

Holden Beach Holds Tax Rate At 15 Cents

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners spent about 25 hours cooped up in town hall over the past month reviewing the community's new budget before taking it to public hearing last week.

Apparently, it was time well spent. The board adopted the new spending plan last Wednesday after one of the calmest budget hearings in years. A couple of residents even praised the board's work.

"I think you all did a great job," Jim Lowell commented. "Obviously, because I have nothing to say."

Lowell and other Holden Beach homeowners face the same tax rate as last year—15 cents for every \$100 of property. The owner of a \$100,000 home will be billed \$150.

Town Manager Gary Parker's original budget presented in May featured a 16-cent tax rate, but cuts were made to hold the rate at 15 cents.

"I think it's great when you can do all the things this town's doing and not have to go up on taxes," Mayor Wally Ausley said last week. "We appreciate your vote of confidence here tonight."

The \$1.5 million budget includes a \$560,900 water fund, \$271,000 for streets, \$232,125 for police and

\$181,350 for administration.

The streets budget includes money to pave Sandpiper, Sandspur, Sand Dune, Lumberton and Marlin streets, and resurface Fayetteville and Clippership. Also in the budget is \$15,000 for two police cars and \$6,200 to renovate the town hall.

Holden Beach expects to receive \$225,000 in occupancy tax this year

walk construction.

Parker's budget included \$40,000 for sidewalks, but town officials later changed the figure to \$120,000 by taking \$80,000 from the occupancy tax fund balance.

"With this \$120,000 we'll just about be able to finish up sidewalks from one end of the beach to the other," Ausley said. Town officials haven't decided where the next segments of sidewalks will be placed.

One speaker at the public hearing, Jack Knight, said he would like to see the sidewalk extended past his house all the way to the east end of Ocean Boulevard.

Two other speakers, Crawford Hart and Don Pollard, said the town should budget more money for the police department. Hart objected to cutting funds for an all-terrain vehicle, while Pollard said the town needs more officers on duty during the summer.

To offset an increase in county water rates, Holden Beach homeowners will pay more for water this fiscal year if they use more than 2,000 gallons per month. The rate has been increased from \$1.50 to \$1.65 per 1,000 gallons.

Holden officials estimate the county water rate increase will cost the town about \$10,000. By passing the cost on to the customers, the town should recover about \$9,000.

"I think it's great when you can do all the things this town's doing and not have to go up on taxes."

—Mayor Wally Ausley

from tourists. It will be used for expenses such as sidewalks, police salaries and trash pickup.

Also using occupancy tax money, Holden Beach will add \$25,000 to the sewer/stormwater runoff capital reserve fund, \$10,000 to the recreation land acquisition reserve and \$5,000 to the town hall improvements reserve.

One of the few major adjustments made to Parker's original budget proposal was a hefty increase in the amount of money set aside for side-

May Join Gill Net Debate

BY DOUG RUTTER

Holden Beach Commissioners may join the growing debate over the use of gill nets along the beach on behalf of some residents who want to ban the fishing gear.

Town officials briefly discussed the issue last week and plan to take it up again at their July 6 meeting. By that time, Town Manager Gary Parker is expected to find out what other area beach towns are doing about nets.

In recent years, commercial and recreational fishermen have clashed over proposals to ban use of gill nets along the beach. The nets are primarily used in the fall when fish swim near the shore.

Sport fishermen argue that gill nets, which hang vertically in the water and snag fish as they swim by, kill too many fish. The nets also can interfere with swimmers and beachcombers.

North Carolina Fisheries Director William Hogarth was scheduled to hold a public meeting Wednesday night at the Long Beach Recreation Center on the gill net issue.

Hogarth has received complaints about nets from Long Beach and Caswell Beach. Effective July 1, he has the authority to regulate commercial fishing gear such as gill nets within one half mile of the beach.

Holden Beach resident Crawford Hart, a strong environmental advocate, asked commissioners last week to write a letter to the state asking for a ban on gill nets within one half mile of the beach.

Hart said the nets hurt porpoises that swim along the shore. He also said the nets interfere with baby sea turtles that hatch in September and October and try to swim out to sea.

Another resident, John Broadnax, also called for restrictions on gill nets. "There are times when there's so many nets in the water it's hard for the sportfishermen to catch fish," he said.

John Holden, the town's first mayor, said getting nets off the beach would make it safer. He said people can get hurt if they trip over lines anchoring gill nets to the strand. "They can be dangerous."

Commissioner Sid Swarts, an avid sailboarder, said the nets can pose a danger to swimmers. "They're not catching that much, and this time of year they're hazardous to swimmers."

Mayor Pro Tem Gil Bass, who manages Holden Beach Fishing Pier, asked Parker to get copies of letters that have been sent to the state from Long Beach and several New Hanover County beach towns.

Other Business

In other business last week, commissioners:
 ■ Reappointed three people to the planning and zoning board and one to the board of adjustment. Ted Rivenbark will serve a second, three-year term as a regular member of the planning board. Johnny Craig and Jim Lowell will serve one year each as alternate members. Dave Gibson was reappointed to the board of adjustment.

■ Agreed to ask the Brunswick County Health Department to sample water in the island's finger canals. Town officials want to know if it's safe for people to swim in the man-made canals, or if they're too polluted.

■ Decided to establish a parking area for handicapped people next to the Tri-Beach Volunteer Fire Department substation on Starfish Drive.

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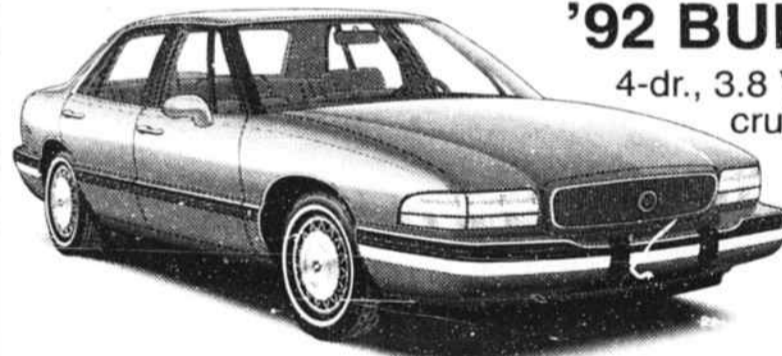
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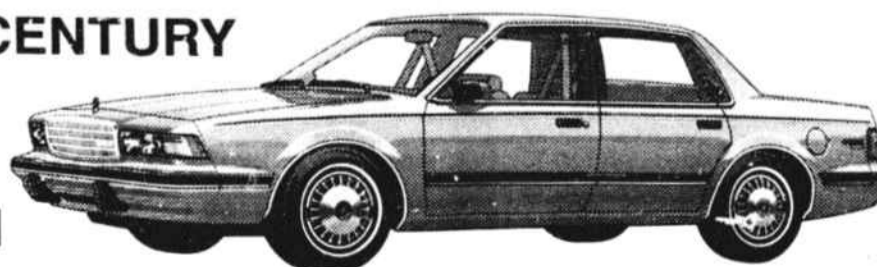


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