

Holden Beach Board Rejects Septic Tank Ordinance

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach's proposed ordinance aimed at stopping the abuse of septic systems went down the drain Monday night on a 3-2 vote.

Commissioners David Sandifer, Gil Bass and Gay Atkins voted against an amended version of the controversial rules.

Sid Swarts and Jim Fournier were the only supporters of an ordinance that has been the subject of widespread public opposition for the past two months.

Immediately after rejecting the regulations, commissioners voted 4-1 in favor of a new approach to an old problem.

The wastewater management committee that drafted the rules will meet with real estate agents to discuss ways of stopping

overcrowding of rental homes.

All five town board members have said they oppose putting more people into cottages than they can safely accommodate. Overcrowding is usually a problem each summer, and it can lead to septic system failure and pollution.

Fournier opposed the meeting of committee members and real estate agents, saying he didn't expect anything positive to come out of it.

Bass suggested that the town involve local real estate agents, who handle most of the house rentals on the island. "They're in it every day," he said. "They've had time to look at it and think about this."

Swarts voted in favor of the new approach, but was obviously upset that the

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—Commissioner Gil Bass

septic system ordinance he helped write was shot down.

"I'm a little disappointed because I was sworn to uphold the state law and it looks

like I failed," he said.

Swarts said most of the people misunderstood the proposed ordinance, which was the subject of two well-attended public hearings this summer.

He said the only thing the proposed rules would prohibit is advertising that a home for sale or rent has more bedrooms or sleeps more people than the septic tank permit allows.

"People have stood up over and over again and they have never addressed the issue it prohibits," said Swarts.

Swarts' amendment of the original ordinance deleted a section that would have allowed the town building inspector to inspect homes for compliance with state wastewater treatment rules.

Even with the changes, however, most of the town board members said they didn't think the ordinance was the way to approach the problem.

"This ordinance doesn't cure or even touch the problem we are talking about, which is overcrowding," Bass said.

Sandifer said the proposed ordinance could actually promote overcrowding by discouraging people from listing in rental brochures the number of people a home can sleep. He also said the rules don't address overcrowding, which is a density problem and shouldn't be related to septic systems. "Numbers of people should be controlled, not just advertising," Sandifer said.

If a real estate agent advertises that a

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STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

A Better Oil Trap

Partners in the development of a revolutionary new oil-spill recovery process display the United States Patent they received last week. Shown (from left) are Shallotte attorney Mason Anderson, inventor O'Neal Varnam of Supply, his son Sammy Varnam and Shallotte engineer Jay Houston. The story is on Page 8A.

School Attendance Plan Draws Praise, Criticism For Board

BY SUSAN USHER

Efforts by the Brunswick County Schools to improve student attendance and discourage tardiness drew criticism and praise Monday night, with more than 150 people filling the Waccamaw School cafeteria for a meeting of the county school board.

That meeting was recessed at 8:45 p.m. to continue at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 19, at the central office in Southport.

On his third full day on the job, new Superintendent Ralph Johnston told the packed house that he needed

more time to review both the county attendance policy and individual schools' plans for carrying it out before addressing specific concerns.

Those school plans were due in to the central office Oct. 1, his first day on the job. Brunswick County Board of Education Chairman Donna Baxter assured audience members that another meeting on the subject would be called by the board after the plans are reviewed and the policy has been discussed with principals to clear up any miscommunication.

A blind ad appearing in several local publications last week encouraged people with concerns about these and other policies to attend Monday's meeting.

Speakers expressed concerns that the attendance policy hasn't been explained clearly to parents, that some requirements appear to "punish" parents or students and that not all the provisions may be suitable for the primary school level.

The new attendance policy decreases the number of days a student is allowed to miss school before receiving a failing grade. In the past students could accumulate 20 absences.

The new policy gives students only 10 days of absences. However, it provides students "remediation," a chance to make up missed work without failing a class or grade and to have the absence "erased" from their record, whether it was an excused or unexcused absence.

Brunswick County Schools sought special permission from the State Department of Public Instruction to use classroom remediation to make up the absences, said Mose Lewis, assistant superintendent for instruction, as part of an effort to improve its rating on the annual "report card" issued by the state. The system is spending \$80,000 on salaries and supplies for the program.

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SUNSET, CALABASH WOULD BE REPRESENTED

Form Sewer Authority, Engineers Advise

BY LYNN CARLSON

Engineers consulting with Sunset Beach and Calabash officials say it is time to organize a regional sewer authority which can pursue the loans and grants needed to construct a central waste disposal system.

Representatives of Powell Associates of North Myrtle Beach, S.C., have asked the towns' attorneys to draft articles of incorporation for

what they are calling the Southwest Brunswick Regional Sewer Authority.

For those articles to be approved by the N.C. Secretary of State, the two towns would have to appoint the authority's charter members.

Engineer Joseph Tombro, reporting to the Sunset Beach Town Council on Monday, said developing an authority would not obligate the towns to build a sewer system, but would provide the necessary "management entity" to apply for construction funds.

Engineer Jim Billups said the two towns are "fairly well down" the state's priority list for sewer system construction grants, but that he sees "shortcomings" in the state's evaluation methods.

He said he will attend a public hearing in Raleigh Oct. 13 to discuss the priority list and will submit "all the favorable information I can" in hopes of getting either or both towns' ranking raised.

Sunset Beach Town Attorney Michael Isenberg suggested that a resolution of intent to form the authority be presented at the Nov. 2 town council meeting, and that a public hearing then be scheduled.

Tombro said a regional sewer authority would be make it easier to

get a Farmers Home Administration loan to purchase the Carolina Blythe sewer system, which serves several developments near the state line. Purchase of the Carolina Blythe system is part of the proposed first phase of the sewer system, which would serve the Calabash business district and Sea Trail.

"Only a county or a sewer authority can enter into a purchase contract," Tombro said. "With an authority, you're also not requiring any tax base to secure the loan, which would be secured by the plant itself. Also, the water and sewer authority would owe the money, and not the towns."

Mayor Pro Tem Ed Gore warned of the need of a "cap" on the number of authority members. "This could conceivably eventually include Ocean Isle Beach, Shallotte and Holden Beach. These boards are very autonomous and independent of the town, so we have to look out for the town's best interests up front."

Whether Sunset Beach needs a sewer system has been an issue of continuing controversy in the town. Leaders of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association have expressed concerns about the cost of such a system, which they have estimated

as high as \$25 million. The engineers have been reluctant to project costs until their studies are complete.

A Citizens Advisory Committee on Wastewater, appointed by Mayor Mason Barber, is working with the engineers to study the town's needs and make recommendation. The chairman of that committee has criticized the \$25 million figure as excessive and has said no such cost has been presented to the group.

Members of the taxpayers' group also have said they fear that a sewer system will encourage overdevelopment of the island and mainland areas, and have promoted the idea of a less expensive stormwater runoff management system as an alternative.

Meanwhile, the engineers said, tests continue to determine the extent of pollution on the island at Sunset Beach and whether its primary source is septic tank pollution or stormwater runoff.

"We ran into some difficulty testing in homes," Tombro said, "so we're beefing up groundwater testing."

He added that an independent firm will be collecting and testing samples to ensure that results are "without bias."

Board To Talk, Not Listen At Oct. 14 Zoning Workshop

The Brunswick County Planning Board will hold a work session Wednesday, Oct. 14 to discuss questions raised by speakers at a Sept. 29 public hearing on the proposed county zoning ordinance. The workshop is open to the public.

The board will discuss each point raised during the public hearing but will not accept further comment, said Brunswick County Planning Director John Harvey.

"They've already made their case," said Harvey. "They aren't going to be listened to again. It's in the hands of the commissioners now."

Harvey said Brunswick County Board of Commissioners Chairman Kelly Holden had contacted him before the public hearing and asked that the planning board consider each point raised. The board was asked to submit its recommendations to the board of commissioners before its next meeting Oct. 19. The planning board's regular monthly meeting is scheduled for Oct. 21.

Harvey said the planning board agreed to schedule the work session after its joint hearing with the commissioners had adjourned.

About 75 people attended the public hearing. Of the 22 speakers who commented on the proposed ordinance, most spoke in opposition to all or parts of the law.

The planning board work session will begin at 7 p.m. in the planning department conference room at the Brunswick County government complex in Bolivia.

As defined by state law, the board can deliberate, but can take no official action at a "work session."

Seaside Group Drafts Charter For Proposed Municipality

BY SUSAN USHER

The proposed Town of Seaside would be governed by a mayor and five council members, a group of about 40 community residents agreed at a meeting held last week at a local auction house.

By voice vote of attendees, a steering committee filled in the blanks in a model charter for the town and defined its boundaries last Wednesday night, after hearing first from an attorney with the N.C. League of Municipalities.

"I always tell people they should not rush out and start a new municipality without a good reason for it," Ellis Hankins, a League lobbyist with the N.C. General Assembly who formerly practiced law in Brunswick County, told the group. That's because a "paper town"—one whose residents don't want to do anything—"is not good."

"Sooner or later two things are going to happen," said Hankins. "One, it's going to start levying taxes; and two, it's going to start adopting regulations that you will have to abide by."

A willingness to pay more taxes for a higher level of services than is currently available and "preserving a community's identity" are among the reasons commonly

expressed, he said. The latter "usually means some concern about a neighboring town, or towns, annexing..."

Hendrix noted that better law enforcement—a costly service to provide—is one of the things Seaside area residents are saying they want, citing a high number of property crimes such as breaking and entering and theft.

Hankins reviewed options for better law enforcement, from starting a police force to negotiating or contracting for increased patrol; basic sources of state and local revenues for towns; and procedures a town must follow in any annexation effort. He noted that residents of an area proposed for annexation can go to court in an effort to challenge it.

Seaside is a small mainland community along N.C. 179 between Ocean Isle and Sunset Beach.

As outlined on the map, the proposed municipality would generally run from a point on Seaside Road north across N.C. 179 to along Dale Drive, then east toward Ocean Isle Beach to a wooded area just beyond Cornerstone, south across N.C. 179 again to Laketree Shores, then following a creek along the east side of Laketree Shores to the middle of the Intracoastal Waterway and back to the start.

It would not include Seaside Station, as had been proposed at one time. However, it would include the subdivisions of Pine Acres, Ocean View Landing, Ocean Pine Acres, Laketree Shores, Tarheeland Acres, Ocean Haven, Frank Hester subdivision, Whispering Heights, Water Wonderland, Marlee Acres, Schooner's Pointe, Brooks Acres, Seaside Heights, Eastside Heights, Seaside Acres and Salt Marsh.

Audience members expressed mixed views Wednesday. One man questioned the benefit of the town paying for increased law enforcement, while a woman likened the Seaside community to "the ham in a ham sandwich waiting to see which (adjoining town) will grab us. Then the rich islands will tell us what to do."

She continued, "Nobody wanted us until we got water lines."

The committee is preparing the charter and map to submit to Rep. E. David Redwine, who will be asked to submit a local bill for incorporation. As approved Thursday the charter also provides for at-large elections, with council members to be elected to staggered, four-year terms, and the mayor to two-year terms.

The group did not vote Thursday on who would serve as acting mayor and council between incorporation and

the first town election. Hendrix said those decisions will be made later.

An initial tax rate of 10 cents per \$100 valuation is proposed, to go no higher except by referendum. The governing body would not be paid except by vote of the people.

"The committee members and residents of the community have a strong feeling on that, for people to have a large say in how the town is run," said Hendrix, speaking for the seven committee members present.

Redwine, who attended an Aug. 13 meeting, is like most members of the General Assembly. He typically includes a provision for a referendum of permanent residents of the proposed town in any incorporation bill he introduces, though the law doesn't require it.

"If it fails, then that's the end of that," said Hankins.

The incorporation committee plans to hold another public meeting Thursday, Oct. 22, at 7:30 p.m. at Coastal Auction House on N.C. 179. To raise funds for the effort, volunteers will be selling fried fish and chicken dinners Saturday, Oct. 10, at McDonald's Farm at the intersection of N.C. 179 and N.C. 904. Cost is \$3.50 per plate.