

An extensive investigation by the Accomack County Sheriff's Office has led to the arrest of two juveniles in connection with several crimes, including gang-related activity.

According to Sheriff Larry Giddens, the cases included the April 18 robbery of a BB&T Bank customer, the April 12 theft of a vehicle and the February 11 breaking and entering and theft of a firearm from a residence. The investigation also led to the recovery of two firearms.

Giddens said one of the juveniles was charged with robbery, use of a handgun while committing a robbery, two counts of possession of a handgun having been convicted of an offense, two counts of under age possession of a firearm, carrying a concealed weapon, grand larceny of a vehicle, breaking and entering and larceny of a handgun.

The second juvenile has been charged with robbery, use of a handgun while committing robbery, possession of a handgun having been convicted of an offense, underage possession of a firearm, and robbery while actively participating in or being a member of a criminal street gang.

The juveniles are being held at the Norfolk Juvenile Detention Center pending trial.

Sheriff Giddens also reported that four suspects have been arrested in connection with the April 27 shooting and attempted robbery of residents near Parksley.

Javal Irving Pepper, 21, of Bloxom and Keshawn Terrell Kellam, 19, of Parksley have each been charged with malicious shooting, attempted robbery and two counts of use of a firearm in commission of a felony. Pepper and Kellam are both incarcerated in the Accomack County Jail with bond denied.

The juveniles were charged with malicious shooting, attempted robbery and use of a handgun while attempting to commit a robbery. They are being held at the Norfolk Juvenile Detention Center pending trial.

Assisting in the investigations were the sheriff's street crime unit, the Virginia State Police, the Eastern Shore Drug Task Force and the Virginia State Police Gang Task Force.

Fear that a migrant labor camp would be placed at the location of a former motel in Birdsnest drew a large turnout for this week's meeting of the Northampton County Planning Commission. One after the other, area residents voiced their concerns and fears surrounding the placement of a labor camp at the former Candlelight Motel located just south of the intersection of Rt. 13 and Birdsnest Drive. Speaking against the proposal, Thomas Sawyer of Birdsnest said the county has been emphasizing the need to attract tourism to the area and allowing the housing on Rt. 13 would not be in keeping with that concept. In addition, Sawyer said the property had a drainage issue, which resulted in water standing and posing a possible health concern. The drainfield from the Candlelight property runs onto an adjacent property and which was reported to have caused possible contamination of a small nearby lake. Nancy Clayton noted that she operated a daycare facility that adjoined the property right behind the motel rooms that would be occupied by the workers and was strongly opposed to the proposal. Noise, drinking, and traffic concerns from Rt. 13 were noted as her major worries. Clayton suggested that having children from the labor families in close proximity to Rt. 13 would also put them at risk. "I don't want it next door to me," she said." Speaking in support of his wife's concerns, Joe Clayton noted that he had worked for years for local farmers and that he had extensive experience with labor camp housing. "It's an ungodly sight. Put this facility on their (Byrd's) property or on a back road away from Rt. 13. Don't pass this proposal."

Steve Bell, also an adjacent property owner, pleaded with the commissioners to reject the proposal. Bell noted that he and his wife had planned to build a home on the property but has reservations over concerns for his family's safety. "Bad things can happen. I've put my life into owning this property and it would be ruined if the labor camp were to be placed there." Gary Stewart, representing Byrd Foods, said the plan is to keep labor families on the site with a full time manager, limiting the number of residents to 24. Also, Stewart indicated that the facility was designed to be operated year

round with families of workers who would be staying on the Shore, even in the winter. By placing the labor facility at the motel site, Stewart noted that it would improve the property which has been vacant for several years. Stewart also noted that the highway department and the health department had both approved of the planned facility. Ultimately, the commission voted to delay making a recommendation on the proposal until its June meeting.

In other action this week, the Northampton County Planning Commission voted to support a request for a special use permit by William Baines to place a farm pond on his property on Reedtown Rd. Noting concerns by some members as well as local residents near the proposed site, the commission attached the stipulation that the pond be enclosed by a fence and warning signs to prevent children from having access to it. Also required would be a means to aerate the water during part of the year to prevent it from becoming stagnant thus attracting insects and snakes.

A request by Phillip and Roberta Burghan for a variance to place a deck on a dwelling was met with opposition by the commission based on the issue of not meeting setback requirements and not meeting the hardship stipulation that would need to be met to gain approval. The commission voted 7-2 to deny the request.

Local governments in central Virginia and Hampton Roads, including Accomack and Northampton County, are getting a new satellite-based digital alerting system that will allow them to keep communication with the Virginia Emergency Operations Center in the event of phone or Internet loss. The Emergency Management Network, or EMnet, also lets localities send Emergency Alert System messages directly to their local media during emergencies and disasters.

“Making these communication systems available to more localities can save lives,” said Michael Cline, state coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. “EMnet allows us to communicate with local governments when other systems are unavailable and to get them the help they need. It also allows local governments to send live-saving Emergency Alert System messages to the media quicker than ever before.”

The network is a secure system designed to maintain communications for the emergency management community during a disaster, when phone lines and Internet service could go down. Reliable communications systems are extremely important during response efforts, in the event that localities need to request assistance from other localities or from the Virginia Emergency Operations Center. EMnet also offers an efficient means of delivering hazards and warnings to emergency responders. VDEM is currently working with designated localities to conduct site surveys. Once the surveys are completed, EMnet will be installed in facilities designated by localities, such as local emergency operations centers or 911 centers. Installation for all 22 sites is scheduled to be completed by the end of summer 2008.

A major debate erupted during the public hearing held Monday as part of Chincoteague Town Council's monthly meeting. More than 10 citizens voiced their opinions about granting a conditional-use permit being sought by Christine Schreiberstein of Massachusetts to open a “complimentary therapy” business out of her residence. Schreiberstein addressed the concerns over parking, noting that she can only see one client at a time and that the three parking spaces she has are more than enough.

Councilman E. David Ross noted that “complimentary therapy” is not listed as a business in the town code and although “the merits of her business are not up for discussion, ... the people of Chincoteague do not want her practice here in their community.” Indeed the majority of those addressing the council were not in favor of the permit. One citizen even went so far as to call the business “witchcraft” and said,

"We don't need it on our island." Ultimately, the council denied Schreiberstein's request for the conditional-use permit on the grounds that the business does not meet the town's requirements.

In other business Town Manager Robert Ritter Jr. reported on the Fiscal Year 2009 budget noting that he was "working off of uncertified numbers from the county and they are working off of uncertified numbers as well." Based on an estimated 6-cent per \$100 valuation tax rate, the total proposed Fiscal Year 2009 budget would be \$5,857,908, \$148,000 less than this year's budget. The budget is expected to be adopted in June after a public hearing is held.

The council will meet again tomorrow at 5 p.m. in a special session. The Agenda calls for the adoption of a resolution demanding an appeal of the county's reassessments.

The Cape Harbor project moved one step closer to fruition this week with a decision by the Charles Planning Commission to call for public hearings on the plan. Developers Judy Morgan and Valerie Hanchel fielded questions from commissioners regarding parking, construction, and population density in an effort to resolve any issues that remained as roadblocks to the project. The proposed project would consist of six condo structures totaling 425 living units and a separate 120 unit hotel to anchor the project on the west end. The question of underground parking and possible concerns over flooding was raised by several commissioners as well as resident Roger Munz, who was in attendance. Munz pointed out that the proposed area for the project was prone to flooding during storms and that it could pose an issue with vehicles trapped under the building. Hanchel noted that the parking garage, which would be able to handle upwards of 1000 vehicles, would only be four (4) feet below the surface. In addition, the first floor would be raised another six (6) feet above ground level. The plan would also call for a raised entry ramp that would, in effect, serve as a dike to prevent storm water from entering the parking area. The Commission has set two public hearings to provide the community with a chance to discuss the impact of the Cape Harbor project on the town. The first hearing is set for June 3 at 6 PM with a second set for June 21. Members of the public are encouraged to seek out information on the project prior to the public hearings to enable them to better understand what the project involves. The commission also plans to provide additional information on the project through a variety of town and private publications as well as on the town's website at: <http://capecharles.org/>

Meanwhile...

The Cape Harbor project is but one of several projects that are planned or have been started around Cape Charles harbor. In the past week, one structure has been razed adjacent to Cape Charles Coast Guard Station to make way for a 75-ton boat lift. The lift, the first of two, is to be part of the Southport yacht facility that will occupy part of the area previously known as the Sustainable Technology Industrial Park (STIP). Other projects in the works include a boatel, commercial shops, additional condos and additional boat slips for the town marina. For additional information or to comment on the on the harbor projects, contact Town Planner Tom Bonadeo at 757-331-3259 ext.15.