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Libraries, residents detail their needs from county

By Tom Woerner, Staff Writer
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Friends of the Library Southport and Oak Island President Cindy Phillips speaks to county commissioners recently about growing space needs for the local library branches. (Photo by Tom Woerner)

Supporters of the Southport and Oak Island libraries asked Brunswick County commissioners for help dealing with what they say is increased usage of their branches

Friends of the Library Southport & Oak Island President Cindy Phillips spoke to commissioners during the public comment section of the regular January meeting on Jan. 12, and said the success of recent holiday events at both the Oak Island (Oak Island had more than 400 participants) and Southport branches of the library indicates there is a need for more space and resources.

“Some people say libraries are irrelevant, but these numbers show that is not true here. Our work is not done,” Phillips said. “We still rank behind similar libraries in our state. Spaces are no longer large enough to hold the people we have coming.”

She said she is confident help is on the way from commissioners.

“I thank you in advance for helping us keep up with the growing needs of our community,” Phillips said.

She noted several areas where the commissioners have already helped the library system, including additional funds which have allowed for more book purchases, more meeting space, additional staff members and other resources.

“You have helped us achieve the vision we have and I think you have,” Phillips said.

Growth was the other major issue among those who spoke Tuesday night. Close to 10 speakers offered their opinions about how to handle issues like water, sewer, roads and management of new homes coming to the area.

Josh Kirby, of Supply, told commissioners they need to look at how they handle issues relating to new people coming to the community, moving towards a more systematic approach opposed to handling infrastructure needs separately.

“The traditional model of development we are using is fundamentally broken,” Kirby said. “We need a reset in how decisions are made.”

He also said private citizens need to be considered more in the future.

“We need to begin open discussions and transition to citizen based decision making, and we need to treat public input not as interference but as essential feed back,” Kirby said.

Southport resident Shirley Sullivan reinforced Kirby’s remarks relating to public opinion.

“It appears there is minimal concern for citizen concerns,” Sullivan said.

Carl Parker, of Leland and president of the Brunswick County NAACP, focused on the issue of clean water. He used examples such as the Emancipation Proclamation to imply minorities are being treated unfairly.

“Some of our residents don’t have access to clean water,” Parker said. “For 22 years, we have kicked the same can around to get water lines to residents who can’t even wash their babies with clean water. We want a more fair way to get water lines where there are no water lines now.”

He urged commissioners to take charge of the water issue.

“We want you to look at the situation as an overseer and bring us clean water,” Parker said.

Sarah Singer also said she has concerns about the water here.

“Bathing my children, washing my dishes and enjoying our beautiful ocean is dangerous because of dangerous chemicals,” she said.

She also said she hopes commissioners are held responsible for failing to act on the issue.

“The first thing I notice is voices of citizens seems to fall on deaf ears,” Singer said. “You are doing a disservice to the people who elected you and it should end with the next election.”

In action items, the board followed staff recommendations and changed storm water regulations to include 100 year storm events.

Prior to Monday’s action post development runoff could not exceed pre development runoff for one year, 10 year and 25 storms.

Staff recommended and the board approved adding 100-year storms to the list.

The board considered an exemption for smaller individual properties. The ultimate decision included all properties in the new regulations.