

Sanitary district director Speight resigns Leland board seat over lawsuit

By Terry Pope
County Editor

Leland councilman Jean Speight told town officials this week she plans to resign from council effective October 31 because she disagrees with legal action the town may take against the North Brunswick Sanitary District, of which she is director, and against the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners.

"I deeply regret the events that have led to this decision," Speight stated in her letter presented to Leland mayor Franky Thomas on Thursday.

As NBSD director, Ms. Speight has been entwined in the legal dispute involving the town and district over Leland's right to purchase water at wholesale rates and sell it to new customers. The council has voted to file a lawsuit claiming discrimination against the district and county commissioners after they,

Brunswick County."

Last month, county commissioners voted unanimously not to sell water to Leland because that would affect the sanitary district system already in place in northern Brunswick. Leland wants to enter the water business so it can provide both water and sewer service to newer developments like the 900-acre Magnolia Greens Golf Plantation, which is also expected to expand in the future.

After negotiations between the district and Town of Leland failed, mayor Thomas asked the county to sell the town wholesale water and to treat Leland like other towns and industries who are county water customers. But the NBSD boundaries include the entire Town of Leland and was created in 1976 before Leland was incorporated. Lines are in place in Leland from the \$3.5 million in bonds used to start delivering water in August, 1988, to the first 800 customers.

Today, the district has 95 miles of lines and more than 2,100 customers. County commissioners are afraid splitting the customer base now at a time when northern Brunswick is growing will hurt the district's ability to retire its bond debt and result in higher rates for customers.

"At this time, when we are experiencing growth of the greatest magnitude," said Ms. Speight, "we all need to be working together, not fragmenting, to insure orderly and controlled growth to insure a smooth meshing of the old and the new."

Last month, amid the dispute, the district mailed a four-page flyer to all Leland area postal customers to explain the disagreement between the district and the Town of Leland.

"I sincerely thank all the citizens who helped put me in this office and supported me these past three years," said Ms. Speight, "and ask that they understand that I feel that in my position as director of the North Brunswick Sanitary District that I can better serve all of northern Brunswick County by continuing to expand our water system and by helping to bring much-needed sewer to all the unincorporated areas."

She requested that the council appoint former mayor Russell Baldwin as a replacement for her unexpired term.

County attorney Huey Marshall advised county commissioners that acts of discrimination would only apply if Leland becomes a water customer and is treated differently from other towns with its rates or level of service. Marshall said the county is not compelled to sell water to Leland but that there isn't a precedent of turning a town away.

Sanitary district chairman Elgie Jones told commissioners the district's ability to obtain grants would be diminished if its franchise area is fragmented.

"These attempts at 'cream skimming' are not good public policy," said Jones, "and do so at the cost of the existing customers who have supported the system for over ten years and continue to pay off the debt service of which the town's new customers would possibly not be paying a part of."

'... I can better serve all of northern Brunswick County by continuing to expand (the sanitary district) water system and by helping to bring much-needed sewer to all the unincorporated areas.'

Jean Speight

too, voted not to sell Leland water.

Ms. Speight said she has enjoyed serving the citizens of Leland, but says the town's recent decision to file a lawsuit she believes is "in the worst possible interest of the citizens of the towns of Leland, Belville, Navassa, the sanitary district and the remainder of northern

Winnabow VFD earns state grant

A state grant of \$9,210 has been awarded Winnabow Volunteer Fire Department.

"North Carolina is fortunate to have such a large number of dedicated fire and rescue volunteers, and I am very pleased to assist their efforts," said Jim Long, state insurance commissioner and fire marshal. "These grants help volunteer fire personnel provide essential services to their communities by allowing them to spend more time training in the latest fire suppression methods, and less time fund-raising."

The Volunteer Fire Department Grant Fund was created by the General Assembly in 1988 to help volunteer units raise money for fire-fighting equipment and supplies. The funds are matching grants; the state matches dollar-for-dollar, up to an approved amount, monies raised locally to purchase necessary equipment. The state insurance department has distributed a total of \$26,111,056 in grant money to fire and rescue departments across the state. The total amount of volunteer rescue and fire grants approved for Brunswick County to date is \$449,053.

"The N. C. Department of Insurance is committed to our fire and rescue volunteers who provide a vital service to the people of Brunswick County," said Long. "We salute these volunteers for their dedication to protecting the lives of others. I am honored that North Carolina is able to financially assist local volunteer fire and rescue departments across the state. I am confident that this grant will enhance operations in Brunswick County."



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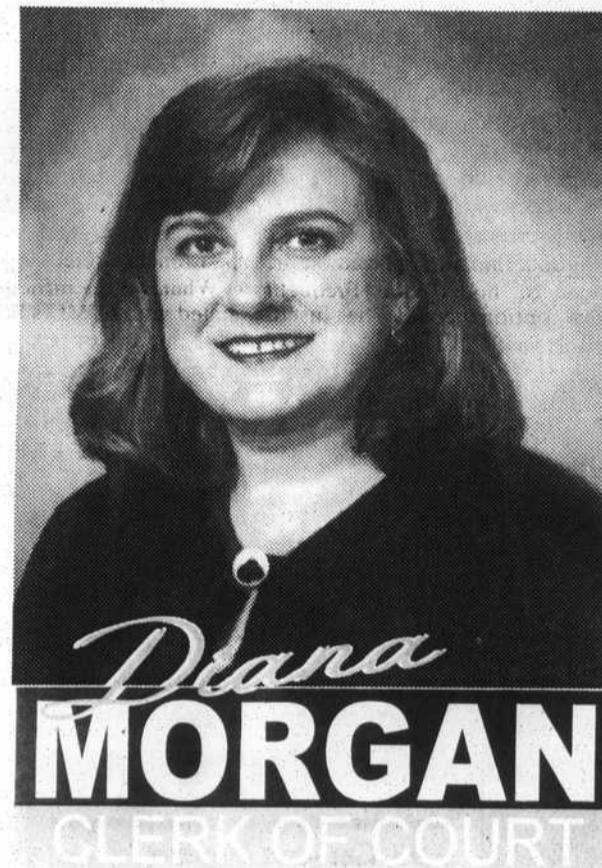
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