

NEXT STEP DEPENDS UPON LIBRARY TRUSTEES

Leland Votes To Assume Control Of Northern Library Project

BY TERRY POPE

The Leland Town Council voted 3-2 at a special meeting Friday to oversee construction of a new northern Brunswick County library branch, but some council members say it is a move the town cannot afford.

The council wants an agreement with the Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees that will return three acres of land to the town along with \$217,000 in donations collected to build the library.

Leland Mayor Russell Baldwin said a \$50,000 state grant and \$30,000 from the county will be lost if the town doesn't take action before Dec. 31.

But two council members who voted against the controversial move, George Yates and Jane Gilbert, say the town is trying to undermine the work of the building committee headed by Leland resident Edith Tillman. Baldwin and council members Lynette Carlisle and William Benton voted for the agreement.

"If the Brunswick County Library Board of Trustees agrees to this contract," said Yates, "we are in effect contracting to receive stolen goods, in my opinion."

The building committee wants commissioners to form a county-controlled library board. The project stalled when the committee learned from the state that a non-incorporated library board could not own land on which a library is built.

Fearing liability, the trustees have refused to sign a construction agreement with the contractor. The building had originally been scheduled for completion this month.

The library will be built on land donated by the town on Village Road behind the town hall. It will replace the old library branch near the post office.

"It (agreement) doesn't even mention the people who own the project and collected the money in good faith from the people in this community," said Yates. To assume control of the project without consent of the committee, he said, "is

an outright act of robbery."

Terms of the agreement Leland accepted Friday are as follows:

- Trustees will re-deed the three-acre tract to the town;
- All funds collected for construction will transfer to the town's treasury, including the county's \$30,000 grant;
- Trustees will deed the old library branch to the town within 30 days after the new branch is open to the public to help the town defray additional construction costs;
- Trustees will continue to operate the new branch and be responsible for operating expenses, routine maintenance and insurance;
- The town will assume full responsibility for construction of the library according to plans and specifications, with the right to make minor changes in the design specifications;
- If all funds are not forthcoming, the town may make alterations in the plans and specifications after consulting with the trustees;
- The town will provide up to \$30,000 to furnish the building with carrels, book shelves and other furniture selected by the library director;
- The town will provide any contingency funds necessary to complete the project;
- The town will lease the building to the trustees on condition that it continue to be used as a branch library, and would revert back to the town if it is no longer used as a library;
- If the town stops using the building as a library, Leland would reimburse the town of Belville \$21,000 donated for construction;
- The town will comply with state regulations to receive the \$50,000 state grant; and
- Changes can be made if agreed to by both parties.

"We've already donated \$60,000 and three acres of land to this project, and I think that's about as far as we can stretch."

—George Yates, Leland Councilman

Yates said the town should not "forcefully take this project away from the people who have worked so hard to get it where it is today."

"Even if they (building committee) were to agree to this," said Yates, "I have some very serious reservations about the cost involved that the town would be committing itself to. We've already donated \$60,000 and three acres of land to this project, and I think that's about as far as we can stretch."

Following a meeting Sept. 12 with State Library Director Howard McGinn, it was learned that "the proper procedure was for the town to build and be responsible for the

library," said Baldwin.

"We have an obligation, not just a right, but an obligation to deal with this matter because we can't afford to lose this \$50,000 grant," said Baldwin. "We can't afford to lose this library."

Stepping in will tie up too much of the town's finances, added Ms. Gilbert.

"The town has no right to take over this project," she said. "It is not the town of Leland's project; it is a project for the northern end of Brunswick County that was set up to service all of the people, not just the people of Leland."

The money collected by the building committee is "owned by the people of Leland," said Baldwin. "It's not in the possession of any one person or one group of people. I just don't see that we have any alternative than to do what Mr. McGinn asked us to do."

It has become a political issue, said Councilman Benton, because outsiders have stepped in and "twisted the minds of some very

fine people."

"They've brought their political desires into this thing to try to embarrass and defeat Mayor Baldwin," said Benton. "That's the whole key to the issue. Some people have fallen for their gimmick."

The money raised for the project does not belong to the committee, he added, but to the state library system.

"We on the board are not stealing this library," said Benton. "We haven't stolen anything, and I resent such accusations from any person."

Someone needs to have the courage to step in and take responsibility, said Councilwoman Carlisle.

"I did hear the deadline date of Dec. 31," she said. "If we delay and tally and dally on, we are not accepting our responsibility to the people that we represent in Leland, for the money that has been put forth for them."

The contract will now go to the library trustees for a vote, said Town Attorney Glen Peterson. The building committee has asked that trustees not negotiate with the town until after the Nov. 5 election.

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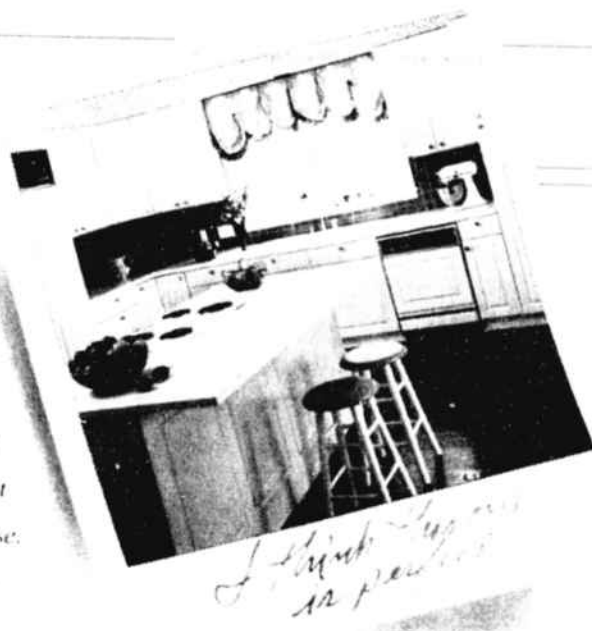
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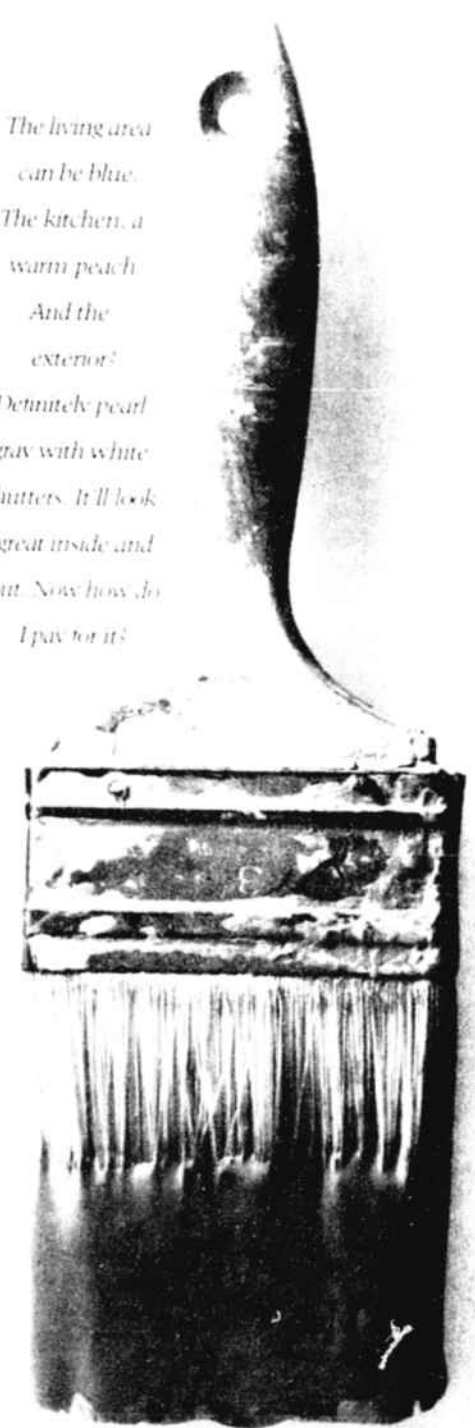


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