



South Ward candidate Carolyn Highsmith tries to figure out if she won the tight South Ward race during the Board of Elections canvas meeting on Thursday.



South Ward candidates Carolyn Highsmith and John Larson shake after the BOE's official results showed Highsmith winning by six votes.

Final Election Results Northeast Ward City Council	
Vivian H. Burke	64.56% (2,707 votes)
Keith King	35.44% (1,486 votes)

Narrow South Ward win leads to recount; June primary rules set

Candidates say tight race shows flaws in the system

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

"Does that mean I won?" asked Carolyn Highsmith after the Board of Elections approved the official results of the primary election.

Indeed, after hours of waiting for provisional ballots to be tabulated during the BOE meeting on Thursday, March 24, it did turn out that Highsmith pulled off an extremely narrow victory over her opponent, John Larson, in the Democratic primary for the South Ward City Council seat. The final numbers were Highsmith, with 2,029 votes to Larson's 2,023 votes. Larson shook Highsmith's hand congratulating her, but the victory is still potentially tentative. Since the six-vote victory is less

than one percent, Larson applied for a recount on Monday, which the BOE is expected to be complete this week.

"We will make sure that all due diligence is spent to ensure that the proper votes are counted," said Larson.

Highsmith said she considers herself the winner and was thankful for all her supporters in the South Ward.

"We had a lot of people in the South Ward who wanted to see me win because they know what I represent, they know I'm going to represent the South Ward to the very best of my ability," she said.

But Highsmith also said she supported the recount. Both candidates patiently sat through the canvas process on Tuesday and Thursday of last week, watching the board approve and disapprove votes. After the canvas, both agreed that they had questions and concerns about the process they witnessed. Highsmith said that there were residents who cast ballots that

weren't counted and it was unknown who would've gotten those votes had they been accepted.

"It's a very flawed system right now and we've



got to clean it up," she said.

On Tuesday, 101 absentee ballots that came in the day after election day were discounted because they didn't have a postmark, which statute requires. On Thursday, of the 961 provisional ballots that were considered, 592 were rejected.

Voter ID was a small portion of provisionals, with all nine reasonable impediment provisionals accepted. Only 39 provisionals were rejected because voters cast their ballot without an ID and failed to produce an ID to the BOE afterwards.

Other provisional rejections included 151 out-of-

precinct votes that had no signature, 157 ballots by people who weren't registered to vote and 194 ballots by people who weren't registered to vote but also didn't provide a signature. Statute requires a signature on provisional ballots and poll workers were trained to get voter signatures even when the signature line didn't print out, which BOE Director Tim Tsujii said happened numerous times. Tsujii said his office will be examining the software that produced the ballots. Tsujii will also be offering his full review of election performance and recommendations for improvements in the next BOE meeting in April.

During the comment period on Thursday, Larson's supporters lamented the lack of parking at one precinct in the South Ward and that several voters didn't have the South Ward race on their ballot. Tsujii said the BOE found there were 18 people who were given the wrong party ballot in the South Ward.

Larson compared the canvas process to watching sausage being made.

"I think there are real questions about people being disenfranchised and if it hadn't been for the closeness of this election, it would have just been buried under the carpet," said Larson.

The victor of the South Ward primary will face Republican Michael Tyler in November.

Also during the meeting, the board approved Early Voting plans for the June 7 primary, which will feature races for the U.S. House of Representatives and one seat on the N.C. Supreme Court. Early voting will be at the BOE offices in the Forsyth County Government Building on Thursday, May 26, Friday, May 27 and Tuesday, May 31 through Friday, June 3 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m and Saturday, June 4, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Many have filed to run in the second primary, with the new District 13, which stretches from Guilford into Davie

and Iredell Counties, having the most challengers with 22 candidates. Alma Adams is running for reelection in the 12th District, which is now entirely in Mecklenburg County. Her Democratic primary challengers are Gardenia Henley of Winston-Salem, Rick Miller of Summerfield, former state senator Malcolm Graham and state lawmakers Rodney Moore, Tricia Cotham and Carla Cunningham. Republicans vying for the seat are Leon Threatt, Paul Wright and Ryan Duffie.

Locally, for the Fifth District, Virginia Foxx will face Pattie Curran and B. Mark Walker in the Republican primary. Democrats Jim Roberts, Charlie Wallin, and Josh Brannon, who Foxx defeated in 2014, are also running for the seat. N.C. Justice Robert Edmunds is facing Daniel Robertson, Michael Morgan and Sabra Faires in the judicial primary.

Redistricting creates interesting congressional primaries

BY JONATHAN DREW AND GARY D. ROBERTSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Changes wrought by this year's redistricting will make for unusually crowded fields in several North Carolina congressional districts during rescheduled primary elections - including one where two incumbents will face off.



North Carolina lawmakers were forced last month to hastily redraw the map of congressional districts after a federal court ruled that two were unlawfully race-based. Legislators also delayed primaries for U.S. House candidates until June 7, separating them from other contests held earlier this month.

Below is a look at the races, along with the factors influencing them:

New rules

The primary field took shape with last Friday's filing deadline, which attracted 76 candidates covering all 13 districts.

A one-time change in the law allows candidates to run in the congressional primary while also seeking

another elected position this year. They would normally be barred from running for two elected positions. A congressional primary winner already on the November ballot for another position now will have to choose to run in one or the other.

There will also be no primary runoffs this year, meaning a candidate in a crowded race could win with far less than half the votes.

"It is a great year to watch current members of the General Assembly test the waters for a higher seat with really little risk," said David McLennan, a visiting professor of political science at Meredith College.

Another layer of uncertainty is added by ongoing litigation that could change the districts again before the election.

Jostling Democrats

When lawmakers corralled the 12th District within Mecklenburg County, it made the left-leaning territory attractive to a number of Democrats.

U.S. Rep. Alma Adams of Greensboro has said she's planning to move to the 12th, which previously snaked along Interstate 85 from Greensboro to Charlotte.

Also vying for the Democratic nomination are three members of the state

House with ties to the area: Tricia Cotham, Carla Cunningham and Rodney Moore. The other Democrats are Malcolm Graham - a former state senator from Charlotte who ran in 2014; Gardenia Henley and Rick Miller.

Bitzer said incumbents generally have an advantage, but Adams is facing opponents with strong Mecklenburg County ties. The Mecklenburg vote could splinter, allowing someone to win with 20 to 30 percent of the vote, Bitzer said.

Attracting a crowd

The new Republican-leaning 13th District shares the name of Holding's current district, but its boundaries shifted to a completely different geographic area to the west.

That's attracted a whopping 17 Republican candidates, including four state legislators: Sen. Andrew C. Brock and Reps. Julia Howard, Harry Warren and John Blust.

"It's going to be a competitive battle simply because somebody could win with maybe 30 percent of the vote, and there's no runoff primary," Michael Bitzer, a professor of politics and history at Catawba College, said even before seven GOP additional candidates filed Friday.

There also are five Democrats running.

People who filed for 5th District congressional seat:

Pattie Curran, Republican, Kernersville

Incumbent Virginia Foxx, Republican, Banner Elk

Charlie Wallin, Democrat, Boone

Jim Roberts, Democrat, Pilot Mountain

Josh Brannon, Democrat, Vilas

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