

Article 10.

Special Assessments.

§ 160A-216. Authority to make special assessments.

Any city is authorized to make special assessments against benefited property within its corporate limits for:

- (1) Constructing, reconstructing, paving, widening, installing curbs and gutters, and otherwise building and improving streets;
- (2) Constructing, reconstructing, paving, widening, and otherwise building or improving sidewalks in any public street;
- (3) Constructing, reconstructing, extending, and otherwise building or improving water systems;
- (4) Constructing, reconstructing, extending, or otherwise building or improving sewage collection and disposal systems of all types, including septic tank systems or other on-site collection or disposal facilities or systems;
- (5) Constructing, reconstructing, extending, and otherwise building or improving storm sewer and drainage systems. (1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1975, c. 664, s. 8; 1979, c. 619, s. 12.)

§ 160A-217. Petition for street or sidewalk improvements.

(a) A city shall have no power to levy special assessments for street or sidewalk improvements unless it receives a petition for the improvements signed by at least a majority in number of the owners of property to be assessed, who must represent at least a majority of all the lineal feet of frontage of the lands abutting on the street or portion thereof to be improved. Unless the petition specifies another percentage, not more than fifty percent (50%) of the cost of the improvement may be assessed (not including the cost of improvements made at street intersections).

(b) Property owned by the United States shall not be included in determining the lineal feet of frontage on the improvement, nor shall the United States be included in determining the number of owners of property abutting the improvement. Property owned by the State of North Carolina shall be included in determining frontage and the number of owners only if the State has consented to assessment in the manner provided in G.S. 160A-221. Property owned by railroad companies shall be included in determining frontage and the number of owners to the extent that the property is subject to assessment under G.S. 160A-222. Property owned by railroad companies that is not subject to assessment shall not be included in determining frontage and the number of owners. If it is necessary to exclude property owned by the United States, the State of North Carolina, or a railroad company in order to obtain a valid petition under subsection (a), not more than fifty percent (50%) of the cost (not including the cost of improvement at street intersections) may be assessed unless all of the owners subject to assessment agree to a higher percentage.

(c) No right of action or defense asserting the invalidity of street or sidewalk assessments on grounds that the city did not comply with this section in securing a valid petition shall be asserted except in an action or proceeding begun within 90 days after publication of the notice of adoption of the preliminary assessment resolution. (1915, c. 56, ss. 4, 5; C.S., ss. 2706, 2707; 1955, c. 675; 1963, c. 1000, s. 1; 1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1973, c. 426, s. 33.)

§ 160A-218. Basis for making assessments.

Assessments may be made on the basis of:

- (1) The frontage abutting on the project, at an equal rate per foot of frontage, or
- (2) The area of land served, or subject to being served, by the project, at an equal rate per unit of area, or
- (3) The value added to the land served by the project, or subject to being served by it, being the difference between the appraised value of the land without improvements as shown on the tax records of the county, and the appraised value of the land with improvements according to the appraisal standards and rules adopted by the county at its last revaluation, at an equal rate per dollar of value added; or
- (4) The number of lots served, or subject to being served, where the project involves extension of an existing system to a residential or commercial subdivision, at an equal rate per lot; or
- (5) A combination of two or more of these bases.

Whenever the basis selected for assessment is either area or value added, the council may provide for the laying out of benefit zones according to the distance of benefited property from the project being undertaken, and may establish differing rates of assessment to apply uniformly throughout each benefit zone.

For each project, the council shall endeavor to establish an assessment method from among the bases set out in this section which will most accurately assess each lot or parcel of land according to the benefit conferred upon it by the project. The council's decision as to the method of assessment shall be final and conclusive and not subject to further review or challenge. (1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-219. Corner lot exemptions.

The council shall have authority to establish schedules of exemptions from assessments for corner lots when a project is undertaken along both sides of such lots. The schedules of exemptions shall be based on categories of land use (residential, commercial, industrial, or agricultural) and shall be uniform for each category. The schedule of exemptions may not provide exemption of more than seventy-five percent (75%) of the frontage of any side of a corner lot, or 150 feet, whichever is greater. (1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-220. Lands exempt from assessment.

No lands within a city, except as herein provided, shall be exempt from special assessments except lands belonging to the United States that are exempt under the provisions of federal statutes. (1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-221. Assessments against lands owned by the State.

When any city proposes to make local improvements that would benefit lands owned by the State of North Carolina or any board, agency, commission, or institution thereof, the council may request the Council of State to consent to special assessments against the property. The Council of State may authorize the Secretary of Administration to give consent for special assessments against State property, but the city may appeal to the Council of State if the Secretary of Administration refuses to give consent. When consent is given for special assessments against State lands, the Council of State may direct that the assessment be paid from the Contingency and Emergency Fund of the State of North Carolina or from any other available funds. If consent to the assessment is refused, the state-owned property shall be exempt from assessment. (1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1975, c. 879, s. 46.)

§ 160A-222. Assessments against railroads.

Assessments shall not be made against land owned, leased or controlled by a railroad company, except that if there is a building on the land, the portion of railroad property subject to assessment shall be a lot whose frontage equals the actual front footage occupied by the building plus 25 feet on each side thereof, but not more than the amount of land owned, leased, or controlled by the railroad. If a building is placed on land that would have been subject to assessment but for the limitations imposed by this section after an improvement is made, then the railroad company shall be subject to an assessment without interest on the same basis as if the building had been on the property when the improvement was made.

It is the intent of this section to make uniform the law concerning assessments against railroads. To this end, all provisions of law, whether general or local, in conflict with this section are repealed; and no local act taking effect on or after January 1, 1972, shall be construed to modify, amend, or repeal any portion of this section unless it shall specifically so provide by reference hereto. (1965, c. 839, s. 2; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-223. Preliminary resolution; contents.

Whenever the council decides to finance a proposed project by special assessments, it shall first adopt a preliminary resolution that shall contain the following:

- (1) A statement of intent to undertake the project;
 - (2) A general description of the nature and location of the project;
 - (3) A statement as to the proposed basis for making assessments, which shall include a general description of the boundaries of the area benefited if the basis of assessment is either area or value added;
 - (4) A statement as to the percentage of the cost of the work that is to be assessed;
 - (5) A statement as to which, if any, assessments shall be held in abeyance and for how long;
 - (6) A statement as to the proposed terms of payment of the assessment; and
 - (7) An order setting a time and place for a public hearing on all matters covered by the preliminary resolution which shall be not earlier than three weeks nor later than 10 weeks from the date of the adoption of the preliminary resolution.
- (1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-224. Notice of preliminary resolution.

At least 10 days before the date set for the public hearing, the council shall publish a notice that a preliminary assessment resolution has been adopted and that a public hearing will be held on it at a specified time and place. The notice shall generally describe the nature and location of the improvement. In addition, at least 10 days prior to the hearing, the council shall cause a copy of the preliminary resolution to be mailed to the owners, as shown on the county tax records, of all property subject to assessment if the project should be undertaken. The person designated to mail these resolutions shall file with the council a certificate showing that they were mailed by first-class mail and on what date. The certificate shall be conclusive as to compliance with the mailing provisions of this section in the absence of fraud. (1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-225. Hearing on preliminary resolution; assessment resolution.

At the public hearing, the council shall hear all interested persons who appear with respect to any matter covered by the preliminary resolution. After the public hearing, the council may adopt a resolution directing that the project or portions thereof be undertaken. The assessment resolution shall describe the project in general terms (which may be by reference to projects described in the preliminary resolution) and shall set forth the following:

- (1) The basis on which the special assessments shall be levied, together with a general description of the boundaries of the area benefited if the basis of assessment is either area or value added;
- (2) The percentage of the cost to be specially assessed;
- (3) The terms of payment, including the conditions under which assessments are to be held in abeyance, if any.

The percentage of cost to be assessed may not be different from the percentage proposed, and the projects authorized may not be greater in scope than the projects described in the preliminary resolution. If the council decides that a different percentage of the cost should be assessed than that proposed in the preliminary resolution, or that any project should be enlarged, it shall adopt and advertise a new preliminary resolution as herein provided. (1915, c. 56, s. 6; C.S., s. 2708; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-226. Determination of costs.

When the project is complete, the council shall ascertain the total cost. In addition to construction costs, the cost of all necessary legal services, the amount of interest paid during construction, costs of rights-of-way, and the costs of publication of notices and resolutions may be included. The determination of the council as to the total cost of any project shall be conclusive. (1915, c. 56, s. 9; C.S., s. 2711; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-226.1. Discounts authorized.

The council is authorized to establish a schedule of discounts to be applied to assessments paid before the expiration of 30 days from the date that notice is published of confirmation of the assessment roll pursuant to G.S. 160A-229. Such a schedule of discounts may be established even though it was not included among the terms of payment as specified in the preliminary assessment resolution or assessment resolution. The amount of any discount may not exceed thirty percent (30%). (1983, c. 381, s. 4.)

§ 160A-227. Preliminary assessment roll; publication.

When the total cost of a project has been determined, the council shall have a preliminary assessment roll prepared. The preliminary roll shall contain a brief description of each lot, parcel, or tract of land assessed, the basis for the assessment, the amount assessed against each, the terms of payment, including the schedule of discounts, if such a schedule is to be established and the name of the owner of each parcel of land as far as this can be ascertained from the county tax records. A map of the project on which is shown each parcel assessed with the basis of its assessment, the amount assessed against it, and the name of the owner, as far as this can be ascertained from the county tax records, shall be a sufficient assessment roll.

After the preliminary assessment roll has been completed, it shall be filed in the city clerk's office where it shall be available for public inspection. A notice of the completion of the assessment roll, setting forth in general terms a description of the project, noting the availability of the assessment roll in the clerk's office for inspection, and stating the time and place for a hearing

on the preliminary assessment roll, shall be published at least 10 days before the date set for the hearing on the preliminary assessment roll. The council shall also cause a notice of the hearing on the preliminary assessment roll to be mailed to the owners of property listed thereon at least 10 days before the hearing. The notice mailed to each property owner shall give notice of the time and place of the hearing, shall note the availability of the preliminary assessment roll for inspection in the city clerk's office and shall state the amount of the assessment against the property of the owner as shown on the preliminary assessment roll. The person designated to mail these notices shall file with the council a certificate showing they were mailed by first-class mail and on what date. Such a certificate shall be conclusive as to compliance with the mailing provisions of this section in the absence of fraud. (1915, c. 56, s. 9; C.S., s. 2712; 1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1983, c. 381, s. 5.)

§ 160A-228. Hearing on preliminary assessment roll; revision; confirmation; lien.

At the public hearing, which may be adjourned from time to time until all persons have had an opportunity to be heard, the council shall hear objections to the preliminary assessment roll from all interested persons who appear. Then or thereafter, the council shall annul, modify, or confirm the assessments, in whole or in part, either by confirming the preliminary assessments against any or all of the lots or parcels described in the preliminary assessment roll, or by canceling, increasing, or reducing them as may be proper in compliance with the basis of assessment. If any property is omitted from the preliminary assessment roll, the council may place it on the roll and levy the proper assessment. Whenever the council confirms assessments for any project, the city clerk shall enter in the minutes of the council the date, hour, and minute of confirmation. From and after the time of confirmation, the assessments shall be a lien on the property assessed of the same nature and to the same extent as the lien for county and city property taxes, according to the priorities set out in G.S. 160A-233(c). After the assessment roll is confirmed, a copy of it shall be delivered to the city tax collector for collection in the same manner as property taxes, except as herein provided. (1915, c. 56, s. 9; C.S., s. 2713; 1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1973, c. 426, s. 34.)

§ 160A-229. Publication of notice of confirmation of assessment roll.

After the expiration of 20 days from the confirmation of the assessment roll, the city tax collector shall publish once a notice that the assessment roll has been confirmed, and that assessments may be paid without interest at any time before the expiration of 30 days from the date that the notice is published, and that if they are not paid within this time, all installments thereof shall bear interest as provided in G.S. 160A-233. The notice shall also state the schedule of discounts, if one has been established, to be applied to assessments paid before the expiration date for payment of assessments without interest. (1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1983, c. 381, s. 6.)

§ 160A-230. Appeal to General Court of Justice.

If the owner of, or any person interested in, any lot or parcel of land against which an assessment is made is dissatisfied with the amount of the assessment, he may, within 10 days after the confirmation of the assessment roll, file a notice of appeal to the appropriate division of the General Court of Justice. He shall then have 20 days after the confirmation of the assessment roll to serve on the council or the city clerk a statement of facts upon which the appeal is based. The appeal shall be tried like other actions at law. (1915, c. 56, s. 9; C.S., s. 2714; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-231. Reassessment.

The council shall have the power, when in its judgment any irregularity, omission, error or lack of jurisdiction in any of the proceedings related thereto, has occurred, to set aside the whole of any special assessment made by it and thereupon to make a reassessment. In that case, all additional interest paid, or to be paid, as a result of the delay in confirming the assessment shall be included as a part of the project cost. The proceeding shall, as far as practicable, in all respects take place as it had with the original assessments, and the reassessment shall have the same force as if it had originally been properly made. (1915, c. 56, s. 9; C.S., s. 2715; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-232. Payment of assessments in cash or by installments.

The owners of assessed property shall have the option, within 30 days after the publication of the notice that the assessment roll has been confirmed, of paying the assessment either in cash or in not more than 10 annual installments, as may have been determined by the council in the resolution directing the project giving rise to the assessment to be undertaken. With respect to payment by installment, the council may provide

- (1) That the first installment with interest shall become due and payable on the date when property taxes are due and payable, and one subsequent installment and interest shall be due and payable on the same date in each successive year until the assessment is paid in full, or
- (2) That the first installment with interest shall become due and payable 60 days after the date that the assessment roll is confirmed, and one subsequent installment and interest shall be due and payable on the same day of the month in each successive year until the assessment is paid in full. (1915, c. 56, s. 10; C.S., s. 2716; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-233. Enforcement of assessments; interests; foreclosure; limitations.

(a) Any portion of an assessment that is not paid within 30 days after publication of the notice that the assessment roll has been confirmed shall bear interest until paid at a rate to be fixed in the assessment resolution but not more than eight percent (8%) per annum.

(b) If any installment of an assessment is not paid on or before the due date, all of the installments remaining unpaid shall immediately become due and payable, unless the council waives acceleration. The council may waive acceleration and permit the property owner to pay all installments in arrears together with interest due thereon and the cost to the city of attempting to obtain payment. If this is done, the remaining installments shall be reinstated so that they fall due as if there had been no default. Waiver of acceleration and reinstatement of future installments may be done at any time before foreclosure proceedings have been instituted.

(c) Assessment liens may be foreclosed under any procedure prescribed by law for the foreclosure of property tax liens, except that lien sales and lien sale certificates shall not be required, and foreclosure may be begun at any time after 30 days after the due date. The city shall not be entitled to a deficiency judgment in an action to foreclose an assessment lien. The lien of special assessments shall be inferior to all prior and subsequent liens for State, local, and federal taxes, and superior to all other liens.

(d) No city may maintain an action or proceeding to enforce any remedy for the foreclosure of special assessment liens unless the action or proceeding is begun within 10 years from the date that the assessment or the earliest installment thereof included in the action or proceeding became due. Acceleration of installments under subsection (b) shall not have the effect of shortening the time within which foreclosure may be begun, but in that event the statute of limitations shall

continue to run as to each installment as if acceleration had not occurred. (1915, c. 56, s. 11; C.S., s. 2717; 1923, c. 87; 1929, c. 331, s. 1; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-234. Assessments on property held by tenancy for life or years.

(a) Assessments upon real property in the possession or enjoyment of a tenant for life, or a tenant for a term of years, shall be paid by the holder of the remainder or reversion, as the case may be.

(b) Repealed by Session Laws 1979, c. 107, s. 12. (1911, c. 7, ss. 1, 2, 3; C.S., ss. 2718, 2719, 2720; 1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1979, c. 107, s. 12; 2003-232, s. 6.)

§ 160A-235. Lien in favor of a cotenant or joint owner paying special assessments.

Any one of several tenants in common, or joint tenants, or copartners shall have the right to pay the whole or any part of any special assessment levied against property held jointly or in common, and all sums by him so paid in excess of his share of the assessment, interests, costs, and amounts required for redemption, shall constitute a lien upon the shares of his cotenants or associates, which he may enforce in proceedings for partition, actual or by sale, or in any other appropriate judicial proceeding. The lien herein provided for shall not be effective against an innocent purchaser for value unless and until notice thereof is filed in the office of the clerk of superior court in the county in which the land lies and indexed and docketed in the same manner as other liens required by law to be filed in the clerk's office. (1935, c. 174; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-236. Apportionment of assessments.

When special assessments are made against property which has been or is about to be subdivided, the council may, with the consent of the owner of the property, apportion the assessment among the lots or tracts within the subdivision, or release certain lots or tracts from the assessments if, in the opinion of the council, some of the lots or tracts in the subdivision are not benefited by the project. Upon an apportionment, each of the lots and tracts in the subdivision shall be released from the lien of the original assessment, and the portions of the original assessment assessed against each lot or tract shall have the same force and effect as the original assessment as to the particular lot or tract assessed. At the time of making an apportionment under this section, the council shall enter on its minutes a statement to the effect that the apportionment is made with the consent of the owners of the property affected, and this entry shall be conclusive in the absence of fraud. Reassessments made under this section may include past due installments of principal and interest as well as installments not then due, and any installments not then due shall fall due at the same dates as they would have under the original assessment. The council may delegate authority to make apportionment of assessments to the chief financial officer, but apportionments shall in all cases be reported to the council at its next regular meeting and entered in the minutes. (1929, c. 331, s. 1; 1935, c. 125; 1971, c. 698, s. 1.)

§ 160A-237. Authority to hold water and sewer assessments in abeyance.

The assessment resolution may provide that assessments levied under this Article for water or sewer improvements be held in abeyance without interest until improvements on the assessed property are actually connected to the water or sewer system for which the assessment was levied, or a date certain not more than 10 years from the date of confirmation of the assessment roll, whichever event first occurs. Upon termination of the period of abeyance, the assessment shall be paid in accordance with the terms set out in the assessment resolution. If assessments are to be held

in abeyance, the assessment resolution shall classify the property assessed according to general land use, location with respect to the water or sewer system, or other relevant factors, and shall provide that the period of abeyance shall be the same for all assessed property in the same class.

All statutes of limitations are suspended during the time that any assessment is held in abeyance without interest. (1973, c. 426, s. 35.)

§ 160A-238. Authority to make assessments for beach erosion control and flood and hurricane protection works.

A city may make special assessments, according to the procedures of this Article, against benefited property within the city for all or part of the costs of acquiring, constructing, reconstructing, extending, or otherwise building or improving beach erosion control or flood and hurricane protection works. Assessments for these projects may be made on the basis of:

- (1) The frontage abutting on the project, at an equal rate per foot of frontage; or
- (2) The frontage abutting on a beach or shoreline protected or benefited by the project, at an equal rate per foot of frontage; or
- (3) The area of land benefited by the project, at an equal rate per unit of area; or
- (4) The valuation of land benefited by the project, being the value of the land without improvements as shown on the tax records of the county, at an equal rate per dollar of valuation; or
- (5) A combination of two or more of these bases.

Whenever the basis selected for assessment is either area or valuation, the council shall provide for the laying out of one or more benefit zones according to the distance from the shoreline, the distance from the project, the elevation of the land, or other relevant factors. If more than one benefit zone is established, the council shall establish differing rates of assessment to apply uniformly throughout each benefit zone. (1973, c. 822, s. 7.)

§ 160A-239. Reserved for future codification purposes.