

Sunset Ends Year With Plans To Replace Outgrown Town Hall

BY LYNN CARLSON

Sunset Beach Town Council ushered out the old year by signing an architectural contract to replace its outgrown town hall.

Current plans are for construction to begin in mid-1994 on a new 4,500-square-foot town hall adjacent to the current facility on N.C. 179.

Inching Toward Sewer

Council devoted much of its energy this year to inching toward implementation of a central sewer system with its neighbor Calabash, a plan strongly backed by elected officials and criticized by a local taxpayers' organization.

In early January, consulting engineers for the town began seeking the endorsement of the conservation group N.C. Coastal Federation for a regional sewer system to serve as a model water quality improvement project. That endorsement did not happen, but the year ended with NCCF organizing a Wilmington symposium on integrating central sewers and stormwater runoff systems to control all types of pollution.

Town officials throughout this year have sought federal and state grants and loans to build a sewer system, and were disappointed to learn just two weeks ago that Sunset Beach and Calabash do not qualify for federal Farmers Home Administration grants of \$4.1 million each because their residents' average median incomes are too high.

FmHA offered a low-interest loan of \$18 million, but the town officials were wary because of regulations which prohibit the use of federal funds to encourage de-

velopment in floodplain areas.

Plans for the central sewer project evolved throughout the year. At the year's beginning, an integral step in the process was said to be purchase of the private Carolina Blythe sewer plant which serves Carolina Shores. When the town's consultants had differences with Carolina Blythe owner Billy Burnett and his \$4.5 million asking price, that plan was scrapped in favor of pumping up to 300,000 gallons per day of treated waste to Little River, S.C., for disposal through that area's central sewer system.

The first areas to be served under that plan would be downtown Calabash, Sea Trail Plantation and the Shoreline Woods development for four years, beginning in mid-1994, until a sewage treatment plant could be constructed in southwest Brunswick County.

Council held a public hearing on the sewer issue in late April when most speakers said they were worried about pollution and would favor a regional solution to the problem.

Referendums must pass in both Sunset Beach and Calabash before the towns can embark on any spending toward sewer construction. Those votes are anticipated by mid-1994.

That Old Bridge

The March 13 "Storm of the Century" renewed the push for a new, safer bridge across the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway to the island of Sunset Beach.

In the freak winter storm, about 100 cars carrying

day visitors were stranded on the island for more than nine hours because the pontoon bridge must be opened and tied back when winds exceed 30 miles an hour. Wind gusts that day reached triple-digits and were sustained in excess of 50 mph for several hours.

Council unanimously backed Mayor Mason Barber's suggested resolution asking for acceleration of a court-ordered environmental impact statement which is delaying replacement of the bridge.

The impact statement was ordered in 1991 as result of a lawsuit by island homeowners and residents who opposed a high-rise span being planned by the state Department of Transportation. In mid-1993, a Raleigh firm was awarded contract to conduct the study, which is under way and expected to take at least a year to complete.

During the first 11 days of July, DOT staffers clocked 81,147 cars crossing the pontoon bridge. Daily

traffic peaked on July 3, with 8,943 vehicles.

Using Land, Money

Sunset Beach's five-year land-use-plan update was approved this year. The document addresses what it calls "four key planning issues"—the need for a public sewer system, conservation of undeveloped Bird Island, the future of the town's pontoon bridge and maintaining a 35-foot building height limit.

The town's budget for fiscal year 1993-94 was approved at \$1.56 million, with \$175,000 set aside toward construction of the new town hall. There was no increase in the tax rate of 16.7 cents per \$100 valuation, one of North Carolina's lowest.

Elections

In the November election, incumbent Mayor Mason Barber easily fended off a challenge by Minnie Hunt. Incumbents Julia Thomas and Ed Gore were re-elected, but Bud Scramton was unseated by seven votes by newcomer Herb Klinker.



N.C. Coastal Federation Gets \$135,000 In Grants For 'Year Of Coast' Activities

The N.C. Coastal Federation has been awarded \$135,000 in grants to further its role in an effort to enhance management of North Carolina's coastal environment.

The Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation has granted \$85,000 and Carolina Power and Light, \$50,000.

The N.C. Coastal Federation, headquartered in Swansboro, has been designated by Gov. Jim Hunt as the private fundraiser for efforts related to the Coastal Futures Committee and Year of the Coast.

The Coastal Futures Committee

was appointed by Hunt to evaluate the state's coastal management program on its 20th anniversary next year. The governor has proclaimed 1995 the Year of the Coast to promote protection and wise management of N.C.'s coastal resources.

The Coastal Futures Committee will earmark the grants for its work and to boost public awareness of the importance of North Carolina's coastal resources.

Last October, Hunt told the committee at its first meeting, "We must make sure our regulations help us to

be good stewards. We have to balance our desire to protect and enjoy the coast with our need to share it with others. I think we have a moral responsibility to do the right thing for our people and for our land."

To date, the N.C. Coastal Federation has raised \$220,000 to support the Coastal Futures Commission and Year of the Coast.

To receive public notices of Coastal Futures Committee meeting or more information about Year of the Coast activities, call 1-800-232-6210.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Shalotte Recognized For Enforcement

Tim Phillips of the Governor's Highway Safety Program (right) congratulates Shalotte Police Chief Rodney Gause after the department was recognized for dedication to safety belt law enforcement. The state will give the department up to \$2,000 to purchase highway safety materials and equipment. During the recent "Click It Or Ticket" campaign, town officers issued 305 seat belt tickets and 15 child safety seat citations. Officers also made 17 educational presentations that reached 2,400 people in the community. Surveys taken before and after the program indicated that seat belt usage increased from 34 percent to 88 percent.

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