



New Redistricting Plan Places Varnamtown Back In District 2

BY TERRY POPE

At least one community is pleased with a new redistricting plan chosen by Brunswick County Commissioners Monday night.

Varnamtown Aldermen were not happy at being grouped with Southport and Oak Island as part of District 3 in a plan chosen earlier.

Because of a mapping error, commissioners had to choose another plan to place before voters Nov. 5.

The one they chose, 3-1, will put Varnamtown back in District 2.

In opposing the plan, District 5 Commissioner Donald Shaw said he felt the new plan created a District 4 that covered too much territory.

The county's five residency districts must be redrawn to reflect the county's growth since the 1980 U.S. Census, from 35,777 to 50,985 residents, or about 43 percent.

The districts are for residency purposes only. While candidates run from and represent the district in which they reside, they are elected by voters countywide.

The districts are the same for both commissioners and the Brunswick County Board of Education. Both boards have five members, one from each district.

A plan chosen by the board in August was a "faulty document," said Planning Director John Harvey.

"This was a mapping error, not a statistical error," said Harvey in a memo to commissioners. "It was entirely my fault."

The error would have placed 12,294 residents in District 3 and 8,225 residents in District 2. It left

unaddressed, Harvey said it would have created disproportionate representation.

Each district in the proposed plan would contain about 10,197 residents. When commissioners drew district lines in August 1983, each contained approximately 7,200 residents.

Commissioners chose not to accept the amended version of the plan adopted in August, for as Chairman Kelly Holden of District 1 said, "When you correct the mapping error, you change the whole map."

Varnamtown officials had expressed concern to commissioners that in the previous plan District 3 had crossed the Lockwood Folly River to include their community. The amended map would have shifted the Varnamtown area to District 4.

"It would have been left alone, had it not been for a mapping error," said District 2 Commissioner Jerry Jones of the Varnamtown situation.

District 3 Commissioner Gene Pinkerton was out of town on business Monday, said Holden.

There have been differences of opinion over whether the county must redraw its district lines by a binding vote of residents.

State Rep. E. David Redwine said since the county maintains residency districts instead of electoral districts, where residents cannot vote countywide, the county could choose not to redistrict.

"It does not compel them to re-

district anything," said Redwine, of the state law.

A local bill (H.B. 630) is expected to pass the General Assembly next year giving the county authority to redistrict in the future without a binding referendum.

If the county chose not to redistrict this year, said County Manager David Clegg, it could possibly face a class action lawsuit over the one-man, one-vote principle. The districts would contain disproportionate numbers of residents, he said.

"I'm not so sure the (U.S.) Justice Department would not step in," said Clegg. "I think that what we are doing is the appropriate action. It is a unique opportunity for the citizens of Brunswick County to involve themselves in a crucial issue."

Of North Carolina's 100 counties, 25 elect boards of commissioners like Brunswick County, with residency districts, said Clegg. The other 75 counties have electoral districts.

Between 1981 and 1984, the county redrew its district lines twice, once to change the makeup on the board from six members to five.

"We call these things electoral districts, but technically that's not what they are," said Clegg.

The only electoral districts in Brunswick County are for electing members to the Doshier Hospital Board of Trustees, the Leland Sanitary District Board and the Southeast Brunswick Sanitary District Board.



COUNTY OFFICIALS compare plans for dividing the county into residency districts. Pictured are (from left) Doug Ledgett, assistant to the county manager; District 1 Commissioner Kelly Holden and District 2 Commissioner.

Three More Issues Added To Ballot

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County Commissioners want to know what residents think about county zoning, non-partisan school board elections and fire and rescue tax districts.

In a non-binding vote, the board will use the Nov. 5 ballot to gather input on those topics.

Commissioners voted 4-0 Monday to add the three items to the ballot, which already contains two binding referendums—one asking if commissioners' terms should be shortened from four years to two and another asking voters to approve a redistricting plan chosen Monday.

District 4 Commissioner Frankie Rabon made the motion to put the three items on the ballot. He has stood opposed to county zoning since it became a hot issue several years ago.

One question will ask if commissioners should enact a "comprehensive zoning ordinance to regulate all unincorporated areas of Brunswick County," effective on or before Jan. 1, 1993.

The county held regional meetings on county zoning when it became a debated topic several years ago, said Chairman Kelly Holden.

"We did everything we could to educate the public on these topics," said Holden. "I think we did our homework there."

Holden thinks residents will approve of county zoning, saying the concept has gained support in the coastal areas. But Rabon said he's not so sure it will pass.

The issue resurfaced again this summer when residents in Wainbow asked commissioners to help oppose an air quality permit application from someone who wants to build a pet crematory in a residential neighborhood there.

Southeastern Pet Cremation Inc. plans to build the crematory off of Old Town Creek Road. Without county zoning, the county cannot regulate what is built on the lot, said County Manager David Clegg.

As of Tuesday, that permit application was still pending with the N.C. Division of Environmental Management air quality section, said DEM spokesman Jim Sheppard.

Rabon also wants voters to decide if members of the Brunswick County Board of Education should be chosen in non-partisan elections, as they were at one time. Removing party affiliation from the school

board election would remove politics from the public schools, he said.

A third question will ask if commissioners should establish five county service districts to fund fire protection, ambulance service, rescue service and emergency medical services effective July 1, 1992.

Volunteer fire and rescue departments are now funded by the county's general fund. Districts are favored by the Brunswick County Fire and Rescue Association.

If districts are established, it would allow the county to levy taxes on property value within a district. The money collected would go to volunteer units within that district.

In other business Monday, commissioners:

■ Heard from Emergency Medical Services Director Doug Ledgett that Shallotte and Coastline Volunteer Rescue personnel will meet Thursday (today) to decide which squad will service the Royal Oak community when 911 services begin in March. Residents there gave commissioners a petition asking that Coastline be selected.

■ Fielded questions from Bob (See ISSUES, Page 2-A)

Parents Remove Nine Middle School Students From Quest

BY SUSAN USHER

Shallotte Middle School has transferred nine out of approximately 675 students from its advisor/advisee program at the request of parents who object to the use of Quest materials.

Last week, after a request from two parents to remove Quest from the schools, the Brunswick County Board of Education chose to continue using the program as the curriculum for the middle school advisor/advisee program, with one change.

Principal Mark Owens of Shallotte Middle School said his office sent letters last Thursday to the parents of all 675 or so students in sixth, seventh and eighth grade who participate in A/A.

Parents were advised their child was participating in the program and asked to make an appointment with Owens' office if they had concerns about it.

Monday morning nine parents, acting as a group, notified the

Beacon that they planned to withdraw their students from A/A, but chose not to discuss their reasons for doing so.

Owens said the parents did remove their children from A/A as well as from intramurals, since that is offered on an alternating schedule with A/A. He said several of the adults asked if students could be readmitted if their parents so chose after reviewing Quest materials for themselves. That is possible, he said.

Owens said he shared Quest materials with the parents for their review. "They left feeling good, it seemed to me," he said.

Meanwhile, Owens said the nine students have been assigned to a study period, and must bring materials on which to work each day. "That has created no problem for us," he said Tuesday.

Mose Lewis, the assistant superintendent of schools in charge of instruction, said the school board's goal is to create a "winning" situa-

tion in which no one loses—one that satisfies parents who don't want their children in the program and places students in an acceptable program substitute while not taking Quest out of the classroom.

"We hope we can use this in an acceptable way for all involved," he said.

Quest, which includes lessons in self-esteem, decision making and goal setting is used as part of the school system's drug education prevention program for the middle schools. Program Coordinator Jeff Cumbie said Quest teaches students that it is illegal and wrong to use illegal drugs or to use legal drugs illegally.

However, opponents argue that Quest is inadequate as a drug and alcohol abuse prevention program and that the curriculum "indoctrinates students into the occult, New Age Thinking and the religion of secular humanism" instead of its stated goals.

Search Begins For Missing Woman

BY TERRY POPE

Brunswick County sheriff's detectives suspect foul play is involved in the disappearance of an Ash woman missing from her home since Aug. 17.

Rhonda Diane Keeler, 29, of Route 1, has not been seen by her family in about a month, said Detective Nancy Simpson.

"This is one case that we are concerned about," said Ms. Simpson. "It's beginning to look like something has happened to her."

Detectives spent two days searching a wooded area and dragging a creek bottom near her home last week. A helicopter was also used to search by air, said Lt. Donnell Marlowe.

"We've put a lot of hours in on this case," said Marlowe.

Detectives returned to the woods near her home to search again Monday morning, aided by a group of concerned Ash residents.

Officers also want to question her husband, Timothy James Keeler, 31, who has not been seen since last Wednesday, said Ms. Simpson.

"We have no idea where he is," she said. Keeler reportedly told Mrs. Keeler's mother, who lives in Ash, that the couple was hitchhiking last

month to Asheville to see their two children, who have been placed in foster care.

While at a bar in Charlotte, Mrs. Keeler went to a restroom but never returned, he said, so he thumbed a ride back to Brunswick County, Ms. Simpson reported.

Mrs. Keeler was last seen wearing a light blue T-shirt and jeans. She is 5 feet 4 inches tall, weighs 105 pounds and has brown hair and brown eyes.

She has been treated at detoxification centers in Wilmington and Greenville previously, said Ms. Simpson, but she has not been located at any centers since Aug. 17.

Her mother, Genevieve Rathburn, of Route 1, Ash, told detectives Monday that friends are willing to help detectives search the Ash area, "to see if they could find anything," said Marlowe.

One of their two children had a birthday last week, and Mrs. Keeler did not contact the child, said Ms. Simpson.

"I feel that if something had not happened she would have called the child," said Ms. Simpson. "It's beginning to look like something has happened."

Detectives believe Keeler left the area to go to South Carolina.

The couple had been having marital problems prior to the incident, said Ms. Simpson.

Anyone with information that may help locate Mrs. Keeler should call the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, 253-4321.



SALISBURY

was in New Hanover County, about five years ago, said Davis.

"This is one time that we need the assistance of the news media to help get this man," he added. "We don't know where he is."

Summer died from multiple stab wounds in the chest and abdomen and was found inside a company-owned 1985 Ford van parked off of N.C. 133 on a cutoff leading to Orton Plantation and Brunswick Town State Historic Site, approximately 13 miles south of Belville.

Sheriff's Detective Douglas "Sonny" Padgett found the victim inside the van, along with two pounds of marijuana and a ledger containing the names of several persons. Padgett had retraced Summer's route to Wilmington after the family reported him missing.

Summer had been married to the sheriff's stepdaughter, Jane Brittain Summer. The van belonged to Soil and Materials Engineers of Wilmington, where Summer was employed as a senior technician. He had never been in trouble with the law before.

"This is just one step we have made," Padgett said. "There are many more steps to take. There are always missing pieces that must be found."

The photograph released by SBI agents last week shows a bearded Salisbury, as he looked about six years ago.

SBI agents were called in on the case immediately by Brunswick County sheriff's detectives, said Al Stevens, SBI special agent in charge of the coastal division.

"We cannot go into any particular

evidence," said Stevens. "He (Salisbury) has been one of the suspects under investigation."

Cummings said his special task force is still investigating another case in Brunswick County, the February 1987 murder of a Leland woman, Beverly Potter Mintz.

"It's ongoing," said Cummings. "Once again, we are attempting to eliminate outstanding leads in that case."

If the MUST team can help solve one murder, then it can be called an effective unit, said Cummings.

"The concept and the forming of the team has really paid off," he said. "It was very easy for the MUST team to come into this situation. We were able to come in and add a new approach to it. We were lucky the case was worked so well."

Cummings refused to say what evidence pointed to Salisbury.

"There are just certain things we can't release at this time," said Cummings.

Davis said officers are only taking care to assure a conviction when Salisbury is captured.

"When we get him, we want a conviction," said Davis. "After we get him, then any information the district attorney is willing to release, we'll release it. I think with the FBI's assistance, we stand a good chance of locating him."

FBI agents are hoping to locate and arrest Salisbury on a fugitive warrant.

Anyone with information regarding Salisbury is asked to contact the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, 253-4321, or the SBI, 779-1400.