

## Former clerk will sue for reinstatement

# Alexander alleges race, politics cost her job

By Holly Edwards  
County Editor

In one of the last official actions taken by outgoing members of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners, the board unanimously agreed Thursday to ask county manager/attorney David Clegg to defend three commissioners against former clerk to the board Regina Alexander, who is suing the commissioners for allegedly firing her because of her race and Democratic party affiliation.

New board members could overturn this decision, however, and opt instead to reinstate Alexander or settle out of court. The former board turned down an offer made by Raleigh attorney Martha Geer in July to settle out of court.

While Alexander claims she was fired in June, 1991, in part because she is black, N. C. Institute of Government assistant director Steve Alred indicated that the Civil Rights Act sets a 180-day limit on filing claims alleging discrimination on the basis of race.

"She's out of luck," Alred said. However, Geer said race discrimination is a violation of two federal statutes, as well as the U. S. Constitution, and that there is a three-year time limit for filing suit under these terms.

Alexander also claimed in her suit that commissioners chairman Kelly Holden and fellow Republican board members Donald Shaw and Jerry Jones voted to eliminate funding for her position because of her party affiliation. She had served as clerk to the board since 1980, and her performance had been "entirely satisfactory," the suit states.

After deleting funding for Alexander's position, commissioners subsequently voted to appoint county manager David Clegg's secretary, Kelly Barefoot, to a dual position as secretary to the board and the county manager.

The suit alleges Barefoot was hired because she is white and a political supporter of Holden.

Holden rejected Alexander's claims, and said funding for her position was deleted along with funding for 20 other positions in order to balance the county's budget. The clerk serves at the pleasure of the board, he said, and can be dismissed without cause. He also pointed out that Barefoot, like Alexander, is a registered Democrat.

"Many counties this size do not have a full-time clerk, and I don't feel we did anything wrong," said Holden. "I always had a cordial relationship with (Alexander)."

However, Geer said Alexander was fired not only because she is a Democrat but also because she was not perceived as being a political supporter of Holden. She added that

*'Many counties this size do not have a full-time clerk, and I don't feel we did anything wrong. I always had a cordial relationship with (Alexander).'*

**Kelly Holden**  
Former chairman

serving at the pleasure of the board does not give the board the right to fire its clerk for "illegal reasons."

Alexander claims that as a result of her dismissal she suffered "substantial emotional distress that contributed to severe health problems" that eventually led to her requiring

emergency surgery. She also claims commissioners "wantonly and recklessly" violated her rights of free speech, discriminated against her because of her race and party affiliation and violated her right to equal protection.

As a result, the suit alleges, Alexander suffered embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety and damage to reputation, as well as monetary and non-monetary benefits due to her as a county employee. She was earning an annual salary of \$26,440 in her position as clerk to the board.

She is asking for \$10,000 in compensatory damages, punitive damages to be determined by a jury and reinstatement as clerk to the board.

The suit will be formally filed in state or federal court within the next two weeks, said Geer.

When asked why Alexander waited 18 months to file the suit, Geer replied: "It's not unusual to wait that long. She had to find an attorney, and then she had her health problems to deal with. There was also a period of investigation."

In other business discussed by the board of commissioners Thursday:

- Commissioners unanimously agreed to award construction of the Shallotte Point Special Assessment District (SAD) to Hendrix Barnhill of Greenville, and to include Holly Acres in the SAD project. The county received seven bids, and accepted Hendrix Barnhill's low bid of \$738,322. The company indicated the project would be completed in 145 work days, if there are no interruptions.

- The board approved 26 health department fee increases recommended by consulting firm David M. Griffith and Associates, including increases in the cost of flu vaccinations, pregnancy tests, adoption fees for pets at the county animal shelter and water sample analyses.

- Commissioners also agreed to hire an additional animal control officer and an additional public health nurse. However, the board did not go along with a DMG recommendation to do away with the residency requirement for health department employees.

The changes will take effect February 1, 1993.

- A representative of Gov. Jim Martin presented Holden with a plaque for his outstanding service to the citizens of Brunswick County.

- Commissioners unanimously approved project ordinances for the county warehouse and library projects in Southport, Shallotte, Leland and Oak Island.

- The board agreed to give the Brunswick County Airport Commission \$2,000 to purchase a tractor to mow grass.

- Sunbelt Roofing and Associates from Marion, S.C., was hired for \$85,228 to re-roof the planning and public assembly buildings.

- Commissioners accepted \$92,990 in additional federal funds for the county's public housing project.

- The board approved \$10,000 in additional funding for the county planning department. Commissioners said the costs of developing the countywide zoning ordinance led to a shortage of funds in the planning department.

### Sales tax report

Collection of the local-option sales and use tax in Brunswick County totaled \$631,084 during the month of October.

The amount will be combined with collections for November and December, to be distributed to Brunswick county and municipal governments on a quarterly basis.

### Beach burglaries

A vacation home at 232-76th Street NE was burglarized sometime during the past several months, Long Beach police reported this week.

A Panasonic radio/cassette player, its speakers and a Technic CD player were stolen from the home between October 25 and December 4, when the crime was reported by the homeowner, Garland Duvall.

A burglary was attempted at 105-3rd Street SE Sunday night, major Johnny Freeman said. When homeowner Carla Clark awoke, the burglar fled before gaining entry, Freeman reported.

Investigations into both cases are continuing.

### Tree seedlings now available to landowners

The N. C. Division of Forest Resources is accepting applications for forest tree seedlings.

The seedlings are available to any North Carolina landowner. This year, the division's nurseries have a good supply of genetically improved loblolly pine, longleaf pine, white pine, Virginia pine and shortleaf pine. One-year red cedar and one- and two-year bald cypress seedlings also are available.

In addition, the nurseries have supplies of high-quality hardwood seedlings, including several oaks, green ash, yellow poplar, sweetgum, black locust and sycamore. Fraser fir seedlings are available from mountain-region Christmas tree producers.

Environmental seedling packets are available to landowners interested in planting the tree species most common to their areas of the state. Each packet contains 100 seedlings of several tree species. Educational packets of 50 loblolly pine and 50 white pine seedlings are available to teachers.

Seedling applications may be obtained from the division, the U. S. Soil Conservation Service and the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Service. For more information, persons may contact the county forest ranger at 253-5297.

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