert witness fees, with \$3,500 left in the treasury to be used as needed as the N.C. Department of Transportation prepares a court-required environmental impact study.

In a related matter, the membership authorized the board Saturday to seek a meeting with the N.C. Department of Transportation regarding operation and control of the bridge.

"Control of the bridge is virtually non-existent," said Warren "Bud" Knapp, chairman of the group's bridge committee. Among other issues, SBTA is concerned about abuse of load capacities and an effort by Ocean Isle Beach to increase the frequency of opening the bridge to recreational boats (See related

Sunset Beach VFD Wants Own Water Rescue Team

BY SUSAN USHER

Sunset Beach Fire Chief Greg Cain is pleased as punch that the fire department acquired its first new truck in 21 years Saturday, but his eyes are already looking ahead to the volunteers' next effort.

"A water rescue team is the next project we want to plan for the town," Cain told members of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association Saturday.

"We were hoping before this summer we would have it. We've got the team, but not the equipment."

Holden Beach began forming a water rescue team last fall after a series of drownings there last summer.

Sunset Beach has been fortunate not to have had a similar experience, Cain said, and he wants to keep it that way.

He and four other members of the Sunset Beach VFD have completed initial water rescue training, and that he would like to see all members of the department trained for added flexibility.

Training includes all aspects of rescue—from launching the surf boat without capsizing to administering aid to victims in the water.

Four members of the departments are also trained SCUBA divers.

The major delay in forming a Sunset Beach Water Rescue Team is lack of equipment, he said. Cain estimates it will cost about \$15,000 to fully equip the team, with the major purchases being a hard-bottom, rubber surf boat with trailer and motor and a used four-wheel drive vehicle to haul the boat to the surf.

Each team member must also have his or her own gear, including life jacket, wet suit, gloves and helmet, to help ensure that the rescuers will not have to be rescued.

Meanwhile, if an incident occurs at Sunset Beach, said Cain, the town would have to seek assistance from Ocean Isle Beach, which would mean a delay in response.

The five Sunset Beach volunteers trained with the Holden Beach Water Rescue Team in classes offered by an instructor from Florida and offered through Brunswick Community College at a cost of approximately \$40 or \$50 per volunteer per class.

If sufficient equipment were available local training could be provided at a lower cost, he said, because there is a certified trainer in the county.



CAIN

story in this issue.)

Buckling Up

Police Chief J.B. Buell introduced the police department's new seatbelt law education/enforcement program, which aims to increase seat belt usage for safety reasons.

In North Carolina all occupants of a passenger vehicle are to wear seat belts and children should be in child restraint seats.

Buell also reported only four break-ins throughout the town during the winter, with "minor" damage only. "We have a very low crime rate at this time," he said.

He fielded questions from members on subjects ranging from home security checks to speed limit enforcement.

One resident was particularly concerned about speeding on 30th and 31st streets, citing construction vehicles as a major culprit in the past.

"They've learned they're not immune from getting tickets," said the chief. "It's taken a while, but they're starting to slow down."

Other Business

In other business the group:

Heard updates on the town's sewer system study and efforts by SBTA to get the town council to seek local legislation that would make it possible to change the town's 35-foot height limit for island construction only by referendum. The town is looking at possibly tying a limit

to flood elevations. Whether or not the town proceeds with development of a sewer system, said Waldmiller, "we want the 35-foot height limit regardless."

■ Announced plans for a Labor Day ecology meeting for members, their families and friends, focusing, said speaker Warren "Bud" Knapp, on Sunset Beach as a symbol of environmental concern. Various environmental groups will be represented, with discussion centering on how to turn concerns into solutions.

■ Welcomed resident John Watts as the SBTA's new board member, following the resignation Friday of Fran Pelletier, who is moving outside the town limits.

■ Raised annual dues from \$10 to \$15.

■ Authorized the board to seek a meeting with the N.C. Department of Transportation to discuss of the Sunset Beach Bridge, and to write DOT asking that the bridge continue to open to recreational waterway traffic on the hour only. (See related story in this issue.)

■ Heard from Fire Chief Greg Cain about the department's purchase that day of a new fire truck, and its plans to develop a water rescue team. The department, comprised of volunteers, is funded by contributions from the public, Sunset Beach and Brunswick County, as well as fundraising events.

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