

Sewer Authority Plan Draws Fire At Sunset Beach

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council. Opponents of the authority disagreed on nearly every point with consulting engineers from Powell Associates, hired by Sunset Beach and Calabash to construct a "selected plan" to implement a wastewater program for the towns.

The plan includes construction of a wastewater collection and treatment facility and stormwater management system plus formation of a "public management entity" to monitor, inspect and repair systems not connected to the system.

The engineers have estimated the cost of a sewer system at \$25 to \$30 million to serve residents from the state line to the easterly limits of the Sunset Beach extraterritorial jurisdiction and from the oceanfront to U.S. 17.

James E. Merkel, one of those allowed in from outdoors to speak, said "I have seen nothing to suggest a need for sewers on Sunset Beach. It has never been demonstrated to me."

However, just prior to the meet-

ing, engineers Joseph Tombro and James Billups distributed copies of a ten-page "Status Report on Wastewater Collection & Treatment Programs" for the two towns. The report outlines the process of implementing a sewer system and presents evidence of pollution it says "should be sufficient to convince the most cynical observer that on-site septic systems are not the answer for treating sewage on the island of Sunset Beach."

The Powell report says town water consumption records indicate that about 35 percent of homes on the island of Sunset Beach use more water than the 7,200 gallons per month an average working septic tank system can treat.

"The amount by which actual consumption exceeds this amount is up to 18,000 gallons per month. Therefore, many of the systems are receiving wastewater at a rate of two to three times the design capacity."

"Assuming the septic systems are operating as designed, which is an idealistic situation, then the overloading results in inadequately treat-

ed wastes which go directly to the groundwater, and potentially to the adjacent estuaries."

Two proponents of the authority expressed concerns about septic tank efficiency and about a pending state crackdown on malfunctioning or outdated systems.

Sea Trail Plantation partner Miller Pope, who also owns a motel and rental properties at Ocean Isle, said, "You can't compare a rental house to the house you live in. Renters will take the grease they cook in and pour it right down your drain. During the winter, the grease can clog your drain lines and make a septic system useless."

Contractor Tom Pope said, "I challenge you to get yourselves informed about septic tanks. In two or three years, we'll be drowning, swimming, in sewage. When the state regulators get hold of you, you're going to be down here on your hands and knees begging for a sewer system."

Opponent Judy Van Winkle questioned whether pollution testing

around Sunset Beach had been conducted only during the summer when rental cottages are occupied to capacity.

Engineer Tombro replied, "It makes no difference. If you have these constituents in your water at any time of the year, you damned sure better be scared. The problem doesn't go away."

Opponents argued that no authority should be formed until after a referendum is held on the sewer system and that an authority would allow the towns to "circumvent the will of the people."

Outspoken opponent Sue Weddle charged, "Word in the community is that your minds are already made up, that this meeting is a farce. Even though there's a clear consensus in this room, you have no intention to listen."

Engineers and council argued that an authority is the only viable vehicle for the two towns to seek grants and loans; that only through an authority can the towns learn whether adequate funds can be raised to con-

struct a system; and that the authority will not be "activated" until it has funds to spend.

Opponents expressed fears that an authority could abuse its power. Merkel referred to his experience as a property owner in Chapel Hill, saying such authorities are "beholden to nobody," and said a similar board there "took 2,000 acres in the country, built an administrative palace and decided to spend \$350,000 to build a recreational facility that has nothing to do with water or sewer."

"We're not sewer experts," Scrantom countered. "We're trying to do what's best for the community in our opinion. Some won't agree, and some will. I think you people are scared of the word 'authority.' If it gets to be a bureaucracy, we'll just cancel it."

Mayor Pro Tem Ed Gore said, "I share your concerns about a possible bureaucracy" and that those concerns "will be considered in the establishment of the authority. Our job is to bring this entity to the people to

do the job and operate at the lowest rates possible."

Gore was accused by opponents of having a vested interest in the sewer project because he is a partner in Sea Trail Corporation, which needs a central sewer system in order to expand.

Mayor Barber refuted a statement made two weeks ago at a meeting of the Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association alleging that Sea Trail's principals were influencing the board to construct a taxpayer-funded sewer system.

Barber said Sea Trail "will get a sewer system one way or another, whether it's public or private. We asked them to hold off on their plans until the town decided what it was going to do."

Council did not recommend limiting any of the authority's statutory powers, which include owning and acquiring property, constructing water and sewerage systems, entering into contracts, applying for grants, issuing revenue bonds, establishing rates, imposing special assessments and condemnation.

Shell Point Mother, Daughters Face Felony Purse Theft, Forgery Charges

A joint effort Tuesday by county and Shallotte law enforcement officers resulted in the arrest of three Shell Point area women on felony charges of forgery, uttering and larceny, according to Det. Tom Hunter of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department.

Hunter said Gwendolyn Tipton Payne, 18; her mother, Stephanie Tipton; and sister, Letha Tipton King, were arrested about 2 p.m. and were being held in lieu of \$2,000 bond each Tuesday evening.

The three had been reported to police after an elderly Calabash woman's purse was taken from a shopping cart at a Shallotte grocery store about 1 p.m. Tuesday, Hunter said. The purse was found at the store, but credit cards, cash and checks were missing, he said. One of the missing checks was cashed for \$1,000 shortly thereafter at a nearby bank, he added.

All three women were charged by the Shallotte Police Department in the Shallotte incident. In addition, Payne was charged by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department in a Nov. 30 case in which a checkbook and credit cards were reported stolen from another woman's purse left on the counter of a Seaside shop.

In that case, Hunter said, a check for \$800 was cashed at another local bank.

Hunter, Brunswick County Deputy Patty Hewett and Shallotte Police Chief Rodney Gause were discussing the case Tuesday when Hunter spotted the car the suspects were reported to be driving near Gray Bridge and Shell Point roads. Hunter said credit cards belonging to the Seaside victim, a checkbook belonging to the Shallotte victim and \$1,061 in cash were recovered in a search of the women's car.

Cold, Wet Winter Here For Week Or So Longer

More wintry weather is in the forecast for the South Brunswick Islands.

Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady says the outlook calls for continued below normal temperatures coupled with above average precipitation.

"It looks like we're in a pattern for a while, at least the next week to 10 days," he said.

Canady expects temperatures to range from the mid-30s at night into the mid-50s during the daytime,

with at least three-quarters of an inch of rainfall.

For the period Dec. 1-7 he recorded a high of 60 degrees on both Dec. 1 and 2, and a nighttime low of 27 degrees on Dec. 6.

A daily average high of 55 degrees combined with a nightly average low of 35 degrees for a 45-degree daily average temperature. That's about 4 degrees below average, he said.

Canady recorded .6 inch of rainfall during the period.

Needs Assessment To Be Presented For 3-County Area

A presentation of the 1992 Regional Needs Assessment—a study of human service needs and the perceived quality of life in Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties—will be held Dec. 16 at UNC-W.

The meeting will take place in Cameron Hall Auditorium, Room

105, at 7:30 p.m.

Information to be presented will include recent census data, focus group findings and surveys from area residents.

The assessment is a joint project of the Cape Fear United Way, the New Hanover County Department of Social Services and UNC-W.

Bird Island To Be 'Stateline' Topic

The effort to protect Bird Island from development will be the lead story on the N.C. Public Television half-hour news program "Stateline," tonight (Thursday), a spokesman for the network said.

Interviews were taped with Bird Island Preservation Society chairman Bill Ducker and others involved in the effort. The ten-minute

segment will also briefly explore other Sunset Beach issues, including whether the island's one-lane pontoon bridge should be replaced.

"Stateline" will be rebroadcast on Sunday, Dec. 13, at 5 p.m.

N.C. Public Television is received locally on Vision Cable channel 13, Atlantic Cable 12, or non-cable channel 39.

Calabash Vote Seals Sewer Authority

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Brady also suggested that the town should investigate the possibility of contracting with the Grand Strand Water and Sewer Authority in South Carolina to provide sewer service to those portions of Calabash, mostly in the downtown restaurant district, that are not served by Carolina Blythe.

But Tombro said the Myrtle Beach authority already has committed to provide service to enough areas in South Carolina to exhaust its treatment capacity.

Another Carolina Shores resident said, "People in District 2 are not against providing sewer to areas of

Calabash that don't have it. We just don't understand why we have to join with Sunset Beach to do it. Why can't we do it ourselves?"

Jim Billups of Powell Associates said it would require \$1.8 million in "up front costs" to serve most of the downtown business area. Those customers would end up paying more than twice as much per gallon of sewage output than they would if the Sunset Beach is included in the system.

"There is an economy of scale at work," Billups said. "The larger your customer base, the lower the cost per customer."

"We had the option of excluding Carolina Shores from the system plans," he said. "But we learned that

you were looking at a rate increase and felt it was our task to represent the town as a whole. We felt it was in the best interest of Carolina Shores to include it if we would provide service for less than Carolina Blythe will when it is sold or increases its rates."

Coleman Burnett, general manager of Carolina Blythe, confirmed last week that the company is for sale and will seek a substantial rate increase if a buyer is not found by early next year. He also said a new owner of the system could be expected to raise rates even more.

After the meeting, Calabash Mayor Doug Simmons said he was pleased by the board's action.

"I think we did the right thing,"

Clegg Keeps Manager's Post After Vote

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Referring to a recent study of county government job classifications and salaries, Warren said the new board "will have to look at what changes might need to be made."

He said the commissioners also would be assessing new funding requests that might be expected from the new Brunswick County Board of Education.

Warren said he feels it is "very unlikely" that the newly adopted county-wide zoning ordinance will be repealed.

Rabon said the zoning law "may need some fine tuning." He said im-

provements in the county's education system will be a top priority during his term of office. He said he thinks people are "ready to make sacrifices" to upgrade the county school system.

"If money is what it takes, I'm ready. But I'm not yet convinced that money is what's needed," Rabon said. "If I am convinced, I'm prepared to spend it."

Despite siding with the Democrat majority in voting to defer consideration of the leash law, Shaw said he still supports the measure.

"I just wanted to give these boys a chance," Shaw said.

Asked what future conflicts he

believes might arise on the board, Shaw said implementation of the zoning ordinance will be the most controversial issue on the horizon. He said he still favors the law as modified, but expects changes to be made.

"We can work with these people if they'll let us," he said.

The board's next regular meeting will be Dec. 21.

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