

Weekly News Summary for Sunday, September 22, 2024.

It is Fall now. At 8:44 this morning, the sun, which is heading southward, crossed the celestial equator. In Pea Island, Rodanthe, Waves, Salvo and Buxton, high tide happened around Noon. Tomorrow, high tide comes around 1 o'clock in the afternoon. The National Weather Service posted both Soundside and Oceanside Coastal Flood Advisories until Tuesday, September 24 at 2 o'clock in the morning. The weather service expects minor coastal flooding along Pamlico Sound and up to two feet of Oceanside inundation.

A high rip current risk and a four to five foot shorebreak makes conditions life-threatening for swimmers and ocean rescue personnel. A moderate rip current risk is posted south of Cape Hatteras.

Debris from two unoccupied homes that collapsed in north Rodanthe bring additional hazards in the water and on the beach. Stay out of the ocean water. Use caution when on the beach warns the National Park Service.

On Saturday, NCDOT pushed sand off the road at the Pea Island Visitor Center after overwash destroyed the berm. NC 12 remains open and passable. NCDOT will work to rebuild the dune in the coming week.

Two houses collapse in north Rodanthe. Debris from the collapses has reached Ramp 38, south of Avon.

The two houses collapsed from repeated assault by big waves and high tides. The first collapse occurred in the early morning hours of Friday, September 20. The second occurred the same day but fell later, around 9:18 at night. The houses were located on G.A. Kohler Court. The concern, as always, now turns to cleaning up the Cape Hatteras National Seashore beach.

The owner of the first home had a contractor on the scene Friday. The owner of the second home was trying to enlist a contractor, said the National Park Service. On Friday, 19 park service staffers conducted debris removal but efforts to stack debris above the high tide line was not successful. High tide Saturday morning, moved the piles to the ocean. Another 12 park service staffers were on the beach Saturday afternoon.

In a media release, the National Park Service urged visitors to stay out of the water and wear hard-soled shoes when walking on the beach to avoid injuries from hazardous floating debris and nail-ridden wooden debris. Due to potentially dangerous debris on the beach and in the water to the north and south of the collapse site, temporary beach closures for public safety may be necessary, warned the park service.

The first house that collapsed address was built in 1992. The second house was built in 1981. Both homes were unoccupied at the time of collapse.

Buxton naval base activity. On September 20, the company contracted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Savannah District, arrived at the former Buxton Naval Facility, a Formerly Used Defense Sites property, located within the Cape Hatteras Seashore to do a site survey and to continue the response actions the District team initiated Sept. 11, 2024.

Over the past week and a half, a District team has been at the site monitoring the changing conditions for new petroleum releases and digging test pits at varying depths, generally down to the water table, along the west side of the dunes and on the beach area. The team has identified several areas with petroleum-impacted soil that the contractor will excavate and remove. Since the team's arrival, no new petroleum releases have emerged, due to the sand accumulation along the beach, states a media release.

The contractor is awaiting the arrival of heavy excavating equipment and roll-off containers. Once the equipment is on-site, the contractors will begin work along the beach to further investigate the site. They will excavate and containerize any petroleum-impacted soil they encounter, transporting and disposing the material at an off-site waste management facility.

The final pipe removal report is still in the review process, but is anticipated to be complete in early November, pending any unforeseen delays. The final geophysical report is also expected to be complete by early November. These reports will primarily be used to form the comprehensive sampling plan, which should begin sometime before the end of the year.

The FUDS property is a construction site and is not safe for public and/or media access. Photos and video should be taken from a safe distance outside of the active work and beach closure areas.

Business news focuses on Hatteras Island's real estate market indicators.

Not much has changed in the residential statistics or trends, writes Radio Hatteras Business Correspondent Tom Hranicka.

The bright spots in the market are the supply of houses for sale continues to increase, interest rates are decreasing and selling prices remain strong.

The August inventory of houses for sale was more than double the number of homes marketed during the same month last year.

The 30-year fixed mortgage interest rate at the end of May was seven percent. By mid-September, the rate had declined to 6 point 2 percent.

The number of residential properties sold remains basically unchanged with an average of about 20 sales per month since January 2023.

In addition, the number of properties under contract to be sold, an indicator of future sales, continues to reflect a slight downward monthly trend.

The median sale price of residential properties continues to hover around the \$600,000 price range.

Interestingly, earlier this year, the consensus opinion was that the combined impact of affordability of limited supply, rising interest rates and elevated asking prices were the reasons for a slow market.

Other possible reasons for the continuing lethargic market may be that some buyers are waiting to see what results the November election might mean for the real estate market before committing to purchasing a vacation home. Inflation and its impact on family budgets may be another influencing factor, writes Hranicka.

The market for undeveloped lots also seems to be in a holding pattern with the number of properties for sale and the median selling price increasing slightly while other indicators decline in comparison to the January to August time period in 2023.

In other measures of the Hatteras Island economy, the results for July, which just became available, reflect continuing weakness in the year-to-date occupancy tax receipts. The receipts declined about 20 percent from last year.

The meal tax receipts were essentially flat, reporting a 1 point 3 percent decline from the January to July period in 2023.

Keeping the Oregon and Hatteras Inlet channels open seems to always be a challenging task, says Hranicka.

Most recently, the United States Army Corps of Engineers suspended Dare County permits for dredging by the Miss Katie. The suspension was reportedly due to a continued disregard of permit conditions and failure to implement any corrective actions.

The suspension remains in effect until Dare County provides the Corps of Engineers with documentation that procedures are in place to ensure compliance.

Free breakfast and lunch for Dare students

At the start of the school year, students at Cape Hatteras Elementary and Cape Hatteras Secondary schools and the Dare Learning Academy received breakfast and lunch at no cost.

The two Cape Hatteras schools combined qualified for the Community Eligibility Provision. The two schools had a score of 50 out of 62.5. The school nutrition program pays the difference between the schools' score and the program standard. Dare Schools as a whole has a score of 35.

But the Dare County Board of Education was also dealing with the School Nutrition Program, which has run at a deficit for many years. Some of that deficit is from unpaid student meals.

At the end of last year, the program was \$39,000 in debt. Through pleading letters and phone calls, parents paid up \$12,000 of the debt. The School Nutrition Program is an enterprise account and cannot operate at a deficit.

Last year, the school board enacted a policy putting a \$10 cap on unpaid meals. At a rate of \$3.25 per lunch, that means a student in middle or high school can miss paying for three meals.

Historically, if a student reached the cap, the student would be served a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or veggies and fruit, or a cheese sandwich. Obviously, a stigma was slapped on a student.

On Friday, September 20, the 5-on-5 Committee met. The committee is comprised of five people from the Dare County School Board and five people from Dare County. Three elected board members from each group along with the finance directors and county manager and superintendent are the committee members.

Dare Schools Superintendent Steve Basnight made recommendations: do nothing, cover charge cost, or engage in a state Department of Public Instruction Universal Meals program. The majority of Dare's schools would not qualify for the Community Eligibility Provision. Some 106 of the 115 school districts in the state participate in this program.

At its September meeting, the Dare school board approved providing breakfast and lunch at no cost for 30 days, which puts pressure on making a decision.

Dare County board chairman Robert L. Woodard said "no child will be unfed."

In discussion, two Board of Education members, Ron Payne and Carl Woody, expressed misgivings about the Universal meals program.

Woodard responded, "this is your issue. You all need as a board to find a solution."

Dare County League of Women Voters has announced two candidate forums.

On September 30, candidates for the Dare County Board of Education will participate in a forum. On October 3, candidates for Dare County Board of Commissioners will have a forum.

Both forums will be held in the Dare County Board of Commissioners meeting room in the Dare County Administration Building. Both forums start at 7 o'clock and run to 8:30. The forums will be live streamed at the Fessenden Center Annex, Buxton Back Road.

Voters are encouraged to submit questions for the candidates in advance of the forum. Visit Submit a Question to participate at lwvdarenc.org/submit-a-question.

Starting Monday, Diaper Need Awareness Week kicks off in Dare County.

The Children and Youth Partnership has sponsored two drive through diaper giveaways on Hatteras Island. The Diaper Bank is a community funded program. Dare County will donate \$15,000 this year to the Diaper Bank.

On Friday, September 27, Cape Hatteras Soccer has a home match. At half-time, Cape Hatteras Secondary's Marching Band will debut its show for competition season. Be there at 6:30 for the match and half-time show.

Now, stay safe. And thanks for listening. This is Radio Hatteras.