

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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It's Time To Hold Off On New Municipalities

As Northwest moves toward becoming Brunswick County's 19th municipality, it was encouraging to hear Rep. David Redwine decline to introduce two new incorporation bills in this session and to say he will rely more on the House Incorporation Commission in the future.

Redwine didn't introduce the Northwest bill—Rep. Thomas Wright of Wilmington did. Redwine has expressed some well-founded concerns about what he called "the explosion of areas wanting to incorporate" in recent years. "You just can't have a town on every corner," he said. "I know that won't be a popular stance to take."

Indeed it won't, especially to residents of Seaside and Sunset Harbor who have said they want to form towns but probably won't get the chance in this legislative session. But Redwine is right. Nineteen is an astonishing number of towns, even for a county with Brunswick's geographic size and diversity. And there is no reason to think the requests will stop until every village and crossroads unhappy with some facet of county government eventually decides that incorporation is the answer to its greatest woes.

The current Calabash-Carolina Shores "unincorporation" issue should be enough to convince many county-dwellers to be careful what they wish for in regard to creating new municipalities. Hopefully, Calabash won't have to learn the bitter lesson about how much harder it is to get out of its "marriage" than it was to get in, to promulgate a tiresome analogy. But regardless of the outcome in Calabash, its troubles should serve as a lesson that incorporation is not a magic bullet. It can create as many problems as it solves—sometimes more—maybe not today, but somewhere down the line.

Incorporation has traditionally been a relatively simple legislative procedure. It shouldn't be. Now, with the incorporation commission, there is a vehicle for giving thorough and, more importantly, objective consideration to incorporation requests and to explore the possible ramifications, not only for those to be incorporated but for those who will be relied upon to provide traditional municipal services to those new towns.

That way, perhaps, areas will pause before seeking incorporation for all the wrong reasons—like trying to avoid zoning or other county regulations—and be guided toward become towns only when their motives are appropriate and when there is every reason to believe such new governmental ventures can not only survive, but thrive, within the greater community.

Worth Repeating...

- *We desperately need to recover a sense of the fundamental purpose of education, which is to engage in the architecture of souls. When a self-governing society ignores this responsibility, it does so at its peril.* —William J. Bennett
- *If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is that if it is comfort or money that it values more, it will lose that too.* —Somerset Maugham
- *Political language...is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.* —George Orwell



Say What You Want, Whoever You Are

Before you read this, please familiarize yourself with a letter to the editor from Shirley Hewett of Holden Beach.

I have never responded directly to a reader's correspondence, but this time I feel some clarification may be necessary.

The *Beacon* regards its letters to the editor as one of the most important parts of the paper. It is here that we (and you) find out what readers are thinking: about their community, about their government, about the issues of the day and your feelings about how we report on those issues.

If you didn't write letters, we would worry that you don't read (or worse, that you don't care). So we publish just about every letter we get, as long as it is signed by the person who wrote it and doesn't make obscene or libelous remarks.

When I read Mrs. Hewett's letter, I was impressed with her apparent grasp on the inner workings of county government. Having been in Brunswick County for less than a year, I had to admit that she seemed to know a lot more than I about some of these issues.

I did not appreciate being called unprofessional, inaccurate, biased, lazy, incompetent and out of touch. But everyone is entitled to an opinion.

As a matter of fact, because the letter was well written and included what seemed to be informed opinions about complicated issues, I was going to suggest that it be run as a guest column—insults and all.

Notwithstanding her allegations to the contrary, I am very much interested in hearing "the rest of the story" about some of the topics she mentions. But most of these events occurred long before I arrived here,

Eric Carlson



and the trail has gotten a bit cold. So I decided to call Mrs. Hewett and see if she could provide some background.

Most of her charges were aimed at former County Manager/Attorney David Clegg, so I was especially interested to hear what she had to say about her claim that he had "ostensibly recommended to the then commissioners that Brunswick County participate financially in the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority."

I had heard about the LCFW&SA and was aware that it had made some controversial decisions years ago. So last fall, I asked the chairman (Mr. Clegg) about it.

He told me a very long, detailed history of the authority and we discussed some of the criticism it had received. His comments raised a few questions that might have been worth looking into at the time. But since this was a very old story, I filed it away in case some recent development made it newsworthy.

When I read Mrs. Hewett's letter, I thought I had found someone who could give me hard facts about the other side of this issue, instead of the usual rumors and conjecture. I assumed that anyone who felt so strongly about these questions would have other things to say and would jump at the chance to discuss

it. But when I asked Mrs. Hewett to tell me her impressions about how the water and sewer authority operated, she said she could not explain it.

When I inquired about her lawyer-like opinion that the commissioners' letter of intent constituted a "legal or illegal contract," she had nothing to say about that. Her only comment was, "The letter speaks for itself."

Puzzled by her reticence, I began to wonder why her name, typed in bold capital letters at the top of the first page, was spelled "HEWETT" when her signature was spelled "Hewett." So I asked her if she had written the letter herself. There was a brief pause before she answered.

"I and another party together wrote the letter," she said. When I asked who the other party was, she said, "That's between me and them."

So I explained that the *Beacon* requires that all letters to the editor be signed by the author (or authors).

That's because we want our readers to trust the authenticity of the letters we publish. If someone is criticized (or insulted) in a letter, we want that person to know who is doing the criticizing. And we want to prevent someone from writing a letter and signing YOUR name to it.

As I tried to explain this, Mrs. Hewett stopped me and insisted that she DID write the letter, after "conferring" with another person. When I reminded her of her earlier statement, she denied making it and accused me of twisting her words.

But I know exactly what she said. Because I wrote it down as she said it. Just as I have written down thousands and thousands of words spoken by hundreds and hundreds of

people for many years. I'm not saying Mrs. Hewett did not write the letter. She may have accidentally typed her name incorrectly. She may have accidentally said that she and another party "wrote" it when she intended to say they "conferred." Everyone makes mistakes when they type and when they speak.

What bothers me is that I keep hearing this same agenda of old, politically charged "issues" dredged up again and again without anyone providing a convincing argument why the Democrats' interpretation of these events is any more valid than the Republicans'.

Unfortunately, those who continually stir this stale pot prefer to do so from behind the scenes. I've heard the same charges from unidentified voices on the telephone. I've read it in anonymous letters. The only thing new in this version are the insults leveled at me for not putting their politically correct spin on things.

If these folks really believe that David Clegg and the former commissioners are guilty of a "conspiracy" and an "illegal cover-up," why don't they stand up at a commissioners' meeting, present their case and publicly demand a criminal investigation? Is it courage or evidence they lack?

Guess what, folks? The election is over. David Clegg is gone. New commissioners are in control. If they feel the county should pay off lawsuits instead of defending against them, they can do it today. If they want to dismiss current appointees and re-hire old employees, they can do it tomorrow.

And if other people don't agree and want to dismiss their elected officials, they can do it in 558 days.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Writer Commends New Board For Efforts Toward Change

To the editor:

I have read with considerable interest the letters and articles blasting the new Brunswick County Commissioners for the resignation of former County Manager/Attorney David Clegg, and the outpouring of praise for his qualifications and contributions to Brunswick County. I think it is time to set the record straight.

First, I believe that Mr. Clegg resigned on his own volition, perhaps, because he disagreed with some policies of the new commissioners. Let everyone understand that these new commissioners were elected by a substantial majority of the voters because the people wanted a change. Let's also remember that the county manager, county attorney and clerk to the board serve at the pleasure of the board of commissioners by North Carolina statute. It therefore would seem that if any of these appointed people are not willing to carry out the policies of the commissioners, then they should resign; and, if not, they should be dismissed because the board is answerable to the people and not to the bureaucrats.

Now, if the board has asked Mr. Clegg to perform illegal acts as Mr. Donald Shaw has intimated, then let's ask the district attorney to investigate the validity of these charges. If Mr. Shaw has knowledge of criminal activity, he should come forth and testify under oath as to his knowledge and accusations. Indeed, Mr. Clegg should come forth with the truth instead of making veiled threats in the newspaper. To do otherwise, I believe, is conspiracy.

Let's now look at Mr. Clegg's performance as county manager. When New Hanover County groups in conjunction with Takeda and Cape Industries indicated a desire to extend the Lower Cape Fear Water & Sewer

Authority's raw water line to New Hanover, Mr. Clegg, our county manager and/or attorney, and also chairman of the LCFWS Authority, ostensibly recommended to the then commissioners that Brunswick County participate financially in this project. I believe some investigative reporting will find the board of commissioners voted to send a "letter of intent" on Mr. Clegg's recommendation supporting this issue; however the "letter of intent" presented to and signed by the commissioner chairman was actually a legal or illegal contract. No one I know, except perhaps Mr. Clegg, could see any benefit to Brunswick County by helping pay for a water line to New Hanover County. Thankfully this contract was rescinded and another signed.

Further, if Mr. Clegg is so professional, why would he advise the former board that it was legal to break an engineering firm's contract when he was well aware that the action was definitely a political deed, and as an attorney did or should have known the consequences. Indeed, the court quickly ruled that the county had wrongly broken the contract.

Further, *The Brunswick Beacon* reported that over \$200,000 had already been spent on Mr. Clegg's employment of outside attorneys, expert witnesses, etc., with the prospect of that amount or more being spent in an appeal to defend a position on which the court has already ruled that the county was wrong.

Let's look also for the source of these finds spent by the county. North Carolina State law, I believe, requires that finds be appropriated for specific types of expenditures. Transfer of finds may be made only by action of the board of commissioners, and I do not recall any information in any paper authorizing any transfers for specific outside legal fees. Were they taken from other bud-

getary items in an illegal cover-up attempt and/or to hide the true cost to the county? Why not ask one of the new commissioners?

It is to be assumed that Mr. Clegg concurred with the dismissal of several county employees, but did he advise the then commissioners of the proper procedures and legal ramifications? One employee has already recovered, from the county, \$45,000, including his attorney fees and monies due, through the courts. This does not include "outside" legal fees to defend the county in this action.

Mr. Clegg was reported to have said the entire amount was "covered by insurance." However, I believe a little investigative reporting will show this to be untrue. The finds were taken from a "sales tax" account and according to one commissioner, he has no knowledge of any budget amendments to receive funds from an insurance company for this purpose.

And what about the firing of these employees, who were Democrats, several years ago by the then commissioners who were Republicans? This appeared to be about as political as possible, and I certainly did not hear any journalistic hue and cry because of this action.

Eric Carlson's recent articles were the most opinionated and unprofessional pieces of journalism that I have ever seen and were completely unfair to the commissioners as well as to the system. It flagrantly violates the basic tenets of accuracy and objectivity of journalism. But let's remember that Mr. Carlson receives his information primarily from the county employees who feed him the information they want to, without much effort on his part, to fill up whatever space is necessary in the paper. His other source of information is primarily by monitoring public events at which the political signifi-

cance is often not apparent or understood by Mr. Carlson.

When the former board met, just prior to the assumption of office by the new commissioners, and reappointed many board members (a function heretofore normally reserved for the incoming board) of their political persuasion, was this not only political chicanery but also boorish behavior and an insult to the citizens of Brunswick County?

Where were the news reporters? Was this performed at Mr. Clegg's recommendation, or was it a power grab by Mr. Kelly Holden, Mr. Donald Shaw and Mr. Jerry Jones to perpetuate their policies, perhaps, contrary to the desires of the people? But no, these commissioners allegedly abhor political conduct in the administration of county government.

Mrs. (Irene) Kellagher, who writes many letters to the editor, one of which I read in *The Brunswick Beacon* March 11, has never failed to have an unassailable opinion on just about any issue, but who thankfully is largely ignored by those responsible for making meaningful decisions concerning our county.

I think it is time we gave our new commissioners a chance to perform and gave a loud "hooray" to Mr. Donald Warren, Mr. Tom Rabon and Mr. Wayland Vereen for attempting to implement the change for which they were elected. Certainly the continuing "bad mouthing" without due cause is not helping our county. We need their focus on the many problems we face and if it means taking control of the government and dismissing others who insist on "business as usual," then so be it.

Shirley Hewett, Holden Beach
 (More Letters, Following Page)