

Emerald Tidings / Island Review – August 20 Print Edition

FY 2002-2003 – A PRODUCTIVE YEAR FOR THE TOWN OF EMERALD ISLE

FY 2002-2003 was an exciting and productive year for the Town of Emerald Isle. Much was accomplished to maintain and improve the excellent quality of life that we all enjoy in Emerald Isle, and all of us at Town Hall look forward to an even more productive FY 2003-2004.

Highlights of the past fiscal year (July 1, 2002 – June 30, 2003) included the following:

Beach Issues

Eastern Beaches Widened by 100 – 150 ft. – Nourishment Project Complete!

Several years of hard work by many, many people culminated with the construction of the Eastern Phase Beach Nourishment Project this past winter and spring. After initial equipment delays, Weeks Marine, Inc. began dredging on January 13, 2003 near 10th Street. Production was slowed by weather and mechanical delays during January and February, but Weeks Marine assigned two additional dredges to the project in late February and March, and the project was completed on March 27, a few days ahead of the April 1 deadline.

A total of 1.87 million cubic yards of sand was placed on the 5.9 miles of eroded beach between the Indian Beach town line and Pinta Drive. The most severely eroded stretches of beach between the town line and the Eastern Ocean Regional Access were widened by as much as 150 feet, while areas west of the Eastern Ocean Regional Access (that were in generally better shape) were widened by approximately 75 feet. The Town constructed a completely new frontal dune between 10th Street and the Eastern Ocean Regional Access, and planted new dune grass along the entire new dune. A total of 17 public walkways were also improved as part of the project.

The total project cost was nearly \$11.8 million, and the project was financed by voter-approved General Obligation bonds. The project is designed to provide 10 years' worth of erosion protection based on historical erosion rates, and should greatly enhance the ability of the eastern end of town to withstand future hurricane storm surges.

Bogue Inlet Channel Relocation Project Delayed by One Year, but Progress Continues

The Town had originally hoped to dredge a new navigational channel in the center of Bogue Inlet during the winter of 2003-2004 in order to relieve erosion pressures near the Pointe neighborhood. The original project schedule was admittedly very optimistic, and the Town was forced to delay this project until the winter of 2004-2005. The Town remains strongly committed to making this project a reality, and with the help of our consultant, Coastal Planning and Engineering (CPE), has made good progress over the past year.

The project involves the dredging of a new 14' – 16' deep navigation channel approximately 3,000 linear feet to the west of the current channel. This position is approximately equal to the position of the channel in the mid-1980s, and is expected to provide immediate relief from erosion at the Pointe. Based on historical channel migration patterns, this solution is projected to provide at least 15 years of protection from the encroaching inlet.

The Town, CPE, and the various state and federal regulatory agencies have met frequently and regularly over the past year to move the Environmental Impact Statement for this project along. CPE is nearing completion of the draft EIS, and a preliminary version is scheduled for release to the regulatory agencies in late August 2003. According to the project schedule, the Town plans to have a permit in hand for this project by August 2004, with construction expected to begin in November 2004. Approximately 1.1 million cubic yards of sand would be dredged, with the majority of the sand placed on the front beach between Pinta Drive and Land's End, a distance of approximately 4.0 miles.

Storm Water

Town Begins Design Work on Coast Guard Road Storm Water Project

The Board of Commissioners authorized Moffatt & Nichol Engineers of Raleigh, NC to begin design work for the Coast Guard Road Storm Water Project in December 2002. Additional testing and design began in the spring of 2003, and the Town is on schedule to complete the design phase by summer 2004. Construction of the 8 pumps and modifications to 40 acre site that will receive the storm water runoff are expected to begin by September 2004, with a planned summer 2005 completion.

The project will pump storm water from underground pumps at 8 locations in neighborhoods along the Coast Guard Road corridor to a 40-acre tract of land across from Sea Dunes subdivision on Coast Guard Road. The site, now known as Emerald Isle Woods park, will include a new upland forebay to allow pollutants to settle out before discharge into two natural wetlands that will further filter the storm water. Water pumped to the 40 acre site will eventually percolate into the ground water and make its way to Bogue Sound or, in extreme situations, may be discharged to Bogue Sound after treatment in the forebay and wetlands. The project has been well-received by regulatory agencies and environmental groups, and is considered an environmentally-friendly solution to the Town's storm water flooding problems.

As noted earlier, the project is expected to be complete by the summer of 2005. In the meantime, the Town will utilize portable pumps and fire hose to pump any excess storm water from the Deer Horn Dunes and Sea Dunes neighborhoods if necessary. Pumping activities from these locations were limited in the past because there was no suitable location to pump to until the flood levels reached the 14 inch level, at which time the Town pumped to the ocean beach strand.

Park Improvements

Emerald Isle Woods Park Dedicated – More Park Improvements On the Way!

The Town officially dedicated the new Emerald Isle Woods Park on May 2, 2003. So far, the new passive recreation park contains a few trails through the 40-acre storm water site, culminating with a beautiful view of Bogue Sound from a high ridge. Prison labor, Public Works employees, and Parks and Recreation employees did an excellent job clearing the major new trails during the spring of 2003.

The Town was awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in May 2003, and will match this grant with \$250,000. The total project budget of \$500,000 will fund the construction of a new access road and parking, a bathhouse, additional trails and boardwalks over natural wetlands, a gazebo, a picnic area, landscaping, and other park amenities. A start date for construction of these park features is currently undecided in order to most efficiently coordinate

work with the storm water project. The new park will eventually include a public dock on Bogue Sound and a canoe / kayak launch area if additional grant funds become available in the future.

Western Ocean Regional Access Parking Lot Improvements

The Town completed needed improvements to the parking lot at the new Western Ocean Regional Access in April 2003. Compacted clay was removed from the parking lot in an effort to improve drainage, and new gravel was deposited over approximately one-half of the parking lot. Concrete parking bumpers were also installed to better delineate parking spaces. The Town has received additional grant funds to complete the entire parking lot in FY 2003-2004.

Sidewalks

NC 58 Sidewalk Completed – First of Many Planned Pedestrian and Commercial District Amenities!

Construction of approximately 1500 linear feet of new sidewalk in the main commercial district was completed in late June 2003. The new sidewalk stretches from Bogue Inlet Drive across from Judy Street (adjacent to the new Sea Oats shopping center) to NC 58 and then east to Live Oak Street. The project was funded with NCDOT grant funds and Powell Bill funds, and has significantly improved pedestrian safety, access to local businesses, and the aesthetics of the commercial district.

A key element of the new project is the elimination of potentially hazardous perpendicular parking spaces on the Bogue Inlet Drive right-of-way near Jordan's House of Seafood. The Town collaborated with Jordan's to install new curb and gutter and replace the perpendicular spaces with parallel parking spaces.

Additional sidewalks are planned throughout the commercial district as additional grant funds become available.

Planning for the Future

Land Use Plan Update Progressing – Completion Anticipated in Early 2004

The Town's Land Use Plan Steering Committee has made great progress to update the Town's current Land Use Plan that was last updated in 1996-97. The Steering Committee, with the help of Planning Consultant Bill Farris, has completed its initial report entitled "Community Concerns and Aspirations / Analysis of Existing and Emerging Conditions". This report contains a summary of planning and growth-related conditions and issues, and also contains an analysis of existing and emerging conditions with regard to population, housing, the local economy, natural and manmade features, and existing policies. The Steering Committee has conducted public workshop meetings, and has nearly finalized a citizen survey that will be mailed to all property owners later this summer. The input from the survey, as well as that received during public workshop meetings, will be incorporated into the Steering Committee's recommended Land Use Plan Update.

Remaining work on the Land Use Plan Update includes further review of existing policies, classification of existing and future land uses, assimilation of survey results, development of policy recommendations and land use recommendations, and preparation of the final report to be presented to the Board of Commissioners and the NC Coastal Resources Commission. The Land Use Plan Update is scheduled to be presented to the Board of Commissioners in January or February of 2004.

The Town's development ordinances have been amended from time to time over the past 20 years, and no comprehensive rewrite has occurred during that time. The Town intends to use the new Land Use Plan Update to embark on a comprehensive rewrite and consolidation of the Town's development ordinances in the near future.

Community Appearance

NC 58 Committee Completes Work – Puts Forth Recommendations for Improving Pedestrian Safety, Enhancing the Commercial District, and Improving Aesthetics

After nearly a year of hard work and thoughtful debate, the Town's NC 58 Committee presented its recommendations report to the Board of Commissioners in May 2003. The Committee recommended a comprehensive system of sidewalks and bicycle paths (approximately 7.1 miles), pedestrian safety improvements, additional landscaping, improved lighting, and the promotion of architecturally pleasing commercial development.

The Board of Commissioners unanimously adopted this plan in June 2003, and the Town will be working to implement these recommendations incrementally as funds become available. The Town will make a significant effort to secure grant funds for these improvements in order to minimize the impact on our taxpayers.

New Solid Waste Program – Healthy Debate Ends With Relatively Smooth Implementation

In late March 2003, after 3 months of often contentious but healthy debate, and 7 open public meetings, the Town decided to implement a new solid waste program. The new program requires the use of standardized 90-gallon and 65-gallon roll-out containers, prohibits the placement of solid waste "racks" on the public right of way and in the front yard, and includes a new roll-back service for second homeowners.

The Town purchased and delivered approximately 4,000 new solid waste containers to property owners in May 2003, and began implementation of the new program on Memorial Day weekend. Rental agencies did a terrific job assisting the Town with the implementation of the new program, and the presence of overflowing trash containers appears to be a thing of the past. By late June, nearly all solid waste "racks" were removed from the public right of way, resulting in an overall improvement in the appearance of town streets.

A \$5 increase in the annual solid waste fee was necessary to implement the new program, raising the Town's annual fee to \$135, or \$11.25 per month, which is still among the lowest in the state. Property owners who did not have the standard container are being billed an additional \$40 (about half of the retail price) for each new container delivered.

Dunes and Vegetation Ordinance Revised

In June 2003, the Board of Commissioners adopted comprehensive revisions to the Dunes and Vegetation Ordinance. The Dunes and Vegetation ordinance is a section of the Town's Zoning Ordinance that primarily regulates the removal of natural vegetation and alteration of topography during new construction. The new ordinance requires that new residential development keep 35% of the total lot area in a natural state (no alteration of topography or removal of trees with a diameter greater than 3 inches). The new ordinance also requires that a building permit be issued prior to lot clearing activities, and regulates the removal of all vegetation within the oceanfront and estuarine setback areas. The penalties section was also strengthened, and includes fines up to \$500 per

tree per violation, as well as strict requirements to restore altered topography and replace illegally removed trees with significant replacement trees.

Financial Matters

Town Maintains Strong Financial Position – Secures Excellent Bond Ratings

In conjunction with the bond sale for the Eastern Phase Beach Nourishment Project, the Town solicited its first official bond ratings from national bond rating agencies. Moody’s Investor Service and Standard & Poors (S&P) recognized the Town of Emerald Isle’s fiscal integrity by assigning “A” ratings to the Town’s General Obligation bonds. Moody’s assigned an A3 rating, while S&P assigned an A- rating.

These ratings are excellent for a coastal town of Emerald Isle's size, and were higher than ratings for neighboring Atlantic Beach, and the City of New Bern and the Town of Washington, which are much larger than Emerald Isle. The "A" rating enabled the Town to secure a low 2.799% interest rate for the bonds, which will result in significant cost savings for our taxpayers over the term of the bonds.

The main factors contributing to the "A" ratings were the Town’s high assessed valuation, low outstanding debt levels, healthy fund balance levels, high tax collection rate, and the fiscally sound plan for repayment of the beach nourishment bonds. The Town is exceptionally proud of these ratings, and looks forward to maintaining and improving these ratings in the future.

Tax Rate Stabilized – 17.5 Cent General Fund Rate is Lowest Rate Among Full-Service Municipalities in Carteret and Onslow Counties

Due to uncertainty about the State of North Carolina’s FY 02-03 Budget, the Board of Commissioners did not adopt the Town’s FY 2002-2003 budget until late July 2002. The Town’s FY 2002-2003 General Fund tax rate was set at 18.5 cents due to uncertainty at the State level and a need to preserve the Towns’ fund balance. Fortunately, the Town was able to reduce the tax rate back down to 17.5 cents for FY 2003-2004 when the new budget was adopted in June 2003. The 17.5 cent General Fund rate is the lowest of all full-service municipalities in our area. The Town is proud to be able to provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost for our residents and property owners.

Town Keeps Grant Funding Coming In

The Town was awarded over \$450,000 of federal and state grant funds in FY 02-03, enabling the completion or initiation of many worthwhile projects while minimizing impacts on our property taxpayers.

\$ 18,750 Land Use Plan Update (Phase I) NC Division of Coastal Management

\$ 25,312 Replace Lee St / Seagull St Beach Accesses NC Division of Coastal Management

\$ 104,160 NC 58 Bicycle Path NC Dept of Transportation

\$ 30,000 NC 58 Sidewalk NC Dept of Transportation

\$ 250,000 Emerald Isle Woods Park NC Parks and Rec Trust Fund
\$ 4,000 Police Equipment Governor's Highway Safety Fund
\$ 24,000 Bogue Sound Drive Canal Dredging NC Division of Water Resources
\$ 456,222 TOTAL Grant Funding – FY 02-03

Town Departments Continue Excellent Service

Departments Provide the Day-to-Day Services that Keep the Town Going

The Town of Emerald Isle is extremely fortunate to have good people working on behalf of our residents, property owners, and visitors.

The Police Department continues to provide round-the-clock police patrol and emergency response with a police force smaller than most other coastal towns. The Police Department responded to over 6,000 calls for service last year, and performed approximately 30,000 residence / business checks. The Fire Department continues to maintain our exceptional "4" ISO rating, which is the lowest in Carteret County. The Fire Department responded to nearly 560 calls last year. Approximately 380 of these calls were as emergency medical first responders. The Town had a total of 23 structure fires last year.

The Planning and Inspections Department continues to thoroughly administer all State and Town codes, and completed over 2900 inspections last year. The Public Works Department performed routine maintenance on all Town facilities and fleet vehicles, maintained Town rights-of-ways and the beach strand, and completed necessary drainage, street, and sign repairs. The department oversaw the resurfacing of approximately 2.3 miles of Town streets.

The Parks and Recreation Department continued to offer numerous programs and maintained numerous recreation facilities, including the Recreation Center, parks, and ocean and sound accesses. The Parks and Recreation Department assumed maintenance responsibility for the entire NC 58 Corridor from the Cameron Langston Bridge to the "downtown" area as part of the Town's overall goal to improve the aesthetics of the commercial district.

The Finance Department effectively managed Town funds and administered the tax collection system. The Town boasts an exceptional 99.72% collection rate for real property taxes, and secured a clean audit for the year ended June 30, 2002, which was released in November 2002. The Town maintains an undesignated General Fund balance of approximately \$1.4 million.

Town administration, including the Town Manager and Town Clerk, provided overall direction to Town departments, managed the Town personnel system, and coordinated the Mayor and Board of Commissioners' activities and agenda.

Noteworthy Retirements and Replacements

In December, Public Works Director Bob Conrad retired with 20 years of service to the Town. Town Clerk Carolyn Custy retired after 18 years of service with the Town, effective at the end of June. In March, John "Artie" Dunn was promoted from Public Works Supervisor to replace Bob,

and Rhonda Ferebee was promoted from Planning Technician to Town Clerk in June. Kevin Reed joined the Town staff as Planning and Inspections Director in June.

Other Noteworthy Accomplishments

Staggered Terms Approved for Board of Commissioners

In a referendum held in November 2002, the voters of Emerald Isle approved the use of staggered terms for the Board of Commissioners. Beginning with November 2003 election, the top 2 vote-getters in each municipal election will serve 4-year terms, while the other successful candidates will serve 2-year terms.

Left-Turn Lanes Added at Lee Street

Acting upon a request from the previous Planning Board and Board of Commissioners, the NC Department of Transportation constructed new left-turn lanes on NC 58 at Lee Street. These new turn lanes have greatly enhanced the safety and efficiency of this intersection.

FY 2002-2003 A Record Year for New Construction

The Town permitted approximately \$29.5 million of new construction in FY 2002-2003. This is the most ever in one fiscal year in Emerald Isle, and is a 69.5% increase over the FY 2001-2002 total of approximately \$17.4 million. Emerald Isle's prime location and excellent quality of life, coupled with low interest rates and a poor-performing stock market spurred the significant increase. Planning and Inspections staff worked hard to keep up with the increasing demand for their services, and continued to provide excellent customer service.

All of us here at the Town of Emerald Isle are working hard to provide quality services, address community problems and concerns, retain our "family beach" atmosphere, and maintain a low tax rate; all in an effort to provide the highest quality of life for the people who make up the community of Emerald Isle. We're all extremely proud to serve this fine community.

Here's to a successful and productive FY 2003-2004! Please don't hesitate to contact us at Town Hall if you have any questions, concerns, complaints, or suggestions. We are here to serve you.