



Brayton Willis, chairman of the North Carolina Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail Project, discusses the proposed segment of the trail to run through Brunswick County.



Mayor Joe Pat Hatem, Mayor Pro Tem Karen Mosteller, and Alderman Lowe Davis are joined by representatives of the Southport Forestry Committee as the mayor proclaims Arbor Day to be observed April 30.

Photo by Gary Pethe

## Southport Board of Aldermen

# City endorses ferry purchase by Authority

By Gary Pethe  
Staff Writer

The Southport Board of Aldermen at its April 8 meeting unanimously approved a resolution supporting purchase of the Bald Head Island ferry system by the Bald Head Transportation Authority.

“This is something we have all supported, including Bald Head, the county commissioners and the City of Southport,” said Southport Mayor Joseph Hatem, MD, prior to the board vote. “We have a vested interest in it— and we have three people here tonight who are on the board of the Authority who have been advocating for this. It has been four years in the making.”

As stated in the resolution, the Bald Head Island Village Council now wishes to purchase the ferry system “on the basis that it exists to serve the property owners, visitors, non-profits and businesses that compose the unique community of Bald Head Island.” The resolution then counters that claim, noting the village council is elected by permanent residents of the village who constitute less than 10 percent of annual ferry system ridership.

The resolution further notes “Southport continues to believe that the Authority is the best entity to own and operate the ferry system for the benefit of the citizens of the entire region, including the employees and contractors who work on Bald Head Island, most of whom live in Southport, and for the assets of the ferry system that are located in Southport.”

Should the Village of Bald Head Island pursue purchase of the ferry system, Southport intends to explore “acquiring and owning” that portion of the system located within Southport city limits, according to the resolution.

Copies of the approved document will be supplied to the Local Government Commission, the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners and the Bald Head Island Village Council.

### Reimbursement coming

“We’ve got a lot of money coming our way,” said Gordon Hargrove, Southport City Manager, as he updated the Board of Aldermen on status of FEMA and state reimbursement to Southport for repair and rebuilding costs resulting from Hurricane Isaias in late summer 2020. He noted that nearly \$1.7 million from the general fund had to be used to cover the costs. “So getting that money back is really going to help us on some of the infrastructure

improvements we have to make.”

Projects reviewed by FEMA and turned over to the state’s emergency management division to cut checks within the next 7-10 business days include:

- \$558,000 for debris removal;
  - \$51,298 for emergency protective measures;
  - \$3,863 for repair of Southport city buildings and equipment;
  - \$298,000 for restoration of electrical service;
  - \$92,245 for parks and recreation facilities.
- Hargrove noted this project is currently moving through the FEMA process and is taking longer because the city has applied for additional mitigation funds to help prevent damage from future storms.

Hargrove added that funding for repair of the washout and retaining wall along Bay Street is also pending final FEMA review. That project should be turned over to NC emergency management for cutting a check “within the next five business days,” he added.

The city is also expecting reimbursement for expenses dating back nearly two years to Hurricane Dorian. According to Hargrove, Southport will soon receive \$250,000 for electrical restoration necessitated by that August 2019 hurricane.

“This is evidence that, when you follow the process set forth by FEMA requirements, you can get reimbursed for the work that you do—I can’t emphasize that enough,” Hargrove summarized. He thanked city staffers who came together “to push this through.”

He also announced that an additional \$1.2 million is in route to the city from the American Recovery Act. It will come in two \$600,000 payments within the next 30 to 45 days to be used to mitigate any COVID-19 impacts the city has experienced. “I understand it’s not going to be held to very strict parameters,” Hargrove added. “But we just can’t spend it ‘willy-nilly’ either.”

### Yacht Basin recommendations

The Yacht Basin Overlay District Committee presented initial recommendations to the board at the April 8 meeting. As the ad hoc committee – formed at the request of Hatem – wrapped up its work focusing on traffic patterns and pedestrian walkways in the popular Yacht Basin area, co-chair Karen Mosteller, Mayor Pro Tem, noted the group was unable to reach a consensus regarding walkway location.

As a result, two alternative plans were presented. The main difference in the plans is the positioning of the pedestrian walkway along Yacht Basin Drive. Option A calls for a walkway on the “land” (East) side of Yacht Basin Drive, while option B locates the walkway on the “water” (West) side. According to Mosteller, because of uncertainty regarding costs, the committee left the final decision up to the Board of Aldermen and city staff.

She noted, however, that the committee did agree on most other identified issues:

- Keeping Yacht Basin Drive and the adjoining block of West Bay Street (from Caswell Avenue) one way;
- Designating a five-foot wide pedestrian walkway;
- Taking advantage of city rights-of-way
- Relocating Yacht Basin Drive consistent with the city’s 20-foot right of way;
- Marking road surfaces to delineate pedestrian paths and traffic directions;
- Creating a raised planting bed in the triangular area beside the parallel parking spaces at the end of West Moore Street currently marked “no parking.” This will allow for signage noting pedestrians have the right of way to be moved closer to the traffic lane.
- Changing the speed limit to 15 MPH starting at the last block of West Bay and West Moore Streets, and Yacht Basin Drive through Brunswick Street;
- Adding more lighting in the area.

The committee’s final recommendations will be presented at the May Board of Aldermen Meeting.

### City proclamations

Hatem, on behalf of the Board of Aldermen, presented two city proclamations during the April 8 meeting. The first was to proclaim April 30 as Arbor Day in the city and to urge all residents to celebrate and support efforts to protect trees and woodlands.

“I urge all citizens to plant trees to gladden the heart and promote the well being of this and future generations,” Hatem said. Making the proclamation, he was joined by representatives of the Southport Forestry Committee, as well as Mayor Pro Tem Mosteller and Alderman Lowe Davis, who are board liaisons to the committee.

The Mayor’s second proclamation was to recognize the week of April 5-11 as National Public Health Week. He noted the week’s theme is “building bridges to better health.” Additionally, the American Public Health As-

sociation, through its sponsorship of National Public Health Week since 1955, has been educating the public, policymakers and public health professionals about improving public health.

### “A pathway to freedom”

Brayton Willis, chairman of the North Carolina Gullah Geechee Greenway/Blueway Heritage Trail Project, presented plans for the proposed segment of the trail through Brunswick County. This portion of the trail will run from Southport to Navassa where it will join with the Wilmington segment of the East Coast Greenway. The overall East Coast trail runs through a cultural corridor extending from Jacksonville Florida to Jacksonville, North Carolina. The trail is referred to as “a pathway to freedom.”

“The corridor was created to recognize, sustain and celebrate the important contributions made to American culture and history by African Americans, known as the Gullah Geechee, who settled in the coastal counties of South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida,” Willis said.

Corridor creation will also help interpret the story of the Gullah Geechee people and preserve their folklore, arts, crafts and music. Gullah Geechee sites, historical data, artifacts and objects associated with their culture will be identified and preserved to educate the public, according to Willis. The corridor was designated by an act of Congress in 2006.

“The most important part of our outreach is to build an army of supporters that will make this happen,” Willis concluded.

### The Haven approved

Aldermen approved the preliminary plat application for The Haven, an eight-lot subdivision on 2.89 acres at Burrington Avenue and Leonard Street. At its March 25 meeting the Southport Planning and Zoning Board voted to recommend approval of the preliminary plat by the Board of Aldermen. According to Thomas Lloyd, City Planner, departmental staff also recommended approval.

The engineering consultant for Premier Homes, the developer, came back to the planning board with a tree plan that saved or mitigated more trees than originally required. “All the mitigation trees are in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) native tree list,” Lloyd noted. “The developer has worked in good faith with the planning board.”