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## BLAMES FIRING ON RACE, POLITICS

# Former Clerk Plans To File Suit Against Commissioners

BY ERIC CARLSON

Just one week before a new board of commissioners takes office, a former clerk to the board has drafted a racial and political discrimination suit against the three sitting commissioners who voted to eliminate her position.

Brunswick Commissioners Chairman Kelly Holden said Tuesday he has received a draft complaint accusing him and fellow Republican board members Donald Shaw and Jerry Jones of firing 10-year veteran clerk Regina Alexander, who is black and a Democrat, "because of her political affiliation and her race."

The draft suit alleges that a political supporter of Holden, shortly after his election in 1990, "suggested that (Alexander) change her party affiliation to Republican" and said she should "distance herself" from other commissioners.

"Defendants Holden, Shaw and Jones refused to communicate or work with (Alexander)" although she "never received any complaints about her performance," the suit states.

Subsequently the three voted June 17, 1991, to eliminate the salary of the clerk to the board and to appoint County Manager David Clegg's secretary, Kelly Barefoot, to a joint position of secretary to both the manager and the board.

"This secretary was white and, upon information and belief, a political supporter of defendant Holden," the draft suit states.

Holden said Tuesday the suit was "not worthy of a response" and that he plans "to do nothing" in reaction to it. He said the timing of the suit suggests it might be one of several "personal political vendettas" being launched to undermine the accomplishments of the current board.

"I categorically deny the racial and political charges and the claim that we violated anyone's civil rights," Holden said. "I hate that and despise that."

*'I categorically deny the racial and political charges....I hate and despise that.'*  
—Kelly Holden

Holden said Alexander was one of more than 20 county employees whose positions were eliminated during a reduction in force implemented "to help balance the budget." He said that by state law, the clerk serves at the pleasure of the commissioners and can be replaced without cause.

Most counties the size of Brunswick do not have a full-time position of clerk to the board, he said. Alexander's post was eliminated and Barefoot was given the additional duties as a cost-cutting measure, Holden said.

He said Barefoot is a Democrat and was not a political supporter at the time of her hiring. He noted that other prominent posts in the current administration are held by Democrats including Clegg, Deputy Clerk Joyce Johnson, Finance Officer Lithia Hahn and Personnel Officer Starrie Grissett, who is also black.

Holden called it "ironic" that he received the suit just days after a letter to the editor appeared in *The Brunswick Beacon* alleging that Commissioner-elect Wayland Vereen had made campaign promises to reinstate Alexander, Pearlle Vereen and Zelma Babson to their former county positions. The letter, written by Long Beach resident M.L. LaMar, also claims that Vereen told her Clegg would be replaced by the new board.

Holden called Clegg "one of the most impressive people I've ever met" and said that if the county manager were replaced, the commissioners "would not only be shooting themselves in the

foot, but the county as well."

He said he "could only speculate" when asked what connection the Alexander suit might have with the incoming board.

"I hate to see people try to get commissioners to carry out their personal political vendettas," Holden said. "It will be a real test of character for the new commissioners to see if they can resist the pressure."

Clegg, Barefoot, Jones and the three commissioners-elect are attending an Institute of Government seminar in Kill Devil Hills this week and could not be reached for comment.

Raleigh attorney Martha A. Geer said Tuesday that the suit will be formally filed within three weeks. It will also name as defendants the incoming board members Vereen, Tom Rabon and Don Warren, she said. While the action seeks personal damages in excess of \$10,000 from Holden, Shaw and Jones, the new board could settle the county's liability in the case out of court.

Geer acknowledged that a board of commissioners has the right not to reappoint the former clerk.

"But they can't do it for illegal reasons, such as on the basis of sex, race, political affiliation or any other that is a violation of constitutional rights," Geer said. "If they don't like her they don't have to keep her. But they can't do it because she's a Democrat."

Geer said that if the case goes to trial, she would have the burden of proving the termination was racially or politically motivated.

"Or the new board could vote to hire her as clerk," Geer said. "I'm not sure she would be satisfied with being re-hired. I doubt that would be enough."

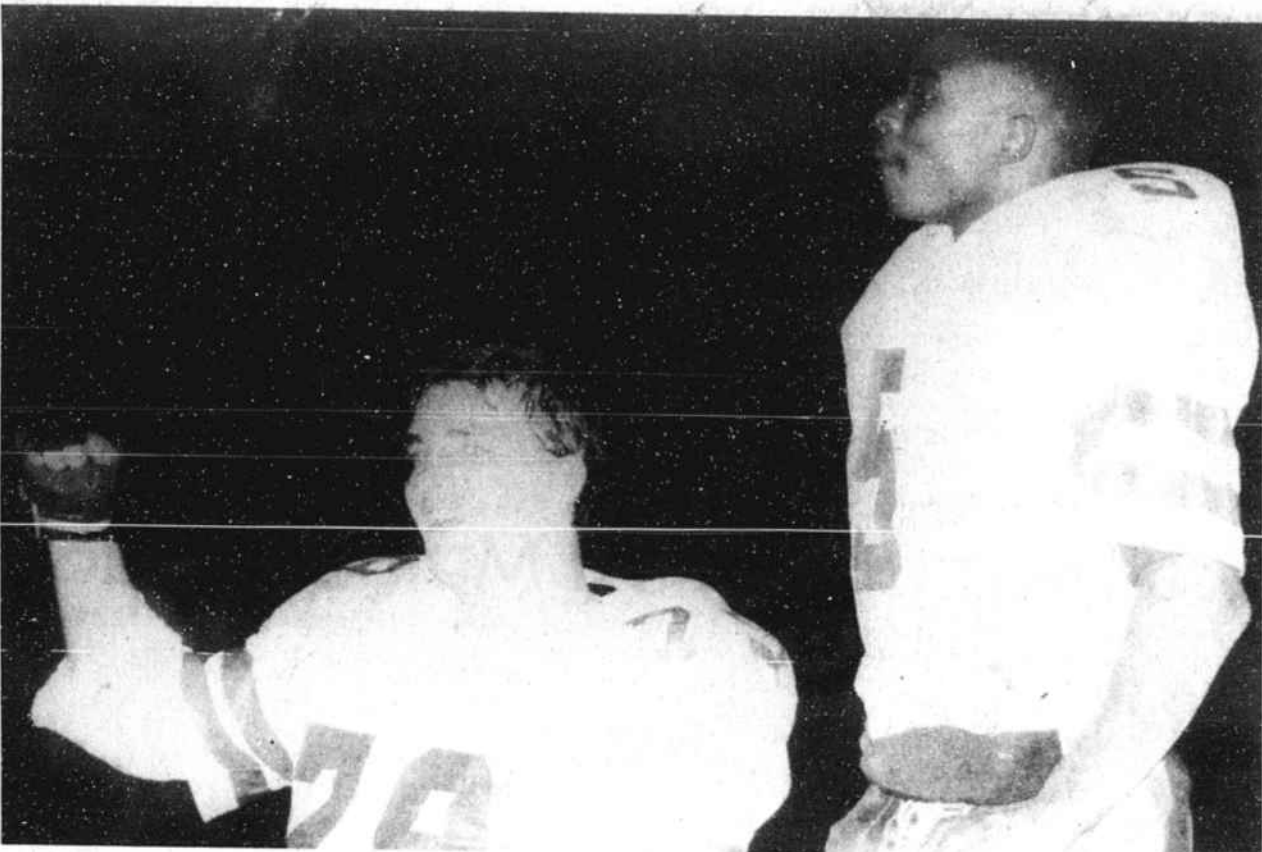
The suit seeks Alexander's reinstatement along with damages, including back pay and compensation for emotional distress.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## A Holiday Ritual

Shalotte town employee Roland Varnam was up to his old tricks last Friday morning, hanging Christmas decorations along Main Street in preparation for this Saturday's annual parade. Varnam hangs the holiday decorations every year on the day after Thanksgiving. The parade will begin at 10 a.m. For more information and a complete listing of entries, turn to Page 2-A.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

## Bring On The Bulldogs!

West Brunswick's Geoff Byrd (79) hams it up on the sideline during the Trojans' 41-14 state football playoff win Monday at Farmville Central while teammate Steve Holmes keeps an eye on the game. The Trojans host the St. Pauls Bulldogs Friday for the Eastern North Carolina 2-A Championship. For more high school football coverage, see Pages 6-7B.

# Holden Beach POA Takes 'Moral Stand' Against Overcrowding

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Property Owners Association took a "moral stand" Saturday, voting to encourage homeowners to take the lead in stopping overcrowding of rental homes on the island.

Responding to the comments of Mayor Wally Ausley, members agreed each homeowner must take responsibility for ensuring their home isn't stuffed beyond capacity during the summer.

Overcrowding homes can lead to septic tank failure, which can result in the pollution of waters surrounding Holden Beach. HBPOA Director Harold Bender's motion to encourage owners to limit occupancy passed unanimously.

The association tied the vote to a batch of letters the town recently mailed to homeowners. The letters tell people how many bedrooms they're allowed to have in their houses in accordance with their septic tank permits.

Holden Beach POA President Bob Lineberger encouraged the group to take a "moral stand" after Mayor Ausley said homeowners must take responsibility for the

number of people that rent their property.

"We live on a very fragile, narrow band of sand here," Ausley said. "We have a responsibility to keep it healthy."

*"We live on a very fragile, narrow band of sand here. We have a responsibility to keep it healthy."*

—Wally Ausley

Holden Beach Mayor

Ausley suggested each owner contact their rental agent and give the maximum number of people they want staying in their home.

"If everybody would say that, we would have no problem," he said. "You could really eliminate this very small number of houses that are being overcrowded."

Ausley estimated there are between 10 and 20 "flagrant" cases of overcrowding on any given week during the summer.

"In my opinion we have a few flagrant overcrowders on Holden Beach," he said. "It is a small number, but it is enough for us to be concerned."

With the small number of homes being overcrowded, Art Zucker of Raleigh asked if the association could take more direct measures to control overcrowding.

"Are they going to adhere to our moral commitment?" (See OWNERS, Page 2-A)

## HEARING SET MONDAY AT TOWN HALL

# Sunset Taxpayers Say They'll 'Scream Bloody Murder' Against Sewer Authority

BY LYNN CARLSON

The board of directors of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association has sent a 13-page newsletter to 1,700 town water users encouraging them to fight attempts to establish a South Brunswick Islands Sewer and Water Authority, a body they say would have the power to proceed with a central sewer system even if such a measure fails to pass a referendum.

The mailing included a copy of a five-page letter from consulting engineer Joseph Tombro of Powell Associates to Sunset Beach Town Attorney Michael Isenberg, in which Tombro estimates the cost of the system at \$25 to \$30 million, acknowledges that a sewer referendum probably would fail, and outlines how the system might be implemented and funded through the authority.

Tombro and engineer Jim Billups have recommended establishment of an authority as "management entity" for the towns of Sunset Beach and Calabash to secure grants and loans for sewer system construction. They have told both town boards that the authority can be given as much or as little power as the two town governments wish.

Before either town can vote on a resolution establishing an authority, each must name its three members. Neither has indicated whose names it is considering or how it will determine the authority's representation.

A group of about 80 SBTA mem-

bers—only a handful of whom indicated they are full-time residents and voters in the town—met Saturday and voted unanimously to try to have the association's attorney present at the Dec. 7 Sunset Beach Town Council meeting, when the opening item on the agenda is a public hearing on the resolution to form the authority.

Tombro's letter to Isenberg says a sewer and water authority "has practical and flexible advantages," adding that "if the referenda of either or both communities fail...the communities may authorize the authority to proceed on different implementation options."

It also says, "The authority may, without going through referendum, provide water and sewer service to specific areas within either community through special assessments or simply by request."

"We have thoroughly discussed the potential formation of a water and sewer authority with staff and attorneys of the Local Government Commission of the State Treasurer's Office, the Local Government Institute, the Division of Environmental Management and the Farmers Home Administration. Without exception, all concur that a water and sewer authority is the way to go, given our unique set of circumstances."

Two weeks ago, a crowd of more than 200 Carolina Shores residents expressed vehement opposition to

the proposal at a hearing held by the Calabash Board of Commissioners, some claiming that they experienced special assessments and witnessed abuses of power by similar boards in the Northeastern towns from which they retired.

The Calabash board postponed its vote on the resolution until the day after the Sunset Beach hearing.

Carolina Shores residents currently receive central sewer service from the Carolina Blythe company based in Florence, S.C. Powell Associates engineers have recommended purchase of the Carolina Blythe plant near the state line as the first stage of the proposed system. (See related story, this page.)

SBTA leaders charge that, despite the work of the engineers and a local wastewater advisory group, there is insufficient evidence of the need for a sewer system. "Sea Trail is who needs it, but they want you to pay for it," said John Watts, the SBTA representative on a six-member wastewater advisory committee appointed by Sunset Beach Mayor Mason Barber.

Watts characterized himself as the wastewater committee's sole unconvinced member. "It's just one against five. The rest of them have already made up their minds," he said, accusing Barber of having "stacked the deck by naming developers or people who work for developers."

(See SUNSET, Page 2-A)

## Carolina Blythe Head Confirms Coming Sewer Rate Increase

BY ERIC CARLSON

Carolina Blythe Utilities Company Inc. will request "a major, substantial increase" in its water and sewer rates next month unless the company is purchased by another private utility or a regional water authority, General Manager Coleman Burnett said Tuesday.

Burnett agreed with consultants who insist that the proposed South Brunswick Water and Sewer Authority could charge lower rates than Carolina Blythe will be able to. He said a new private owner would undoubtedly charge more.

In a telephone interview from the

company's Charlotte office, Burnett was asked for his response to comments made at a Nov. 18 public hearing in Calabash on a proposal for the town to join Sunset Beach in creating a regional sewer system.

As a first step, the two towns must create a joint management board that could negotiate the purchase of Carolina Blythe, the only existing sewer system in the area. The company serves about 1,400 customers, mostly in the Carolina Shores development of Calabash.

At the hearing, project engineers

(See SEWER, Page 2-A)

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