

**Board of Commissioners Conducts Annual Planning Workshop**

The Board of Commissioners met at the Trinity Center in Pine Knoll Shores on February 24 to review the status of the FY 02-03 budget and a preliminary budget forecast for FY 03-04. The Board also discussed several upcoming budget issues, including the need for a new Fire engine, needed repairs to the Recreation Center, parking lot improvements at the Western Ocean Regional Access, and others.

Town staff indicated that overall revenue collections for the current fiscal year (02-03) are coming in slightly over projections, while expenditures are on target. Town staff estimate that revenues will exceed expenditures for the current fiscal year, largely as a result of the additional half-cent sales tax that the County began levying in December 2002. This additional revenue was not anticipated when the Town's budget was adopted in July 2002.

The preliminary projections for FY 03-04 indicate moderate revenue growth, due largely to additional sales tax resulting from the beach nourishment special district taxes. Town staff project modest increases in operating expenditures in FY 03-04, and a return to historical capital outlay spending levels (the FY 02-03 budget, in an attempt to limit expenditures, included virtually no capital outlay spending). The FY 03-04 preliminary projection also includes the delayed replacement of an existing fire engine (at a cost of approximately \$350,000). Based on **PRELIMINARY** projections, it appears possible to avoid a tax rate increase in FY 03-04. The Town Manager has stated that it is his goal to present a recommended budget in May that maintains the current 18.5 cent General Fund tax rate. Such a recommendation will require careful scrutiny of expenditures, and a realization of the projected sales tax revenue increases.

The Town Manager will present the recommended budget to the Board of Commissioners at its May 13 regular meeting. A formal public hearing on the FY 03-04 budget is scheduled for June 3, 2003, and there will be several other public meetings where the public will have the opportunity to comment on the FY 03-04 budget.

**Parking Lot Improvements Planned at Western Ocean Regional Access**

The Town will soon be rocking and grading approximately half of the parking lot at the Western Ocean Regional Access, and will also install concrete parking bumpers to delineate parking spaces. The project will cost approximately \$32,000, and will be partially funded with grant revenues from the NC Division of Coastal Management.

The improved parking lot will accommodate approximately 125 cars and should be completed in time for the Easter weekend. The remainder of the parking area will remain as a grassy area and will accommodate approximately an additional 125 cars. The Town intends to improve the remainder of the parking lot as sufficient funds become available.

**Beach Access Parking Plan On Hold**

Emerald Isle, along with the other towns on Bogue Banks, is currently pursuing a federal Shore Protection Project through the US Army Corps of Engineers that would provide significant federal funding for periodic nourishment of Emerald Isle's beach. The project is currently in the Feasibility Phase, with construction tentatively scheduled for the latter part of this decade.

The Town is fortunate to have over 60 public access walkways along the oceanfront. Nearly all of these public access walkways lack parking, as they were originally intended to serve neighborhoods and overnight visitors only. The Town is fortunate to have two large regional accesses with parking for a total of approximately 500 cars, and another smaller access with parking for approximately 12 cars.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has indicated that the Town must provide beach access with parking every half-mile along the beach in order to qualify for maximum federal funding. The Board of Commissioners discussed this issue last summer and tentatively approved a concept whereby the Town would add additional parking spaces on the Ocean Drive right-of-way and other oceanfront rights-of-ways to meet this requirement. The Board directed staff to further develop the plan with specific locations for consideration at a future Town meeting.

As noted above, the Town is currently in the Feasibility Phase, and this phase will determine exactly which areas of Emerald Isle's oceanfront qualify for nourishment based on the economics of the project and the value of property protected. This economic analysis has experienced delays in recent months, and is not expected to be complete until later this summer. The Town is also awaiting further clarification from the US Army Corps of Engineers on exactly how many parking spaces will be required each half-mile, and we hope to have this clarification later this summer also. Because of these two significant uncertainties, the Town's beach access parking plan is ON HOLD until later this summer.

#### **Town Exploring Options for Yard Waste Service**

The Town currently collects yard waste twice a month (first and third Wednesdays of each month) through its contract with Waste Industries. Property owners are required to call Town Hall to schedule a pickup at their location.

The Town averages approximately 200 collections per month during the spring and summer season, and approximately 125 collections per month for the remainder of the year. Despite Waste Industries' best efforts, there are times when it is not possible to collect from all locations on the scheduled date, and this results in as much as a two week delay for some locations. There are also frequent instances when a property owner contacts Town Hall on the day after the last collection, and must wait until the next collection, thereby resulting in the yard waste remaining at the street-side for an extended period of time.

Town staff are currently researching this issue to identify ways to increase the frequency of yard waste collection while minimizing or negating any cost increase for this service. Staff plan to present a proposal to the Board of Commissioners as part of the FY 03-04 Recommended Budget, and if the Board approves any service changes these would take effect sometime after July 1.