

Forum Draws 30 Brunswick Leaders Concerned With Future, Cooperation

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Otherwise, suggested Chancellor James Leutze, "If we develop the same way as other areas have, we will always lag behind them. We have to seize the initiative."

Most discussion Friday centered on shorter-term, basic needs rather than a vision of regional cooperation.

County v. Municipalities?

Participants agreed with May Moore of Yaupon Beach on the need for a countywide telephone system and on a need for Brunswick County and its municipalities to communicate better and to cooperate.

Speakers also said they would like to see Brunswick County communities work together to develop a single political voice, to meet the need for sewer systems in communities from Belville to Calabash, and to create greater employment opportunities so that young people can remain in the area.

"Thirteen years ago when I came here we were unified. When we spoke to Raleigh it was with a single voice," said John Harvey, Brunswick County's planning director. "Unfortunately we don't have that today. We need to get back to that."

Diversify Or Intensify?

Participants were split in their perceptions of the benefits of travel and tourism. Brunswick County's single largest industry. Some thought the county should continue to build on that industry, while others saw a need for greater diversity of industries.

"Brunswick County is continuing to increase development of a service economy rather than industries that require higher level skills than bed-maker or grasscutter," said Joan Altman, mayor of Long Beach, the

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—John Harvey
Planning Director

largest of Brunswick County's 17 municipalities.

While agreeing that Brunswick County needs "good, clean industry," Commissioner Debbie Sloane Fox of Ocean Isle Beach continued, "but travel and tourism is what we've got and it is growing." As the industry expands it pumps dollars into the local economy. "That relates to people doing business here being able to help the county," she said. "Not all jobs in travel and tourism are low paying. The more the industry grows here the more nice jobs there will be."

Added Messer, "The closest tourist attraction in Belville is the USS Belville. The people in our community aren't relying heavily on tourism. What we need is wastewater treatment...Wastewater treatment is a need all over Brunswick County."

Sunset Beach and Calabash are working together on a regional sewer system that has also attracted the interest of the neighboring towns of Shallotte, Holden Beach and Ocean Isle.

Agreeing that the environment is something everyone should be concerned with, Fox said that Ocean Isle Beach's sewer system "is the best thing we ever did."

Horace Collier, mayor pro-tem of Long Beach, emphasized the need

for countywide planning in any collaborative effort.

"Brunswick County hasn't always had an active planning department. Planning is not always a popular thing," he said. "But if we're to band together as a group, we all need to recognize the need for planning."

Whether it's wastewater treatment in the southwest end of the county, or another issue elsewhere, speakers from the municipalities expressed a desire to see other municipalities and especially the county show an interest.

"My problems (as mayor of the county's largest town) are as much Brunswick County's and the other municipalities' as they are mine," said Altman. "We can't afford to ignore each other."

Sunset Beach Councilwoman Julia Thomas agreed. "I think she hit the nail on the head. We need to communicate with each other, to speak out."

Proactive Or Reactive

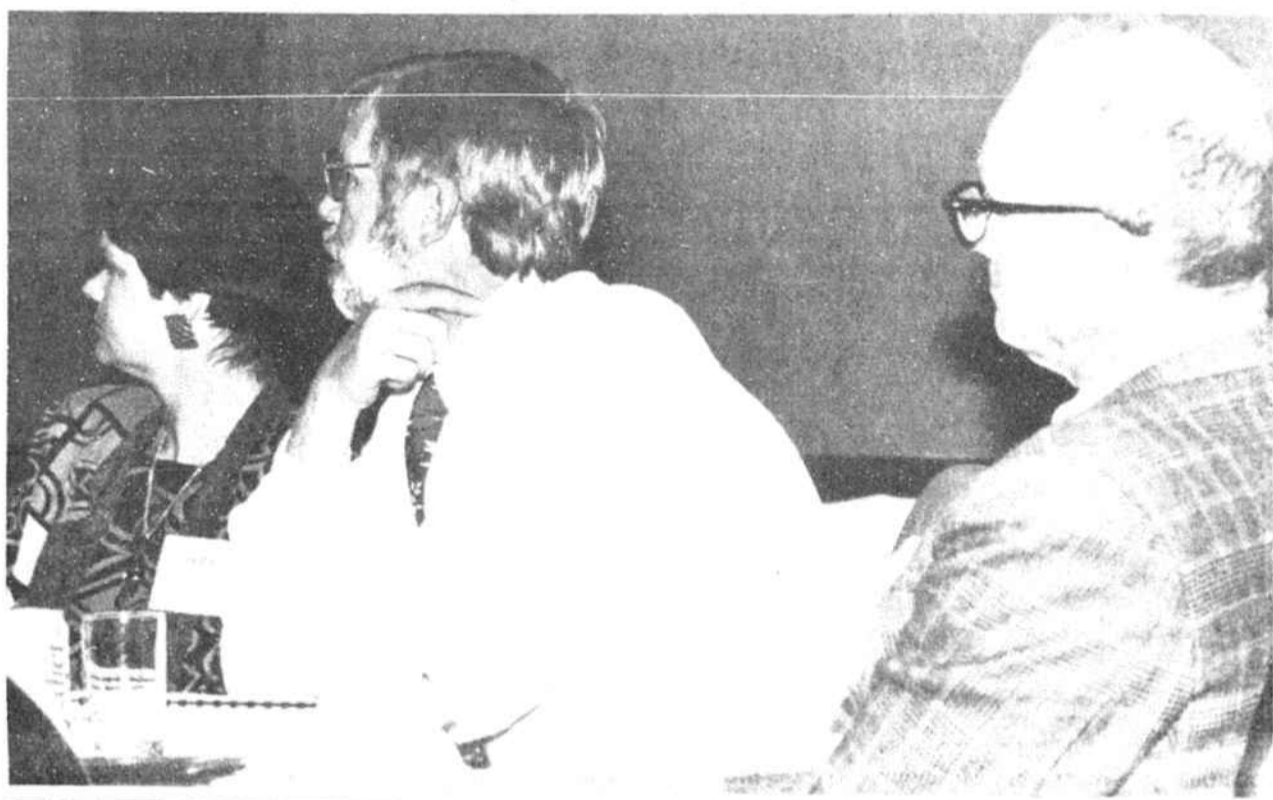
Billy Ray Hall, facilitator, told the group they could let state and federal agencies write the rules for them and simply respond, or that they could work together to help write their own collective destiny as a county.

"I think what we ought to decide is what we want to do in our rural county and then see how resources can be used to make that happen," he said. "There are thousands of ideas out there for working together, they're waiting for you. You need to get together so you can get more bang for your bucks."

Whatever course Brunswick County's elected leaders consider, he noted, must answer at least one other question, that of motive: "Is it really in the best interest of all the parties involved?"



KEN MESSER AND JOAN ALTMAN, in photo above, are mayors respectively of one of the county's smallest towns, Belville, and its largest, Long Beach, but their communities share some of the same concerns. In photo below, among the South Brunswick Islands towns' representatives were Debbie Fox, Ocean Isle Beach; and David Sandifer and Sid Swarts, Holden Beach.



Bird Island Zoning Plans Proposed

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Meanwhile, members of the growing Bird Island Preservation Society are working toward having the island purchased by either a conservation organization or governmental entity. The society's president, Bill Ducker, asked the town council Monday night to take a stand on the Bird Island development issue and to approach its upcoming workshop "in the same spirit and wisdom" that council authorized

its study late last year of the potential development uses of Bird Island.

That study, conducted by environmental consultants in Wilmington, pointed to salt marsh and freshwater wetlands, inlet hazard zones and strict flood insurance regulations as hindrances to Bird Island's development. The consultants identified 33 acres of buildable uplands on Bird Island which are "highly scattered and non-contiguous, making much of it practically unusable."

State Rep. David Redwine, D-Brunswick, contacted at his office in the State House last week, said he will be "looking for pots of money" from which the state might assist in the acquisition of Bird Island.

Price's development proposals currently are under scrutiny by both the state Office of Coastal Management and the federal Army Corps of Engineers who will rule on whether her plans comply with state and federal environmental standards.



Marion Warren of Ash, a member of the Brunswick County Planning Board, explains how rural residents would be affected by the county-wide zoning ordinance that becomes effective July 1. Warren spoke to the crowd of more than 60 people who attended a zoning workshop at the Waccamaw community building Thursday night (Feb. 25) along with County Commissioners Chairman Don Warren (left) and District 4 Commissioner Tom Rabon.

Farmers Speak Out Against Zoning For Rural Brunswick

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such a big land area," said JoAnn Simmons. "We could use this in the beach areas. But what you're putting down here tells me how I'll be able to use my land in 10 years."

"I may not be farming in 10 years," she said.

Marion Warren explained that while the zoning ordinance puts some restrictions on land use in rural areas, it could also protect land owners from undesirable development.

As the newest member of the planning board, Marion Warren last spring successfully lobbied the board to ease many of the restrictions on rural lands proposed in early drafts of the zoning ordinance.

"This end of the county is losing political power at a rapid rate," Marion Warren said. "Day by day, we are getting outnumbered by folks that don't know about Brunswick County. We need all this gobbledygook to protect ourselves against

"This end of the county is losing political power at a rapid rate... We need all this gobbledygook to protect ourselves against people who might buy a lot of land and develop it."

—Marion Warren

and minimum lot requirements. But land owners who engage in other activities on a farm—like operating a commercial welding shop or repair garage—would be allowed to continue doing so only as a non-conforming use in rural districts.

But several people at the meeting expressed concern that unless they live in one of the few small commercial districts within the RU zone, they could not open a new business on their property without obtaining a zoning variance. Applying for a variance currently costs \$100.

"You're saying that all farmers are exempt. But a few years from now, I might not want to grow soybeans. I might want to do something else," Russ said. "Now I'm going to have to pay you \$100 (for a variance) and there's no guarantee I'm going to get it."

Other land owners wondered if the zoning law would prevent them from giving or selling lots to relatives for home sites.

County Planner John Harvey explained that many of the development restrictions that have sparked concern in rural areas are governed by the county subdivision ordinance and not the new zoning law. He said once a farmer creates more than four building lots, the development legally becomes a subdivision that requires approval from the county planning board.

As the meeting drew to a close,

Virginia Bellamy suggested that the residents of District 4 should be allowed to vote on whether or not to have zoning in their areas. Rabon told the group he "would consider it."

Don Warren said Friday that the commissioners might want to decide where to enforce zoning based on the voting patterns represented in a non-binding referendum on county zoning held during the 1991 municipal elections. While the voting totals indicated strong overall support for zoning, many rural residents voted against the idea.

He said he would wait until all six public meetings are held before making a recommendation to the other commissioners.

Other zoning workshops were scheduled for Tuesday night (March 2) at the Andrews Chapel United Methodist Church, Wednesday at the county government complex in Bolivia and March 10 in the education center at the Leland Industrial Park. All meetings are set for 7 p.m.

Bellamy appeared at Monday's board of commissioners meeting to renew her request that the law be modified to leave rural areas left unzoned.

"The good Lord gave me enough of a brain that I can manage my own dirt," she told the board.

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—Virginia Bellamy

people who might buy a lot of land and develop it.

"If we go by the rules they play by, we can do that," he said. "Hopefully you'll have some of your peers sitting on the planning board and the board of adjustment. Either you're going to have your say by complaining up your sleeve, or like this."

The RU (rural) zone is the least restrictive land-use classification in the county zoning ordinance. It is intended for "lands not envisioned as becoming of urban or suburban character within 20 years." It is described as a "mixed use district" that allows homes, businesses and manufacturing uses as well as farms.

State law requires that "bona fide farms" be exempt from zoning restrictions such as height limitations

Near Normal Temps, More Rain Ahead, Meteorologist Says

Area residents can expect near normal temperatures and slightly above average rainfall over the next few days.

Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady said he thinks temperatures will average around 40 degrees at night ranging to around 60 degrees during the daytime, with around three-fourths inch of rainfall.

The transition is expected to be gradual, he said, with the 90-day forecast calling for colder and wetter than normal conditions. "That's not unusual given the weather pattern we're seeing," said Canady, referring to a winter "El Nino" weather system that has resulted in some unusual conditions this season.

For the period Feb. 23 through March 1, he recorded a high of 63 degrees on Feb. 23 and a nightly low of 25 degrees on March 1.

A daily average temperature of 54 degrees and a nightly average low of 31 degrees combined for a daily average temperature of 42 degrees, which is about 8 degrees below average.

Canady recorded fifty-six hundredths of an inch of rain at his residence near Shallotte Point.

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