

County studying CSI airport site for emergency communications center

By MARY HELEN GOODLOE-MURPHY

Dare's communications and emergency management operations have outgrown their space, agency heads told Dare's board of commissioners.

"It's obvious we need more space," said Dare Sheriff Rodney Midgett describing the communications set-up at Dare's Detention Center.

Sandy Sanderson, the county's emergency management administrator, voiced the same concern, saying the operation has outgrown the ability to provide services.

The two agency heads presented a proposal to co-locate communications and emergency management to a new facility on the campus of the Coastal Studies Institute at the Dare regional airport.

For the institute, the proposal offers the opportunity to collect real time and perishable data during emergencies. Institute

director Nancy White described the proposal as an "amazingly unique opportunity." She reported the institute's board of directors supported the proposal.

Envisioned is a 10,000 square foot, two story building to house both communications and emergency management. Keeping the two operations yoked is advocated by Midgett and Sanderson.

"You're looking at about a \$3 million deal," said commissioner Mike Johnson, who advocated action.

The Coastal Studies Institute is in the detailed planning stage

for its research and residential buildings. The institute would engineer for the proposed county project during the design for campus infrastructure.

Commissioner Richard Johnson said he switched from an opponent of the plan to a supporter. "It's a perfect situation," said Johnson. In emergencies, the campus would provide access to residential and classroom facilities.

"We need to make a commitment," said Johnson.

The commissioners have a

See SITE, Page 11A

SITE

(continued from Page 1A)

three-week window to make a decision about relocating the operations in order for the institute to proceed with engineering. A building footprint would be located on the campus and infrastructure designed to accommodate it. The county could build at any time in the future.

The proposal was referred to the board's capital improvements committee.

In addition to this new building proposal, the capital improvements committee is struggling to figure out how to pay for a required 800-megahertz communication system, estimated to cost between \$11 and \$15 million. To help with financing this system or the building, about \$1 million will be freed up from the E911 surcharge fund. Under state legislation, that fund will be freed up for expenditures for any governmental purpose, reported Dare's finance director David Clawson.

Midgett reported that if a new building is built the old communications operation, which is compatible with the new system, could serve as back-up.

Finance projections show the county's capital reserve fund

tapped dry over the next several years. With the down turn in real estate sales, the reserve fund is depleted with existing debt pay-backs and already scheduled capital expenditures. By 2010, the capital reserve fund is expected to have a fund balance of \$871,734 on projected transfer tax revenue of \$5.01 million without interest income.

An example of the tight capital budget was on the board's docket.

Furniture, fixtures and equipment for the Hatteras Satellite office now under construction is estimated at \$182,524, well above the \$50,000 budgeted by Clawson using a percentage based on projected expenditures at the Administration building, also under construction.

Clawson identified five sources for the needed additional funding. Two came from accounts in the Series 2007 Certificates of Participation and two from under budget purchases and the under-budget completion of the Solid Waste Transfer station.

The commissioners adopted two capital project budget amendments transferring \$137,797 to the Hatteras project for furniture, fixtures and equipment and augmenting the project's \$60,000 contingency fund with \$5,273. Two other sources of funds totaling \$350,504 are reserved pending completion of the administration building and courthouse renovation.

In other money actions on Nov. 5, Dare's commissioners unanimously approved in the consent agenda:

- additional state and federal funding of \$36,291 in Smart Start funds used for day care.

- budgeted a \$7,500 grant from the Outer Banks Hospital Development Council for Dare's Respite Care program, which is grant-and donation-funded.

- extended the Water Tower Antenna Space Lease Agreement between the county and United States Cellular Corporation for three years under existing terms and conditions and amended the lease to note the current operating entity for the cellular phone

provider is USCOC of North Carolina RSA #7, Inc.

The commissioners also accepted in the consent agenda receipt of \$20,596 for eight handheld 800-megahertz radios from the State Highway Patrol, the administering agency for Homeland Security funds.

The radios are operative in Bodie Island, northern Dare and west to Columbia, Swan Quarter and Engelhard and north into Currituck and in Camden. State Highway Troopers are using the Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) system in northern Dare. The patrol will purchase the radios on behalf of the county at a cost of \$2,574.50 each from Motorola, the state's sole provider. Distribution of the eight radios was not announced.