

## Swan Beach fighting development

By ROBERT KELLY-GOSS

Monday, November 07, 2005

Currituck's Swan Beach residents have drawn a line in the sand in hopes of stopping future commercial development along the county's largely undeveloped northern beaches.

Swan Beach Property Owners Association will go before Currituck's planning board Tuesday night asking for an amendment to the county's Table of Permissible Uses, according to association president John Howland.

Howland said his group is asking the county to no longer allow offices, private outdoor recreation facilities, horseback riding and other uses associated with commercial ventures throughout the Outer Banks off-road region.

"This is primarily to try and restrict the ability to sneak commercial development into the area," Howland said. "It is a response to (developer) Doug Twiddy having set up a real estate office in the old Coast Guard station."

Gary Ferguson, Currituck's planning director, said Swan Beach, North Swan Beach and Carova Beach are zoned for residential uses. However, there are allowances for low-traffic businesses such as Twiddy's real estate office.

That was done, he said, to avoid what is known as a "transition district." A transition district would allow clusters of low traffic business to be situated between residential development. Ferguson said "to avoid the transition district the (Unified Development Ordinance) was devised to allow these minimum impact businesses to get in with a conditional use permit."

Ferguson said county officials have allowed certain uses, such as a real estate office, with the condition that buildings take on the appearance of a residence. Because Twiddy converted the old Coast Guard station, Ferguson said his office is inconspicuous.

"It is not one of those things that looks like a McDonald's," Ferguson said. "It doesn't take on a true commercial atmosphere."

Howland said his group sees the allowance as a "loophole" and they want to "plug it up."

Swan Beach property owners – 175 people – are concerned that current allowances will have a trickle effect and lead to larger commercial projects.

Last spring Twiddy and landowner Gerald Friedman were working with the county in hopes of developing a hotel, convenience store and restaurant. Residents of the off-road area objected and said the northern beaches are not zoned for commercial development and never should be.

Homeowners told the Currituck Board of Commissioners they moved to the area because of its "unique" undeveloped, roadless beachfront environment; and they want to keep it that way, Howland said.

"The idea of a hotel really got all the residents and property owners up there awake to the fact that some people are not interested in preserving the unique environment," said Howland.

Commercial development coupled with plans to grade a road through residential portions of the northern beaches have rallied homeowners associations to fight potential development. Many believe a sand-graded road is a precursor to commercial projects.

Fruitville Civic Homeowners Association President Tom Hudak said his group supports Swan Beach's efforts. Fruitville also has an attorney on retainer prepared to fight any commercial development along the northern beaches.

"Our attorney has done research and we are prepared if it (commercial development) comes up," said Hudak.

Board of commission members have expressed support for commercial development throughout the northern beaches.

At a work session last spring, Commissioner Paul O'Neal said much of the land platted for development along the northern beaches in the 1960s was set aside for commercial use. O'Neal questioned the ethics of not allowing those property owners the right to pursue plans for commercial development.