

Commissioners discuss district representation

By BEN LEDBETTER
Staff Writer

SHELBY - History manifested itself at the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners work session Monday night.

Cleveland County Board of Commissioners discussed the possibility of district representation and invited people that were involved when the board discussed the issue in 1993.

Commissioner Ronnie Hawkins asked for the work session at the board's July meeting.

A plan for districts was already in place in 1993, but no action was taken after the plan passed both the state house and senate.

North Carolina Senator Ollie Harris introduced Senate Bill 720, titled Cleveland Commissioners Elections, which passed both parts of the state legislature.

Raleigh attorney Michael Crowell, who was used in the Commissioners' last discussion, was present to discuss various methods of districting.

While he was there to talk about various methods, Crowell said he was not there to advocate a particular one to the county.

"I'm not here to peddle any method of election," Crowell said. "There are lots of different ways county commissioners are elected now."

If Cleveland County was going to shift to district representation, Crowell said, it would have two methods to do it.

State law allows for the issue to be put on the ballot in a referendum after commissioners decide on a particular plan to present to the public.

The other method would be for the plan to be presented as a local bill in the state legislature.

In 1966, Cleveland County elected its commissioners based on residency districts, which called for candidates to live in a particular geographical area, but they could be voted on by the whole county.

Crowell said those districts were deemed unfair and the county elected its commissioners at-large, which it currently uses.

The change to at-large elections did not clear the United States Justice Department, Crowell said.

No minorities were elected to the board until a 1994 lawsuit yielded the appointments of Bobby C. Malloy and current commissioner Mary Accor to the board, which increased it from five to seven.

"Voting was racially polarized," Crowell said.

A second lawsuit which was filed on behalf of a Cleveland County citizen's group, said the first one allowed racial gerrymandering.

Currently, two African-Americans serve on the board, Accor, and Chairperson Willie McIntosh.

While changes in the racial patterns of voting could come about with district representation, Crowell discussed other advantages and disadvantages of electing commissioners by districts.

Crowell said two of the advantages of district representation would be every geographic area would be represented and minority representation would be assured.

A couple of the disadvantages Crowell said district representation would bring is a feeling of decreased choices with voters and that commissioners would only have the interests of their respected districts, and not the interests of the whole county.

Although district representation has positives and negatives, it would change the way candidates would campaign for office.

"Typically, candidates would have to rely on seeing voters individually," Crowell said.

Less votes would be needed to elect somebody by district, than by an at-large election.

Members of the 1993 task force that studied the issue along with other political leaders were in attendance Monday.

Bill Williams, who resides in the western section of Cleveland County, was on the '93 task

force, said he was in favor of district representation.

"We must have districts if all the people are going to be represented," Williams said. "We want somebody up there who knows our needs."

Former Shelby politician Les Roark also favored an at-large system of electing county commissioners.

"The voters have the right to vote for everyone that sits on the board," Roark said.

Roark served on the Shelby City Council just before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed.

Former Commissioner E.T. Vanhoy, who served on the 1993 board, said he still opposed district representation. Vanhoy, along with Cecil Dickson and Sam Gold were the '93 board members who were against district representation.

"We went through a cycle and came back right where we are now," Vanhoy said. "What we got is working, so why make a change?"

Vanhoy and Dickson lived near each other in 1993, which would have caused them to run against each other if they sought re-election, although that was not cited as a factor in the issue's defeat then.

"That's history," Vanhoy said. "Let's move forward. We need to look forward instead of backward."

Council

From 1A

better for everyone," Moore said.

Moore said he would like to help bring more industry to town to replace some of the plants that have closed recently.

"I think we need people on the board with some business background," he said.

Kelly said he would like to "finish what we've got started," pointing to numerous new capital projects that are nearing completion.

"I also feel we need to keep utility rates as low as possible," he said. "We have some of the lowest rates around. We recently absorbed a gas increase to the tune of about \$325,000 and we have instructed the city manager to watch for gas prices now to buy for later on. When it reaches what he considers the low point, he's to lock it in. Last year it went up to \$10 and this year we're looking at \$3 or \$4 and that would be a tremendous savings to the citizens."

He said he would also work to keep the tax rate as low as possible.

"I would really like to see some women and young people run for City Council," he said. "We've got a good board

because we've been able to work together and see things to fruition. I'm proud of what we've done."

Kelly said he firmly believes in open and honest government. "I listen to the people," he said. "I love the work and I love the people, and I'm a big believer that you don't ever hide anything from the press. I've always been in favor of open government, and I'll die believing in open government."

Bostic, who filed past The Herald's deadline last week, said he's running "mainly to see that the community and the people in my ward get their voice heard."

He said he would not make up his mind about any issue without first talking to the people and getting their opinions.

"I'm interested in lower power rates for the elderly, and I'm always concerned about taxes," he said. "I would like to see public properties maintained, and would stand behind beautification one hundred percent."

"Basically, any concerns that anyone has is what I will represent when I go to the meetings."

Bostic, 32, is a political science major and is employed by the Social Security Administration.

School

From 1A

education and excel in the classroom and the community."

Barnette operates Excel Mobile Car Wash and is the track coach at North Gaston High School in Dallas.

Smith, a retired Kings Mountain educator who served numerous terms as President of the KM Association of Educators, said if elected he will "represent all of the citizens of Kings Mountain District Schools, and strive to make our system one that we can continue to be proud of."

Smith said he is not running against anybody or against anything the School System has done, but simply because he wants to see Kings Mountain retain its own school system.

"I want the people to know that there is an interest from our citizens in the Gaston County part of Kings Mountain in remaining a part of the Kings Mountain School System," he said. "We will be doing a disservice to our students on this side of town if this merger goes through."

Smith spent 25 years as a teacher at East Elementary, one of the schools that would lose a high number of students if the merger goes through. He retired in 1998.

"I am very proud of our school system and the progress we have made over the years," he said. "I believe we are rated one of the top systems in the state because we are a small, locally-controlled system. This is the main reason I'm seeking a position on the School Board."

Smith said, like a family heirloom, Kings Mountain Schools "were passed down to us by our grandparents, and we need to protect it."

Merger

From 1A

spending on fighting the proposed school merger.

Bill Chambless said, during the recognition time, he supported Kings Mountain's stance against the merger, but that it should move on.

"I think the appeals process worked very well," Chambless said. "I'm happy that Kings Mountain has done it. But, at some point, you have to lay down your arms so to speak. You have to take what the courts have said and go with it."

Chambless said the board should deal with other concerns in the county, citing concerns such as Cleveland County's high unemployment rate.

When the recognition portion of the meeting closed, Hawkins addressed several comments from county residents, many who were in favor of the proposed merger.

Hawkins said Kings Mountain has been financing its legal fight through reserve funds mainly generated from the supplemental tax.

"It is Kings Mountain's right to spend their money," Hawkins said. "There's been more money spent to make merger than to undo merger."

Hawkins said he did like the idea of the Cleveland County and Shelby City school districts merging.

"I want to see them on record to merge," Hawkins said.

Bridges said he still supported Kings Mountain's merger fight, but wanted to delay the board's decision.

Tuesday's near-capacity crowd at the Board's Marion Street chambers was based on a complex political issue, Accor said.

"I think the fuss was about rather or not we could tell the three school systems what to do," Accor said. "We have to do what our constituents elected us to do. They didn't elect us to go one sided. We have to represent the whole county. I believe that's what we did tonight and I don't regret my decision."

McIntosh said he was against further county funding the legal fight against a proposed merger, but his vote was not for advocacy of the issue.

"I'm still against merger, basically because of the way it was done," McIntosh said. "I think it's time to lay it to rest."

In other business, the board:

- approved the reappointment of Jim Hendricks to serve as the Cleveland County Tax Assessor.

Buildings

From 1A

purchasing land in the town limits in closed session. No action was taken on the issue.

• Bill Lail has decided to sell his share of property in Grover.

The town will be on sale Saturday at an auction, at 9 a.m. on Main Street.

Lail, co-owner of L&L Auto Parts, owns seven of the build-

ings in the town, and will have those and lots on sale.

Some of the buildings to be sold include the ones used as the Paint Center and Finch Floor Covering.

Lail said he never knew he would own as many buildings as he did.

"I just started buying a piece of it at the time," Lail said about his purchases. "I never thought about consuming it all, but it's how it ended up."

Lail said the buildings pending sale would give the buyer a chance to improve the town's economy.

"It's just a good chance for someone to consume it and do something for the people," Lail said.

Lail said selling the buildings is preferable to having them demolished.

"I'd rather see something in the buildings than see them falling down on their own," Lail said.

Lail said people from around the Carolinas and as far away as Detroit have expressed interest.

"It's a historical city, they're all interested in a piece of it."

Hayes

From 1A

harder to know what is right for the good of all concerned."

Hayes served the final two years of his 36-year tenure with KMPD as Chief of Police. He served as interim chief on a number of occasions.

Hayes said he thought "long and hard" about whether or not to seek reelection.

"I want to thank the good citizens of Kings Mountain for their trust and support of me as a councilman the past four years," he said.

Grover

From 1A

overall.

"I think there's a few things where changes could be made for the better," Willis said. "Basically, we have a good town, it's well run."

Town Commissioner candidate Chuck Potts and Higginbotham could not be reached for comment.

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Maney

From 1A

Mayor Rick Murphrey and five of the seven City Councilmen had roofing nails thrown into their driveways, and someone threw an explosive device into the front yard of the home of Councilman Gene White. White is offering a cash reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the persons responsible.

"I don't know who it was," Maney said of the incident at his new home, "but I am saying that there's a lot of things happening that are not just coincidence."

"I've had nails thrown in my driveway, and now my new house has been vandalized. If it is related to my job it's a real shame."

Maney said his wife is upset about the incident, and he is concerned for the safety of his children.

"I'm concerned that people have been this low to do things like this," he said. "I'm not pointing fingers at anyone, I'm just saying there's too many things happening that are too coincidental."

The city police department recently called in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to help investigate the earlier incidents.

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