

Varnamtown Opposition Over Taxes

(Continued From Page 1-A)

future as Varnamtown takes on new projects. "There is no such thing as staying like you are," he said. "Unless you stop, and you're not going to stop, things are going to escalate."

But town officials said town taxes are low enough so everyone can afford to pay them and that the tax rate doesn't have to increase if residents don't want it to increase.

Mrs. McDonald said only seven residents in town pay more than \$50 a year in town taxes. Three of them are on the town board, she said, and three of the other four want the community to remain incorporated.

She said she contacted disabled and elderly residents before the town board adopted its budget last year to see if the 4.5-cent tax rate would be a burden.

Town officials pointed out later that the town gets more than 90 percent of its revenue from the state. Varnamtown property owners have paid only about \$3,310 in taxes since the town incorporated.

In addition to taxes, Simmons said residents of Varnamtown had been misled about what would happen following incorporation. He said residents were led to believe nothing would change when the area was incorporated, but the town board has purchased land and is moving toward construction of a town hall.

Alderman Roger Robinson said, "If anybody was misinformed, it was done through the grapevine, not sitting in front of this board."

Redwine, who attended last week's meeting to gauge public sentiment and answer questions, said the General Assembly could pass a bill that would unincorporate the town subject to a local referendum.

Due to the nature of the incorporation issue, however, Redwine said the earliest he could introduce legislation to dissolve the town is January 1991. An adjournment resolution adopted by the General Assembly last year prevents the legislature from addressing controversial issues in the upcoming short session.

Redwine said he helped the Shady Forest community near Sun-

set Beach unincorporate in the 1970s. But he said that town was never active and was a "paper town" from the time it incorporated.

A show of hands near the end of last week's meeting in Varnamtown revealed that about three-fourths of the people attending want the community to remain a town.

Annie Smigiel, president of the river preservation group Save Our Shellfish (SOS), was one of several people who spoke in favor of remaining a town, saying, "I think it has strengthened our voice as far as getting the river cleaned up, and I think we should stay incorporated."

Jim Callan, a member of the committee that studied incorporation of the community about two years ago, also said he favors staying incorporated. He said dissolving the town could open the area up to annexation by Holden Beach or Lockwood Folly, an unincorporated golf course community near Varnamtown.

"We don't know what the Lockwood Folly area might do in the way of incorporating," he said. "If we unincorporate now, we're presenting ourselves to an executioner with a double-barrel, 12-gauge shotgun at 10 feet."

Rev. Tracie Varnum, the first mayor of Varnamtown, and others said it was hard to believe opposition to incorporation exists, since no one has ever brought a complaint before the town board.

"We have harmed nobody," he said. "We have done nobody a disservice."

The former mayor emphasized two sections in the town charter that require a vote of residents before they can occur: 1) increasing in the town tax rate above 10 cents and 2) paying the mayor and aldermen a salary.

Speaking to Simmons, who was standing at a podium, Varnum said, "If you find a town charter with the two town laws that our charter has in it, I'll eat that desk that you're standing in front of."

Much of the night was spent dispelling rumors that involved people on both sides of the incorporation issue.

Among them were rumors that Simmons had tried to unincorporate a section of Wilmington where he lived there and that a portion of Swain's land was left out of the town so he wouldn't have to pay town taxes on the property.

Mrs. McDonald also refuted a rumor that the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) refused to plow local roads following the December winter storm because Varnamtown is an incorporated community.

The town board member produced a letter from the DOT and a map showing the state's priority roads that are cleared following winter storms. "Being a town did not keep you from getting your roads plowed," she said.

Earlier in the meeting, residents were assured emergency services such as fire, rescue and law enforcement would be provided whether the area is incorporated or not.

Coastline Volunteer Rescue Squad President Kevin Mulholland said there will be no charge for service whether the area is incorporated or not. "Coastline's going to service this area whether this is a town or not a town," he said. "We've got you covered."

Sheriff John Carr Davis told the group, "We're gonna be there regardless of what you decide."

Most of the crowd left the church when the discussion on incorporation ended. A handful of residents remained as the board of aldermen continued with its regular monthly business meeting.

The board appointed Alderman Luellen Norris, Swain and residents Jackie Varnam and Beverly Wooten to a finance committee that will draft a proposed budget for the coming year.

Aldermen also created a new planning committee and appointed Robinson, board member John David Dawson, Rev. Varnum and residents Danny Galloway and Faye Galloway. The mayor and town clerk will serve on both committees.

The board's next regular meeting will be Thursday, April 19, at 7:30 p.m. in Dixon Chapel United Methodist Church.



PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Bolivia PTA Buys New Sign

The Bolivia Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association recently purchased a new school sign which features the school's bear mascot. Pictured with the sign are (from left) PTA officers Donna Green, Sherry Willetts and Patricia Sullivan; Student Council officers Alexis Vaughn, Dale Linkous, Kerri Lanier, Jennifer Unger and Latoia Robinson; Student Council sponsor Thelma Fullwood, Assistant Principal Carolyn Williams and Principal David Corley.

Cooler Temps Make Comeback

Weather conditions in the Shallotte area are expected to return to seasonable levels over the next several days, according to Shallotte Point meteorologist Jackson Canady.

Temperatures through the weekend should average from the mid 40s at night to the mid 60s during the day. Rainfall also is expected to be near normal at approximately one-half inch.

For the period of March 13 through 19, the daily average temperature was 62 degrees, which Canady said was eight degrees above average.

The daily average high temperature was 68 degrees, and the nightly average low temperature was 57 degrees.

The maximum high temperature during the period was 86 degrees on March 13. The minimum low temperature was 45 degrees on March 19.

Canady measured 1.12 inches of rain during the seven-day period.

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Veterinarian Found Guilty

(Continued From Page 1-A)

Both Ms. Burroughs and Neal, who also testified at length, stated that the Somerset cat scratched both of them as Ms. Burroughs held the animal so that the veterinarian could attempt to draw blood from its jugular vein for the leukemia test.

Ms. Burroughs, however, maintained that Neal provoked the cat by making 10 to 15 unsuccessful attempts to draw blood. Neal claimed that Ms. Burroughs let go of the cat when he stuck it the first time with the needle, and that he knocked the cat away when it "brutally attacked" him. He said the "kitty" scratched and bit him on the hand and ran up his arm toward his face.

Although Ms. Burroughs testified that the incident lasted at least 30 minutes, the veterinarian asserted that he retrieved the cat after it attacked him, put it in a restraint bag and drew the blood on the next try. "I took the blood sample and said (to Ms. Burroughs), 'See you later,' and it was 12:15," he said, indicating that the procedure lasted only 15 minutes.

A key witness for the state was Dr. Bill Rabon, one of two local veterinarians who examined the cat Jan. 5. Rabon testified that the Somerset cat suffered injuries that appeared to have been caused by "multiple, blunt-force trauma."

Injuries included a broken tooth, an abrasion on the nose, bruises inside the mouth, and neurological damage that kept the cat from being

able to lift its head. Rabon added he observed that the cat's neck had been shaved and that "some attempts had been made to puncture the jugular vein."

Rabon, who also is a member of the Brunswick County Board of Health, later stated that Neal called him and discussed the animal cruelty case. "He said, 'Bill, you've got to get a leash on (Animal Control Supervisor) Zelma Babson for me. I know you can,'" Rabon testified.

Neal also told Rabon he had tried to talk to Health Director Michael Rhodes about the matter but that Rhodes would not speak to him, Rabon testified.

Under cross-examination by Lambeth, Rabon confirmed that he and Neal were "not on the best of terms" because Neal declared bankruptcy after buying Calabash Animal Hospital from Rabon. Neal has operated the animal hospital since 1986. He moved here after graduating from the Auburn University veterinary school in 1985 and working at animal clinics in Columbia, Tenn., and Paris, Texas.

Three other former employees of Neal—Sharon Roberge, Annette Alsbrooks and Dee Lee—testified as state witnesses about the other three cruelty charges. Ms. Alsbrooks said Neal twice threw the stray cat against walls after it scratched him during an X-ray. Ms. Lee said Neal struck Ms. Inman's chow dog several times after he had difficulty anesthetizing the dog for surgery. She also testified that Neal repeatedly

banged the head of the Harrelsons' muzzled chow on an examining table after the dog resisted having its toenails clipped.

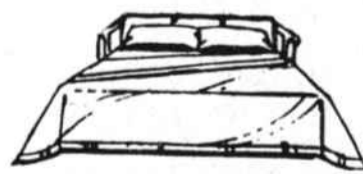
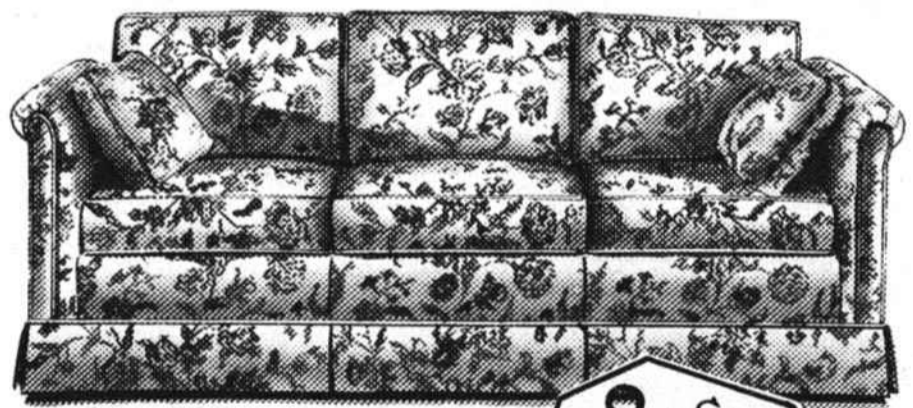
In his testimony, Neal flatly denied abusing any of the animals. He said the Somerset cat broke its tooth when it hit the floor after he protected himself from it; he also said he noticed no other injuries. Neal testified that he repaired the stray cat's broken leg and sent it to a Humane Society animal shelter in North Myrtle Beach, S.C., for adoption. He said that when the Inman dog struggled, he simply held it down with his arms. The veterinarian admitted muzzling the Harrelson's dog but denied beating it.

Defense witnesses included three veterinarians who worked with Neal as early as 1985; all three said they never saw Neal abuse animals. Other individuals who testified on Neal's behalf included five part-time employees and volunteers at the animal hospital and eight clinic customers, all of whom characterized Neal as a caring, highly professional veterinarian.

However, the witnesses who had worked for him—witnesses for both the state and defense—indicated that Neal sometimes lost his temper and became verbally abusive to personnel. When Hicks pointed out that Neal's office had a high employee turnover rate, the veterinarian said it was because working in the animal hospital was a "lousy job," in which employees often had to work long hours, clean up animal excrement and continually see pets that were injured or in poor health.

Also, Neal's girlfriend, Tina Wilson, confirmed under Hicks' cross-examination that her own dog suffered a broken leg while in Neal's care at the animal hospital last year. Ms. Wilson said the dog was injured when it caught its leg in a cage.

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