

Board Membership Big Question For Countywide Library System

BY TERRY POPE

Plans to establish a countywide library system gained stronger support last week, but the big question now is who will serve on its board of trustees.

Committee members who met to discuss an overhaul of the library system reached a consensus that Brunswick County should take control.

County Attorney David Clegg will draft a proposal for membership on the new library board and present it to county and Southport officials for approval, said Kelly Holden, chairman of the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners.

About 50 people attended a hearing on the library system in Southport last Thursday, Dec. 19. Committee members—two commissioners and two Southport aldermen—listened as plans to replace the present joint Southport-Brunswick County Library Board with a countywide system met with firm support.

Several speakers said they were concerned about membership on the new board and what the shakeup would mean for library employees. Some asked for a large board of directors while others said smaller groups work better. State law limits library boards to no more than 12 members.

"I think that's something we're going to have to work out," said Holden. "Large boards can work together. I don't see any way to have a board of five people and have all residents represented."

Southport Alderman Nelson Adams said he hopes the new li-

brary system will be a "better and a larger library system for Brunswick County." Adams joined fellow board members James C. Brown, Mary Childs and Southport Mayor Norman Holden. Brunswick County was represented on the committee by Holden and District 3 Commissioner Gene Pinkerton. Holden replaced Commissioner Jerry Jones, who was sick.

Commissioners consented to possibly taking over the library system to help settle a construction dispute between the town of Leland and the trustees, which by law cannot own land or library buildings. A building committee has raised \$145,000 to build a Leland area library and has received a \$50,000 grant from the state.

Leland has contributed \$60,000 and three acres of land, while the county has chipped in \$30,000.

The present library board is controlled jointly by Southport and Brunswick County, with each governing body appointing six members. Brown told the committee that politics should stay out of the library business. Residents that have no community library should be represented by an at-large member, he said.

"We should do what the people want us to do," said Brown. "We can afford anything the people can afford."

Ann Hines, president of the Oak Island Library Boosters Inc., which is raising funds to build an Oak Island branch library, presented the committee a proposal for board membership.

The county should be divided into

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—Kelly Holden
District 1 Commissioner

library districts, for both existing and proposed libraries, said Mrs. Hines. Two members should be chosen from each district, along with a commissioner and an at-large member, she suggested.

Oak Island also wants new members added when the population in the county demands the need for a new library; that Brunswick County own all land and buildings and provide support for the libraries; and that membership on the board be granted to communities that have raised funds to support a library.

Volunteers have raised \$33,000 for an Oak Island branch to serve its 4,732 permanent residents from Long Beach, Yaupon Beach and Caswell Beach.

Southport's Margaret Harper, a

former trustee and longtime library supporter, said Calabash should also be considered for a branch library under a countywide system.

"You don't know how glad I am that we're at this place, at this time, at last," Mrs. Harper told the committee. "I think now is the time that we're going to come of age."

Mrs. Harper also said the present library employees should be allowed to keep their jobs, retirement and benefits under a new system. Trustees should be persons who are more interested in the libraries than in politics, she added.

Added Tom Owens of Caswell Beach, "We want to have the library accessible to our people, and we want the politics left out of it as much as possible."

The Southport library needs to be upgraded and more branches added, he said. A centralized location, such as in Bolivia, wouldn't reach the largest number of people, Owens noted.

"There's no reason why Brunswick County cannot have one of the best library systems in North Carolina," noted Eugene Tomlinson of Southport. "I would urge you to move ahead with a countywide system."

Some Leland officials had indicated that a \$50,000 state grant would be lost for the Leland branch if construction wasn't under way by Dec. 31. But Pinkerton said there is no deadline.

"I think the state has given us a wonderful Christmas present if they're not going to adhere to this deadline we've read about," said May Moore of Yaupon Beach. She said new county libraries should be built close to the main areas of population growth.

The head of the Leland building committee, Edith Tillman, said the new board of trustees should also meet more regularly and be limited

in size. The present board meets every other month.

"If you have too many people on the board, you just can't get anything done," she noted.

Holden responded by saying he had served on a large Brunswick Community College Board of Trustees that "was very functional."

"We used a lot of subcommittees," Holden said.

Paul Austin of Leland suggested that county control of the library system would "get all of the squabbling out of it."

"The town of Leland will work with the county in any way to get the library built," he said. "No strings attached."

For the 1991-92 budget year, Southport allocated \$20,000 to the library board's budget, Brunswick County \$125,000 and Shallotte \$5,500. The remainder comes from state and federal grants.

Towns Must Follow State Fire Inspection Schedule

BY DORI C. GURGANUS

Mandatory fire inspections now have a set schedule in North Carolina, a schedule that will regulate the way local municipalities deal with fire safety.

The schedule regulation adds a new twist to the recent law requiring towns to have a certified fire inspector on staff or under contract.

The state Building Code Council, part of the N.C. Department of Insurance, voted recently to mandate that businesses within town limits, including churches, be inspected once every three years, said Lee Hauser, deputy commissioner in charge of the engineering division.

Industries and plants must be inspected every two years, and residential/institutional buildings, such as apartments and hospitals, will be inspected once a year, Hauser said.

Public schools have been mandated for several years to be inspected twice a year.

The action came on the heels of a Sept. 3 fire at a meat processing plant in Hamlet that killed 25 persons. The building had never received a fire inspection during 11 years of operation.

Hauser explained that up until now, towns could set their own schedule of fire inspections, but that the new law will see to it that they hold to a state-regulated, steady schedule.

Hiring a fire inspector, which has been state law since July 1 of this year, requires towns to hire an inspector certified by the N.C. Code of Officials Qualification Board. This is the same board, Hauser said, that certifies building and plumbing inspectors.

Towns have several options in securing a fire inspector: they can have an inspector on staff, hire an

independent, state-certified inspector or, said Brunswick County Fire Inspector Cecil Logan, contract with the county for that service.

Six months after the fire inspections became law, Logan reported that his office has "not really" had any problems with towns failing to comply.

Some towns, such as Calabash, have taken it on their own to have a fire inspector readily available.

Calabash Fire Chief Jerry Prince has undergone additional training to become a probationary level one fire inspector, and now has a deadline of two years to complete training to become certified level one.

Prince said that he will be available to perform inspections for the town, in addition to his regular service as fire chief and level three fireman.

"Things are really not going to be any different than they were before, and it's not as complicated as it sounded at first," said Logan, noting that the biggest difference will be the increased frequency of inspections.

Logan recently attended a week-long, "very intense" training course to upgrade his certification.

"I learned an awful lot that I was not aware of," he reported.

As an example, Logan said he learned that it is illegal for an assembly building such as a church to have a Christmas tree with lights on it unless the tree is alive, with a root ball.

He said that he believes that regulations will call for stricter schedules and certifications in the future.

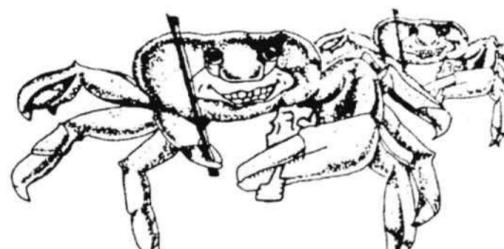
Logan also said that inspections of single-family dwellings have never been mandated, except during the time a house is under construction and must meet state building codes.

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