

Emerald Tidings / Island Review – August 18, 2004 Print Edition

FY 2003-2004 – THE YEAR IN REVIEW EMERALD ISLE CONTINUES TO MOVE FORWARD!

FY 2003-2004 was another busy and productive year for the Town of Emerald Isle, and a great deal was accomplished to enhance the excellent quality of life that we all enjoy in Emerald Isle!

The Mayor, Board of Commissioners, Planning Board members, advisory committees, Town Manager, Town staff, and many concerned citizens all worked very hard to keep the Town of Emerald Isle moving forward over the past year, and all look forward to more significant accomplishments in the next year! We are all truly blessed to live, work, and play in such a wonderful place, and to be a part of the wonderful community of people that make up Emerald Isle!

Highlights of the past fiscal year (July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2004) included the following:

Town Poised to Receive Permits and Construct Bogue Inlet Channel Project This Winter

The Town and its consultants, Coastal Planning & Engineering, continued to work hard over the past year to secure necessary permits for the proposed relocation of the main channel in Bogue Inlet. Much progress was made, and the Town has enjoyed a productive and cooperative working relationship with the various State and Federal resource agencies reviewing the project.

The Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) and other environmental documents were completed and released for public review and comment during the past year. The Town also completed additional work to expand its jurisdiction, insure public ownership of any newly accreted lands attached to Emerald Isle, protect sensitive bird habitat in the inlet area, and develop monitoring and mitigation plans for any negative environmental impacts caused by the project. The current project plan incorporates the scientific analyses included in the EIS and other environmental documents, the various comments from the resource agencies and interested parties during the review process, and the Town's monitoring and mitigation commitments in an effort to insure a successful project with little or no negative environmental impacts. The Town is confident that it has adequately addressed the various issues and concerns associated with project, and is now in the final stages of the permitting process. The Town is poised to receive permits for the project in August / September 2004.

The project will relocate the main channel in Bogue Inlet approximately 3,500 linear feet west of its current location, which threatens several private homes and public infrastructure at The Point. Project construction is expected to occur between November 2004 and March 2005, and will result in the diversion of the majority of inlet flow through a central channel located equidistant from Emerald Isle and Bear Island. The project also involves the nourishment of approximately 4 miles of oceanfront beaches.

Western Phase Beach Nourishment Project Set To Occur in Conjunction with the Bogue Inlet Project

The Bogue Inlet project will provide the sand source for the Town's Western Phase Beach Nourishment Project this winter. Approximately 800,000 cubic yards of beautiful inlet sand will be placed along approximately 4 miles of the oceanfront beach between Pinta Drive and the Lands End clubhouse. The nourishment project will widen the beach in this area by an additional 50-75 feet, thereby completing the overall Emerald Isle Beach Nourishment Project approved by the Town's voters in a referendum in March 2002.

Emerald Isle Survives Hurricane Isabel

Hurricane Isabel impacted Emerald Isle on September 18, 2003, making landfall near eastern Carteret County. Emerald Isle was fortunate to be on the weaker, western side of the eye, and experienced maximum winds of 65 mph during the storm. Damage in Town consisted primarily of downed trees and signs, and damaged roofing and siding.

Town staff executed the Town's Emergency Operations Plan flawlessly, and were able to provide responsive services before, during, and after the hurricane event. The Town was fortunate that Isabel's path stayed east of Emerald Isle, however, a slight shift in the path further west would have resulted in more severe impacts in Emerald Isle. We were fortunate not to experience greater damage.

The Town's ocean beach and The Point held up relatively well, however, the Town did document the loss of approximately 128,000 cubic yards (or 7% of the total 1.85 million cubic yards placed) of sand from the 2003 Eastern Phase Beach Nourishment Project area. Fortunately, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the NC Division of Emergency Management (NCDEM) provided funding to replace the lost sand, which will provide additional protection for the next hurricane event.

FEMA Post-Isabel Beach Nourishment Project Completed Using Beaufort Inlet Spoils

The Town received nearly \$1.9 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the NC Division of Emergency Management (NCDEM) to replace 128,000 cubic yards of sand lost during Hurricane Isabel. The project was constructed in March 2004, and utilized dredge spoils deposited in the offshore disposal area adjacent to Beaufort Inlet to nourish approximately 2 miles of the Town's eastern beaches.

The Town actually received more than 170,000 cubic yards of sand due to over-pumping by the dredging contractor, and this material was placed on the beach between 9th Street and 19th Street, and between 25th Street and Carolyn Street. The FEMA project restored the nourished beach to its width after the original nourishment project was completed in March 2003.

The Town greatly appreciated FEMA's and the NCDEM's assistance with this project, and was pleased to restore our taxpayers' investment in our most important piece of Town infrastructure.

Coast Guard Road Flood Water Project Progresses, But Phase I Hits Budget Snag

The Town made great progress in its efforts to solve chronic flooding problems along the Coast Guard Road corridor during FY 2003-2004. First, the Town revised its strategy for completing the project, opting for a phased approach funded on a pay-as-you-go basis in order to 1) better evaluate the effectiveness of the Town's engineering consultant's recommended approach, 2) to provide immediate relief to the most affected areas in the Deer Horn Dunes and Sea Dunes subdivisions, and 3) to reduce the Town's future debt burden.

Moffatt & Nichol, the Town's engineering consultant, completed detailed design of the Phase I system, which involves the construction of pumps on Fawn Drive, Deer Horn Drive, and Conch Court, in May 2004. The Town earmarked sufficient funds for construction (based on the engineering consultant's estimate) and construction bids were solicited in June 2004. Unfortunately, the low bid for the project was significantly higher than the amount budgeted, and the Town rejected all bids. The Town has instructed Moffatt & Nichol to re-evaluate the design of the Phase I project, and will re-bid the project with potential cost-saving features later in 2004. The Town hopes to secure a reasonable bid for the Phase I project later in 2004, with construction targeted for completion by mid-2005, prior to the 2005 hurricane season.

The Town also took two other important steps to address Coast Guard Road corridor flooding problems. First, the Town secured a 3.2 acre tract of wetlands and uplands at the corner of Coast Guard Road and Wyndward Court for future project needs in October 2003. This 3.2 acre tract will likely be the ultimate receiving tract for flood waters pumped from Island Circle, which is slated for construction during Phase II of the project. Second, the Town submitted a grant to the

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the NC Division of Emergency Management (NCDEM) to fund Phase II of the overall project, which involves the construction of 2 pumps in Lands End and 1 pump at Island Circle. The Town expects to receive notice of possible grant award in 2005.

New and Improved Yard Waste Service Implemented

The Town launched its new and improved yard waste collection service in October 2003, and the new service has been well-received by the community.

The Town purchased a special automated brush truck, and now provides this service with Town personnel rather than contracting for this service, as had been past practice. The Town increased the frequency of collections from twice per month to once per week, and now collects yard waste every Monday throughout the Town. Warm-weather months have seen an incredible increase in the volume of yard waste collected, and the Town is often providing this service on other days during the week to keep up with the high demand. In the past, it was common for large yard waste piles to remain at the street for several weeks before being picked up. The new service has greatly reduced the time that yard waste piles remain at the street.

The Town has experienced a nearly 100% increase in the number of yard waste collection points over the past 3 years, and the new service is actually slightly less expensive than the continuation of past practice. If you have yard waste to be collected, please be sure to contact Town Hall at 252-354-3424 to get on the weekly list!

CAMA Land Use Plan Completed

The Board of Commissioners tentatively adopted the 2004 CAMA Land Use Plan Update in March 2004, and is awaiting final approval by the NC Coastal Resources Commission later in 2004.

The CAMA Land Use Plan is the culmination of nearly two years of hard work by the Town's Land Use Plan Steering Committee, the Town's planning consultant (Bill Farris), the Planning Board, staff, and the Board of Commissioners, and will serve as a guide for future development in Emerald Isle over the next several years. The plan was crafted with significant public input, and will serve as a basis for comprehensive ordinance amendments planned for the future, as well as for consistency reviews when CAMA permits are sought for new development.

The Land Use Plan's primary vision is to maintain the residential, small-town character of Emerald Isle in the future, but it also includes strategic initiatives to promote quality new development and re-development in certain areas of Town, and to maintain and enhance environmental quality.

Key Property Near Coast Guard Road / NC 58 Intersection Rezoned to Residential

The owners of a vacant tract of land at the intersection of Coast Guard Road and NC 58 requested and received approval in February 2004 to rezone approximately 5 acres of an 8-acre parcel from commercial to residential. This rezoning is expected to minimize additional traffic impacts near this intersection, and eliminates the potential for a large-scale shopping center at this location. The owners will instead develop new townhomes on the 5-acre tract located at the rear of the property, while the remaining 3 acres will remain zoned for commercial use. No specific development plans have been submitted to date, however, any specific plans will be thoroughly reviewed by the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners prior to construction of any improvements. On a side note, the owner of the 3-acre commercial tract contributed sufficient funds to the Town to construct a new 5-foot wide sidewalk along the frontage of the property, and this sidewalk will be constructed at such time that new development occurs.

New Water Tank Planned for Coast Guard Road Gets Relocated to Minimize Impacts

Bogue Banks Water Corporation, Inc., the non-profit corporation that provides drinking water to Emerald Isle, announced plans in mid-2003 to construct a new elevated water tank on Ocean Oaks Drive. The new tank is necessary in order to

improve water pressure in the western areas of Emerald Isle and increase storage capacity for times of emergency.

The Ocean Oaks Drive location generated significant concern among the residents in that area. After a complex series of negotiations between the Town, Bogue Banks Water Corporation, the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, and two private property owners, a deal to relocate the new tank to Emerald Isle Woods was completed in November 2003. The Emerald Isle Woods Park location is well-buffered by native vegetation, and will result in significantly less impact on adjacent property owners. Construction of the new tank is expected prior to the 2005 summer tourism season.

Town Continues to Add Sidewalks and Bike Paths / Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee Formed

Thanks to grant funding from NCDOT, the Town completed additional sidewalk segments on NC 58 between Live Oak Street and the Town Hall complex, and between the Eagles Store and Bert's Surf Shop in April 2004. These additional segments have resulted in a continuous 6 ft. sidewalk along the north side of NC 58 between the Eagles Store and the Town Hall complex, and the Town plans to extend the sidewalk west from Eagles all the way to Coast Guard Road over the next year by utilizing inmate labor.

The Town completed design work and applied for necessary permits for a new 10 ft. wide asphalt bicycle path along the south side of NC 58 from Merchants Park to Coast Guard Road in early 2004. Although the permitting process has taken longer than anticipated, the Town expects to receive necessary permits and construct the new bike path later in 2004. In May 2004, the Town applied for another grant from NCDOT to extend this bike path further east from Merchants Park to Black Skimmer Drive. Grant awards will be announced in 2005.

Sidewalk and bicycle path projects are now under the guidance of the Town's new Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, appointed in September 2003. The new committee has been working to promote healthy exercise through bicycling and walking, with new events such as "Wheels Around Town", a monthly leisure ride, and occasional group walks on the beach.

FY 2004-2005 Budget Reduces General Fund Tax Rate to Lowest Rate Since 1969!

The Board of Commissioners adopted the FY 2004-2005 budget in June 2004, and reduced the General Fund tax rate to 16.5 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation, a 1-cent decrease from the FY 2003-2004 tax rate. This tax rate has been confirmed as the lowest rate since 1969, and is perhaps the lowest rate in the Town's history. The decrease was possible due to careful expenditure controls and increasing sales tax revenues, and reflects the Town's commitment to low-cost government that does not sacrifice quality services or key projects. The FY 2004-2005 budget does include funding to continue current Town services and programs, and also provides funding for necessary capital equipment and important capital projects, such as the Coast Guard Road Flood Water Project and additional sidewalk and bike path projects.

Town Maintains Strong Financial Position

The Town continues to maintain a strong financial position, and is fortunate to enjoy high ratings from national bond rating agencies (A- from Standard & Poor's and A3 from Moody's), healthy fund balance levels (approximately 30% of annual General Fund expenditures), a growing tax base (in excess of \$1.4 billion), a high tax collection rate (in excess of 99.1%), low debt levels (less than 1% of total assessed value), and sound financial planning for future capital expenditures. The Town is in a good financial position to withstand natural disasters and economic downturns, and, barring unforeseen circumstances, the Town has excellent potential to stabilize the tax rate in future years.

Another Record Year for New Construction

FY 2003-2004 was another record year for new construction in Emerald Isle, with over \$37 million of activity. This represents a \$7.5 million, or 25% increase over the FY 2002-2003 activity of \$29.5 million. The overwhelming majority of this new construction is in the form of new single-family homes, with very little multi-family or commercial construction

occurring over the past year.

Other Notable Accomplishments

- The Town completed the dredging of the western entrance channel to the canal adjacent to Bogue Sound Drive in April 2004. Grant funds from the NC Division of Water Resources provided 80% of the total cost of the project.
- The Town completed construction of a new 16-space beach parking facility on Station Street near The Point. This project was funded 75% by the NC Division of Coastal Management. This new facility represents the closest public parking to The Point.
- Town staff completed, and the Board tentatively adopted the Town's first Hazard Mitigation Plan in January 2004. The plan is being revised to incorporate comments from the NC Division of Emergency Management, and will be re-submitted to the Board of Commissioners for final adoption later in 2004.
- Town ordinances governing piers and swimming pools were amended to mirror NC Division of Coastal Management regulations.
- The Town ordinance governing lot clearing was amended to eliminate a requirement to have a building permit prior to land disturbance.
- The Town amended its ordinance to maintain a maximum building height limit of 50 feet, but removed a prohibition on the number of stories allowed within that 50 feet limit.
- In May 2004, the Town began sponsoring the monthly "Beach Jive After Five" concert series at Western Ocean Regional Access. For more information, contact the Parks and Recreation Department at 252-354-6350.
- In July 2003, the Town entered into a contractual relationship with Municipal Engineering (Greg Meshaw, PE) of Morehead City to serve as the Town Engineer. The Town Engineer provides valuable assistance in the review of new development proposals, and provides routine engineering advice to Town staff.

Last But Not Least...

The Town is fortunate to have a quality group of Town employees, and the various Town departments continue to provide excellent day-to-day services for the residents, property owners, and visitors to Emerald Isle. The Town's Police Department, Fire Department, Public Works Department, Planning and Inspections Department, Parks and Recreation Department, and Administration Department are all committed to serving you, and welcome your comments, suggestions, and support!

All of us at the Town of Emerald Isle are proud of the Town's accomplishments over the past year, and we look forward to an even more productive year ahead! You can stay in touch with what's happening in Emerald Isle by reading Emerald Tidings in the Island Review, signing up for our email newsletter at our website, or by visiting www.emeraldisle-nc.org for all the latest information about the Town's activities.