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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State Grants Public Hearing on Down East Permit

Ocean – State regulators, in response to citizen concerns, will hold a public hearing on a sewer permit for a proposed subdivision in eastern Carteret County that two years ago sparked a grassroots movement for better development rules Down East. The N.C. Coastal Federation and Down East Tomorrow, the citizens' group that grew out of that movement, had asked for the hearing.

The groups made the request after Marina Village at Snug Harbor, a 62-lot subdivision and marina on Salters Creek near Stacy, applied in December for a state permit to build a private sewer plant to treat 100,000 gallons of sewage a day. The applicants intend to apply the treated sewage on land they own across U.S. 70 from the proposed subdivision.

Public hearings aren't required for state sewer permits, but Coleen Sullins, the director of the N.C. Division of Water Quality, can decide to hold one if there is sufficient public interest and if she thinks the hearing would help regulators better evaluate the permit application. The federation and Down East Tomorrow argued that the subdivision has been the center of intense public interest and scrutiny, and they questioned the need for such a large sewer plant.

The division hasn't yet chosen a date or site for the hearing. It's expected that it will be held in Carteret County.

"We're very pleased that the state has agreed to hold the hearing," said Frank Tursi, the federation's Cape Lookout Coastkeeper. "The sewer plant, as proposed, will be large enough for about 300 houses in what's now a very rural area of the county. The people most affected by this development will now have a chance to be heard."

The owners of Marina Village own about 6,000 undeveloped acres Down East, noted Gerry Barrett, the co-chair of Down East Tomorrow. The developers have yet to reveal their ultimate plans to state or county permitting agencies, Barrett said.

“I’m looking forward to full disclosure from the developers on the master plan for the entire 6,000 acres as required by the county’s subdivision ordinance and the Coastal Area Management Act,” he said.

Hundreds of houses have the potential to pollute nearby Core Sound, which is considered an Outstanding Resource Water – the state’s highest classification – unless contaminated runoff is strictly controlled, Tursi said.

“It also could change a way of life,” he said. “Down East is one of the last traditional coastal fishing communities left in North Carolina. The type of large-scale, yet unplanned development that this sewer plant could trigger is what residents feared two years ago.”

The creation of the Snug Harbor marina sparked general concern about future growth Down East. More than a thousand people attended public meetings on growth issues. Hundreds signed petitions urging the Carteret County Board of Commissioners to declare a building moratorium on high-density development until more protective rules were enacted. The commissioners refused, opting instead for a weak “conservation” ordinance that had no public input and has done little to stem the tide of development.

“Wisely, the state has called a time out for this project,” Tursi said. “Instead of rushing to approve this permit and potentially change the character of Down East, state regulators decided to take the time to more fully evaluate all the possible effects and to listen to what people have to say. Those are good things.”

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***About the North Carolina Coastal Federation:
“Citizens Working Together for a Healthy Coast”***

The North Carolina Coastal Federation (NCCF) is the state’s only non-profit organization focused exclusively on protecting and restoring the coast of North Carolina through education, advocacy and habitat restoration and preservation. NCCF headquarters are located at 3609 Highway 24 in Ocean between Morehead City and Swansboro and are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5 pm.

The headquarters include NCCF’s main offices, the Cape Lookout Coastkeeper office, a gift shop, Nature Library, Weber Seashell Exhibit, ShoreKeeper Learning Center, and adjoining nature trail. The NCCF also operates field offices in Wilmington and Manteo. For more information call 252-393-8185 or check out NCCF’s website at www.nccoast.org