

Sunset Okays \$1.56 Million Budget With No Tax Hike

BY LYNN CARLSON

Sunset Beach Town Council unceremoniously passed a \$1.56 million budget with no property tax increase for the coming fiscal year after a public hearing drew no comment from 19 citizens attending Monday's council meeting.

The \$951,253 general operating budget—up from \$819,429 this year—becomes effective July 1. It sets aside \$175,000 for future town hall construction, replacement of two police department vehicles and a computer terminal for the building inspections department.

Town employees would receive a 3.5 percent cost-of-living raise.

Also, for the second year in a row, the town plans to set aside \$33,000 in a capital improvement reserve fund for use following a disaster.

The \$609,949 water department budget, up from \$596,863, includes \$100,000 toward the town sewer project, \$57,000 set aside for future replacement and repair of aging distribution lines, and one new position.

The budget is based on one of the lowest municipal property tax rates in Brunswick County—16.7 cents per \$100 of property value. The tax bill on a \$150,000 home would be \$250.50.

Current property taxes are expected to generate \$335,176 in general fund revenue. Accommodations taxes paid on cottages rentals and other types of lodging will provide another \$300,000.

Along with the budget, council approved a package of building inspection permit fee changes, adding a \$25 fee for each re-inspection visit by town employees. Residential plumbing inspection fees have been divided into phases—slab, rough-in and final—with a \$25 fee each.

The board also implemented its first water tap-on fee increase since 1979. Inside the city limits, tap fees will increase from \$260 to \$300 and in the extrajurisdictional jurisdiction, from \$300 to \$345. The increases total 15 percent and will cover the increased costs of materials, according to Finance Officer Julia Thomas.

Waste And Pollution

Council agreed to spend \$5,150 for permit fees which would allow Sunset Beach and Calabash to pump wastewater to Little River for treatment and disposal. The Calabash Board of Commissioners agreed last month to pay an equal sum.

"There would be no construction until all funds are committed and a referendum has cleared," consulting engineer Jim Billups told council. "This just ties up (permission) so

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nobody can take it away."

Engineer Joe Tombro said a letter has been delivered to Brunswick County Environmental Health Supervisor Andrew Robinson arranging, per council's request, to test some of the town's finger canals to see if they are too polluted for swimming. Tombro said the waters would be checked for fecal coliform, fecal streptococcus and possibly viral contaminants.

Conservation District

A definition was unanimously approved for a conservation reserve zoning district to include Bird Island and the unzoned area between the mainland and the beach.

The zone would exist "primarily for the preservation of significant limited or irreplaceable areas which include major wetlands; open spaces; undeveloped shorelines that are unique, fragile or hazardous for development" and may permit "single-family, low-density residential uses" on high ground.

A public hearing on the issue drew no comment.

Other Hearings

Council sent back to the planning board a series of amendments to the subdivision requirements setting standards for final plat approval after Dean Walters, manager of Sea Trail Plantation, cited several concerns.

"When you get too restrictive, you slow down quality development with nitpicking," Walters said. Planning board chair Richard Good said the group welcomes more input from developers to make the measures practical.

Walters was the only commenter on that proposal.

Receiving no comment, and passing unanimously, was a sign ordinance amendment limiting direc-

tional signs to church or civic organizations which are not on the town's main thoroughfares but are in its planning jurisdiction.

'No' To Boot Scooters

Council declined, but scheduled a public hearing on, a request by the owners of Boot Scooters to add private clubs as permitted uses under the town zoning ordinance. The club would be located on N.C. 904 near the Pelican Square shopping center.

The owners have appealed a denial by the state Alcoholic Beverage Control agency of their liquor license application.

"If the ABC board permits them, that overrides your zoning," Town Attorney Mike Isenberg said. "But they're supposed to consider your zoning in ruling on the application."

He added, "They're entitled to a public hearing on your refusal to amend the ordinance." The hearing was set for 7 p.m. July 5 in the town hall.

No Nets In Canals

Sunset Beach police were authorized to assess \$50 civil penalties against people who obstruct canals with fishing nets or other devices. Violators will have 72 hours to pay, or a misdemeanor summons would be issued.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Memorial Day Tribute

Gayle Schadle and Patty Matheny, along with other members of the Sunset Beach Beautification Committee, proudly show the new Sunset Beach town flag, officially unveiled in a Memorial Day ceremony. The flag ceremony also served as a memorial to the late Cathy Peed of Sunset Beach, whose "setting sun" design, adapted for the flag, was created for the Sunset Beach Police Department patch. Memorial Day poems were recited, and Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts raised the American and North Carolina flags. A prayer was led by Jane Bye, Beautification Committee president. Schadle headed the group's Flag Committee. Matheny, an artist, helped with the flag's design and coloring.

ON CAUSEWAY

Cigarettes Cause Two Dozen Brush Fires

Sunset Beach firefighters have extinguished as many as two dozen small brush fires along the island's causeway in recent weeks, the result of cigarettes tossed from car windows, according to Police Chief J.B. Buell.

The N.C. Department of Transportation recently widened the causeway shoulders by about two feet on each side and planted new grass. State Coastal Area Management Act regulations required that the seeded ar-

cas be covered with burlap to prevent runoff, Buell said.

"Every time somebody would come by and throw out a cigarette, the burlap would catch fire," Buell said. "It's been expensive having to send a (fire) truck over there every time."

Buell said the grass is coming up now and the burlap "is just about all gone," so he expects the problem is solved.

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