

Emerald Tidings / Island Review – September 19 Issue

Town Accomplishes Much in FY 2001-2002 / More Work Ahead in FY 2002-2003

The Mayor, Board of Commissioners, Town Manager and Town staff had a busy year in FY 2001-2002 (July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002), and much has been accomplished during that time period. This issue of Emerald Tidings will review the Town's accomplishments during FY 2001-2002, and also inform our residents, property owners, and visitors about some of the projects and initiatives we'll be working on in FY 2002-2003.

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!

Town Makes Significant Progress on Three Major Projects During FY 2001-2002.

Over the past year, the Town has worked very hard, and has made significant progress on the three biggest projects facing the Town – the beach nourishment project, the Coast Guard Road storm water project, and the Bogue Inlet channel relocation project.

Local Beach Nourishment Project Is On Go

Acting on a recommendation from the Town's Beach Nourishment Committee in July 2001, the Town coordinated a town-wide bond referendum, completed pre-project planning, and implemented a financing plan for a comprehensive, locally-funded beach nourishment project. The Town's voters approved the project in a March 2002 referendum, and the Town and its consulting engineers began work on the detailed design and other related issues after the referendum. The \$17 million, 9.8-mile nourishment project is scheduled to be completed in two phases, with the Eastern Phase scheduled for construction in winter 2002-2003 and the Western Phase scheduled for winter 2003-2004. Overall, the project is expected to add nearly 3 million cubic yards of material to the beach strand, providing storm protection for structures and the tax base, and a wider recreational beach.

Coast Guard Road Storm Water Project Land Acquired

In response to storm water flooding in the neighborhoods along the Coast Guard Road corridor in recent years, the Town and its consulting engineers investigated several strategies to reduce flood impacts in this area of Town. After much analysis, the Town's consulting engineers recommended a system that would utilize 8 pumps at strategic locations along the corridor to pump storm water runoff to natural wetland areas for treatment and infiltration. In August 2001, after consulting with various permitting agencies, the Town contracted for detailed site investigations on a 40-acre tract located between Cape Emerald and Osprey Ridge that would receive the storm water from the 8 pump system. In January 2002, the Town extended, and the owner accepted, an offer to purchase the 40-acre tract for the storm water project, contingent upon favorable site investigation results. These additional site investigations indicated that the 40-acre tract was suitable for the project, and in May 2002 the Town took ownership of the land. The Town purchased the land for a net cost of \$3.28 million, of which the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund provided \$2.4 million. The Town intends to complete detailed design of the system infrastructure during 2003, and construction is targeted for 2004. Total estimated design and construction cost is approximately \$1.78 million, and would be financed in 2004. The project is expected to significantly reduce the

duration of storm water flooding along the Coast Guard Road corridor during future heavy rain events. The Town will also be seeking grant funds to develop a passive park on the 40-acre tract.

Town Seeks to Relocate Bogue Inlet Navigation Channel that Threatens Point Area

In August 2001, the Town commissioned a reconnaissance-level study of alternatives to address erosion pressures at the Point. In December 2001, the study concluded that it was cost-effective to relocate the existing navigation channel approximately 3,000 feet to the west of the existing channel if the spoil material from the new channel was also used to complete the Western Phase of the beach nourishment project. The Town amended the scope of the beach nourishment project in February 2002 to include this project, and after the successful beach nourishment referendum, began work on this project. A consulting engineer was hired in May 2002, and immediately began work on the development of an environmental impact statement (EIS) for this project. Work on the EIS is ongoing, and meetings with various federal and state regulatory agencies and other stakeholders will be held throughout the EIS process. The Town hopes to complete the EIS and secure necessary permits in time for construction during the winter of 2003-2004, with dredge spoils from the new channel used to complete the Western Phase of the beach nourishment project.

These three projects have required a significant amount of time and resources during the past year, but the hard work has paid off. The Town is significantly closer to making all three of these projects a reality in the foreseeable future. Each of these projects represents a solution to major issues facing the Town of Emerald Isle, and the Town will be working hard in FY 2002-2003 and beyond to bring these projects to completion in a successful manner.

Town Departments Continue to Provide Excellent Service

The various Town departments continued to provide the various local government services that help to insure an excellent quality of life in Emerald Isle.

- The Police Department responded to over 6,000 calls for service, logged over 120,000 patrol miles, and performed over 15,000 business and residence checks during FY 2001-2002. The Police Department continues to provide these services with relatively fewer officers than other departments.
- The Fire Department responded to over 560 calls for service (fire and EMS first-responder), including 23 structure fires that were extinguished by the department. The Fire Department also worked to improve the Town's safety policies and programs, and continues to manage the Beach Patrol function. Fortunately, their emergency management duties were not called into action for a hurricane in FY 2001-2002.
- The Planning and Inspections Department completed nearly 2,600 permit inspections during the fiscal year. A total of \$17.4 million of new construction occurred in Emerald Isle last year. The Planning and Inspections Department also assisted in the review of numerous major development proposals and worked to improve the development review process.
- 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 Western Ocean Regional Access was officially opened and visitor amenities were completed, and a new walkway was constructed at Wyndtree.

- The Public Works Department performed routine maintenance on all Town facilities and fleet vehicles, maintained extensive 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 Finance Department effectively managed Town funds and administered the tax collection system. The Town boasts a 99.6% collection rate for real property taxes, and secured a clean audit for the year ended June 30, 2001, which was released in November 2001.
- 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. The Town initiated several special projects during the year, and work on these projects is ongoing.

Several Town Ordinances Updated

The Town continued its work to update various town ordinances in FY 2001-2002, primarily development-related ordinances. Town staff, the Planning Board, and the Mayor and Board of Commissioners worked hard in the past year to consider various issues, secure public input, and implement new ordinance changes. Some of the changes adopted during the past year include:

- A new ordinance prohibiting the construction of swimming pools within the ocean setback area. Swimming pools are still permitted on oceanfront lots, provided that they are not located in the CAMA setback area.
- Based on the results of a non-binding referendum, the Town enacted a new ordinance with regulations for stabling horses in the Town limits.
- Ordinances refining the Town's street construction standards and regulating the use of private streets were enacted.
- A new ordinance prohibiting the practice of "shining" for deer was enacted in response to residents' concerns.
- A comprehensive revision to the Town's storm water management ordinance was adopted, and includes a requirement to control a greater volume of runoff on-site, implements requirements for single-family residential construction, and regulates the filling of wetland areas, among other requirements.
- Townhouses and condominiums are no longer permitted in the Mobile Home – 1 zoning district.

Work was also initiated (but not completed prior to June 30) on other ordinance amendments, including:

- A comprehensive revision of the Dunes and Vegetation ordinance, which regulates natural and disturbed areas for new development.
- The Planning Board studied several revisions to the Town's Subdivision Ordinance, and recommendations were forwarded on to the Board of Commissioners.
- Greater regulation of beach bulldozing activities, in anticipation of the upcoming beach nourishment project.

Other Significant Activities

- The Town also made an aggressive attempt to enforce the new solid waste ordinance during FY 2001-2002. Although some problems continue, many rental properties have

improved containment of solid waste and eliminated eyesores and nuisances. The Town continues to enforce the new ordinance, issuing numerous citations each week. The Town continues to evaluate potential alternative solutions to the Town's solid waste problems.

- The Board of Commissioners appointed a special committee to study and recommend strategies to improve the appearance, safety, and functionality of the NC 58 corridor through Town. The NC 58 Committee was formed in April 2002, and should complete its work in early 2003.
- The Town continued its pursuit of a federal Shore Protection Project to provide for nourishment of the beach over a 50-year period beginning later this decade. The Town, along with other Bogue Banks towns and Carteret County, is currently in the Feasibility Phase. A new local law increasing the room occupancy tax to fund the local share of the federal Shore Protection Project was approved by the General Assembly in the 2001 session, and implemented in January 2002.
- The Town continued to utilize the Town's web site, www.emeraldisle-nc.org, to disseminate information about the Town to provide for an informed citizenry. All Board of Commissioners agenda items are posted on the Town's web site on the Friday prior to Town Board meetings.

Town Takes Advantage of Grant Funds in FY 2001-2002

The Town aggressively pursued grant funds during FY 2001-2002, and was successful in obtaining over \$106,000 for special projects in Emerald Isle. A \$32,000 grant from the Regional Wastewater Coordinating Council funded 50% of site investigations work for the Coast Guard Road Storm Water Project. A total of \$25,000 from two CAMA grants will fund the replacement of the Lee Street and Seagull Drive public access walkways, and another CAMA grant for \$19,000 will help fund an update to the Town's Land Use Plan. Finally, NCDOT awarded a \$30,000 grant for the construction of sidewalks along NC 58 in the central business district, and this work should begin this winter. The Town also applied for a \$104,000 grant from NCDOT to construct bicycle paths along NC 58, but an award decision has not yet been made. The Town will continue to aggressively pursue grant funds for needed and desirable projects in the future.

Town Adopts FY 2002-2003 Budget; Limits Tax Rate Increase to 1 Cent and Maintains Fund Balance

Despite early projections that indicated the need for as much as a 5-6 cent tax rate increase, the Town completed its FY 2002-2003 budget with only a 1 cent increase in the General Fund tax rate. The Town was able to set its tax rate at 18.5 cents by carefully controlling expenditures in the face of declining revenues. Overall, the Town reduced expenditures by approximately \$178,000 from FY 2001-2002 budget levels. A need to reduce its reliance on fund balance (i.e., savings account), the elimination of state-shared revenues by the Governor and General Assembly, changes to room occupancy tax distributions, and an increased contribution to Emerald Isle EMS still ultimately forced the Town to enact the 1-cent increase. Although a tax rate increase is never desired, the Town was pleased to limit the tax burden without reducing services. The Town worked hard to maintain its undesignated General Fund balance at approximately \$1.4 million despite an especially difficult budget year.

Town Officials Working Hard for Emerald Isle in FY 2002-2003

The Mayor, Board of Commissioners, Town Manager, and Town staff are already hard at work on continuing initiatives and new projects in FY 2002-2003. Some of the work on our plate for the coming year includes:

- Construction of the Eastern Phase of the beach nourishment project, scheduled to begin in November 2002. The Town is working hard to complete the project on time, on budget, with compatible sediment, and in the most environmentally sensitive manner practical.
- Detailed design and permitting of the Coast Guard Road Storm Water Project. An engineering contract is expected to be awarded during this fiscal year, and formal permit applications will be submitted. Work on park development at the 40-acre site will commence with volunteer labor and Town staff.
- Continuation of efforts to relocate the navigation channel in Bogue Inlet. Work on the EIS is underway, as the Town attempts to secure permission for a project that affects the desired change in the channel position with minimal environmental impacts.
- A comprehensive revision of the Dunes and Vegetation ordinance should be completed soon, and scheduled for public input and consideration by the Board of Commissioners.
- The Town will initiate an update to its Land Use Plan later in 2002, and work will continue over the next two fiscal years. The Land Use Plan will indicate the community's vision for future development, and serve as the basis for future ordinance amendments.
- The Town will seek to increase public parking available for beach access, in response to Corps of Engineers requirements for public parking for the federal Shore Protection Project, and as a result of a general policy goal to provide better public parking and access.
- The Town continues its efforts to improve the development review process to insure proper enforcement of Town development ordinances and a fair, efficient review process for applicants proposing new development.
- The NC 58 Committee's recommendations are expected later this year, and the Town will consider actions to implement these recommendations during the annual budget process and in the future.
- Additional evaluation of the solid waste program, including potential improvements to yard waste collection services.
- The Town will be working hard to stabilize the Town's General Fund tax rate with careful budgeting and maximization of available revenue sources.

The Town encourages all interested residents, property owners, and visitors to stay informed about Town government and get involved. Please contact us at 252-354-3424 for information about Town services, projects, and initiatives, or visit our web site at www.emeraldisle-nc.org!