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Hertford, North Carolina 27944

Residents oppose group home

Planning board denies request allowing facility

By GINGER LIVINGSTON
The Daily Advance and
SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

There will be no group homes allowed in Hertford's C-2 (commercial) and office/institutional zones if the Hertford Town Council accepts the recommendation of the town's planning and zoning board.

The recommendation came on a 5-2 vote at the end of a two-hour, intense, often mean-spirited, public hearing attended by well over 100 people at the county courthouse last Tuesday night.

Now the matter rests with the Hertford Town Council. That board will discuss the issue at its regular monthly meeting on March 11 at 7:30 p.m. It is unlikely that the council will throw out the planning board's recommendation, based on recent history.

The decision wasn't a complete victory for the opponents, however. While the board's vote, with council's blessing, will keep group homes out of C-2 and O/I

zones, it will not automatically block requests for those facilities in other zones. A request to allow group homes in another zone would be forwarded to the planning board for review.

The public hearing was scheduled in response to a request to add group care facilities on Sunrise Lane, the street connecting Grubb Street Extended and Don Juan Road. The advertisement for the hearing stated that the board would consider adding group care facilities to the use district and permit their use in C-2 and O/I zones.

The meeting was also scheduled to add the definition of a group care facility to the town's zoning ordinances.

Just prior to the hearing, Hertford officials discovered an error on their zoning map. The property advertised for the hearing was chosen in part because it was zoned commercial on the map. It turns out, however, that the house lot is zoned agricultural/residential, according to town manager John Christensen. Even though the Sunrise Lane site could no longer be considered for a group home at the hearing, the planning board still debated whether group homes should be allowed in the C-2 and O/I zones.

The Criminal Justice Partnership, a subagency of



PHOTO BY SUSAN HARRIS

The old courtroom in Perquimans County overflowed with county residents during last Tuesday evening's public hearing and joint meeting of the Hertford Planning and Zoning Board and the Town Council. The planning board was asked to amend its zoning ordinances to allow group homes in two of the town's commercial zones. The board recommended that the town council not approve the request.

the Albemarle Commission, had asked FIRST (Forsyth Initiative for Residential Self-Help Treatment) to operate a two-year residential drug treatment program in its six-county area. Albemarle Commission Assistant Director Dick George said the proposed site on Sunrise Lane came closest to meeting FIRST's requirements.

FIRST program directors Steve Young and Mary

Hogden, both recovering addicts themselves, were invited to attend the hearing to explain their program.

FIRST is a non-profit organization operating a two-year treatment program. Residents take educational courses, learn job skills and work on beating their addiction during the time. The organization operates its own businesses in Forsyth County and other areas to provide jobs for resi-

dents and help sustain it financially. FIRST wants to operate a 10-12 bed facility in the region.

The program does not accept violent or sex offenders, according to Young and Hogden. While the courts can sentence people to the program, FIRST has the right to reject anyone they deem unsuitable.

Hogden said residents come to FIRST after completing a drug detox program. They cannot use drugs like methadone to cope with their addictions.

FIRST officials began meeting with the partnership about nine months ago to discuss the program. As a good faith gesture, they accepted eight area residents into their program, Young said. Two are from Perquimans County.

Residents who spoke against the group home cited reasons for their opposition such as bringing a bad element into a community already struggling with a drug problem and taking local jobs. Young said FIRST's work program is self-contained.

Some of the comments at the hearing were personal. One attendee referred to the recovering addicts as "drugies," another questioned the quality of the directors' clothing.

Misinformation could also

have been a factor in the opposition to FIRST. Although FIRST stated a desire to operate a 10-12 bed facility, word on printed materials circulated throughout the county stated that the program wanted to bring 30 recovering addicts to the county.

Some county residents called The Perquimans Weekly prior to the hearing and called the facility "a prison without bars." Callers said the residents would be allowed to roam freely and would take jobs away from county businesses. Callers were opposed to locating the facility near Brian Center, Miller and Meads Mobile Home Park and the Riverwood subdivision. Some feared property devaluation if the home were to be located in their neighborhood.

While the planning board turned down the request, at least two members said they are not totally against allowing a group facility in Hertford. Board chairman Carlton Davenport said a group home could operate under a conditional use permit. Member Bob Clinkscales said there was support at the hearing from some people for a group facility. He wondered if education about treatment programs would change the minds of opponents.

County gets WW II medal

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Perquimans County received what might have been the only award of its kind Monday.

On behalf of the national Veterans of Underage Military Service, Jack Hoffler presented the county commissioners with a 50th Anniversary of World War II Commemorative Medal. The award was accepted for the county by commissioner Charles Skinner.

Skinner praised Hoffler's efforts last year, when he brought national figures to Perquimans County for a commemorative Flag Day celebration at Perquimans High School.

Skinner credited Hoffler with having the contacts necessary to cut through military red tape and secure representatives from all branches of the armed forces for the celebration.

Hoffler said he did not know of another county that had received a medal.

CELEBRATION/M.B. TAYLOR DAY



PHOTO BY BRIAN MCLAUGHLIN, THE DAILY ADVANCE

Children waited along Dobbs Street during Monday's M.B. Taylor Day parade to wave at Dr. Taylor. The parade featured the Perquimans High School Marching Pirates, representatives of area churches, town officials and a Hertford fire truck. The celebra-

tion climaxed with a banquet at the high school with guest speaker the Right Reverence Clarence Carr, presiding bishop of the second Episcopal District, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of St. Louis, Missouri.

Students go on Odyssey of Mind

PCHS filled with competitors Saturday

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

All six Perquimans County Odyssey of the Mind teams earned the right to compete in the state competition in April at the Coastal Regional OM Tournament hosted by Perquimans County Saturday at the high school.

OM is designed to enhance the creative development of students by promoting problem solving, team effort, perseverance and sportsmanship.

The long-term competition requires students to work as a team to complete several tasks ranging from building a moving vehicle or structure that supports billiard balls to writing poems to performing plays.

Students must also compete in a spontaneous category. Team members enter a room with only the judges and are given a problem they must solve together quickly. They do not know what the problem will be until they enter the room.

Over 40 teams from as far

away as New Hanover County traveled to Perquimans for the tournament. Teams competed in three age divisions in five problem categories. The first and second place team in each division in each problem category earned the right to compete at the state level at UNC-Charlotte on April 12-13.

Perquimans has been involved in OM for seven years; however, this was the first time the county has hosted the tournament.

"Was was just thrilled with the tournament," said co-director Jeanie Umphlett. "Everyone worked together so well. We got compliments from OM officials, coaches and parents from across the region on our nice, clean school and organization."

Suzy Swindell co-chaired the tournament.

Perquimans earned first place in the balsa wood structure problem in all three age divisions. The high school team took second place in the invention problem. Central Schools' team earned the second spot in the Classics problem. In the tall tales competition, the middle school claimed second place.

All Perquimans coaches are parent volunteers.

Phillips named acting tax assessor

By SUSAN R. HARRIS
Editor

Veteran Perquimans County Tax Department employee Cheryl Phillips was named acting tax assessor and tax collector Monday by the board of county commissioners.

Phillips has been fulfilling the duties of both tax assessor and collector since former tax administrator Tony Jordan resigned in October.

According to county attorney John Matthews, state law required that the county appoint someone to fill the

position of tax assessor in the event of resignation or retirement through the end of the previous assessor's term. The appointee is named acting tax assessor. Jordan's term ends Aug. 1, 1997.

In small counties like Perquimans that employ one person to fill both tax assessor and tax collector posts, the combined position is known as tax administrator.

The commissioners praised Phillips' work since assuming Jordan's duties. She and her staff were credited with reorganizing the department

resulting in more efficient organization.

Work in the tax department is running behind however, because no one was hired to fill Phillips' position when she assumed Jordan's duties. November-March is the department's busiest time of the year, and Phillips told commissioners there are 216 hours of compensatory time now on the books as a result of being short-handed. The commissioners authorized immediate advertising for a clerk.

While commissioners told Phillips that help with the

back-log was on the way, they seemed surprised by Phillips' request for a pay increase to accompany her increased responsibility and state training requirements. (Phillips must earn state certification as a tax assessor).

The problem seemed to be the fact that Phillips is making \$2,500 more per year than Jordan was due to her 20 years with the department.

Commissioners chairman Mack Nixon said the board will review budget figures and consider Phillips' request at its April meeting.

Outside

THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
High: 60s	Low: 40s	High: 50s	Low: 40s	High: 40s	Low: 30s
CHANCE OF RAIN		BREEZY, CLOUDY		COLD AND DRY	