# New Hanover County tourism board adopts resolution opposing offshore drilling

BY **TERRY LANE** ON OCTOBER 28, 2015 - 9:34 PM

A change in Kure Beach's leadership could pave the way for the town to join several other New Hanover County organizations that have formally opposed offshore drilling.

Kure Beach Mayor Dean Lambert, who has vocally supported offshore drilling, was defeated by Emilie Swearingen, a member of the Kure Beach Town Council.

Swearingen won approximately 54 percent of the town's 610 votes cast, compared to 45 percent for Lambert. A write-in candidate received one vote.

For Ethan Crouch, chairman of the Cape Fear Chapter of Surfrider Foundation, the election offers the chance to have the Kure Beach Town Council pass a resolution opposing offshore drilling, which Lambert opposed in the past.

"I think one of the reasons, if not the main reason, he lost the election is that he failed to listen to the people of his community and their position on this issue," Crouch said. "We think a resolution will hopefully happen early in [Swearingen's] tenure and look forward to supporting her efforts on that policy."

The change in leadership in Kure Beach comes as the New Hanover County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) became the latest organization to adopt a resolution opposing offshore drilling off the coast of North Carolina with a unanimous vote Wednesday, October 28.

The TDA, which governs the Wilmington and Beaches Convention and Visitors Bureau, joined more than 600 towns, tourism boards, chambers of commerce, restaurant associations and fishing groups to formally adopt a resolution opposing offshore drilling, which North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory has said he supports.

"We represent the tourism industry and offshore drilling could have an impact on tourism," said TDA President Kim Hufham. "It's important that [the TDA]does take a stand."

The vote comes after Wrightsville Beach, Wilmington and the Wrightsville Beach Chamber of Commerce passed similar resolutions. Additionally, 30 Wrightsville Beach businesses have signed onto a letter to McCrory urging for an offshore drilling ban.

Former mayor of Wrightsville Beach David Cignotti made the presentation to the TDA board, which postponed the presentation for one month to allow for a counter speaker to present a case in favor of offshore oil exploration.

"Tourism produces consistent growth and offshore drilling represents a threat to tourism," Cignotti said.

Bobby Greer, a former New Hanover County Commissioner and a head lifeguard at Wrightsville Beach, represented a group called Vets for Energy and said offshore oil drilling would help improve America's security by reducing reliance on foreign oil. Greer said he served in the Coast Guard.

"We believe a secure nation is an energy secure nation," said Grier, who added the group wasn't asking the TDA to support offshore drilling, only to oppose the resolution. Greer said the jobs and economic development that offshore drilling would generate could help fund beach renourishment and other storm damage restoration efforts.

Lindsey Deignan, a marine biology doctoral student at University of North Carolina Wilmington, took TDA board members through a presentation that outlined the potential risks of offshore drilling.

"There is the potential for pollution and environmental damage every step of the way," she said, adding that the area open to drilling could only produce 4 percent of the country's oil needs.

Greer acknowledged a spill couldn't be discounted, but countered that the last oil estimates were 30 years old and conducted without modern exploration technology.

"If there was a spill, it would be terrible, but the chances are slim to none," Greer said. "We don't know what's out there."

*Staff writer Emmy Errante contributed to this story.*
*email terrylane@luminanews.com*