

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
MARCH 27, 2013**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners and the Pasquotank County Governance Committee met today in a joint meeting on Wednesday, March 27, 2013 at Mt. Carmel Missionary Baptist Church in Newland.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jeff Dixon, Chairman
Dr. William R. Sterritt
Cecil Perry
Joseph S. Winslow, Jr.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Lloyd E. Griffin, III
Gary G. White
Frankie Meads

OTHERS PRESENT:

Randy Keaton, County Manager
Rodney Bunch, Asst. County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Julie Stamper, GIS Coordinator
Lynn Scott, Asst. Clerk to the Board

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM by Chairman Jeff Dixon. He thanked the congregation for allowing us to use the facility. Deacon Charles Jordon gave the invocation. Chairman Dixon welcomed everyone present and asked Commissioner Bill Sterritt, Chairman of the Governance Committee to preside over the meeting.

Commissioner Sterritt thanked the congregation and introduced staff, Community Relations Commission members, former commissioners (John Kitchen and Charles Jordon), NAACP President Keith Rivers, and Daily Advance Staff. He stated that this is the first of four public forums in which the Board of Commissioners and the Board's Governance Committee is seeking input from interested citizens on a proposal to implement a voting plan to allow for more equal demographic representation on the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners. He said the next forum will be held at Weeksville Lions Club and hopefully the third forum will be at Ernest Sutton's church on Bell Street. The location for the fourth forum has not been decided. He said the committee wants citizens' input so that they can make a rational representation to the full Board so that they can make a decision on whether or not we change the current process.

1. PRESENTATION ON POTENTIAL RESTRUCTURING OF VOTING DISTRICTS:

Commissioner Sterritt introduced County Attorney Mike Cox and GIS Coordinator Julie Stamper. Attorney Cox explained that every ten years during the census the Board and the County are required to look at redistricting. He noted that this is not what we are doing currently. He said we are actually talking about restructuring the Board to allow more minority representation on the Board. He explained that in 1965 the Board of Commissioners changed from seven members to five members. Two were from Elizabeth City, two were from outside the City and one was At-large. He stated that the City and the County were sued in the 1980s by the NAACP for alleged violations of Section 2 and Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. He explained that Section 2 prohibits all forms of racial discrimination in the election process across the US and Section 5 applies to certain governments that had low voter registration rates at the time the Voting Rights Act was adopted. He said Pasquotank County is one of forty counties covered by Section 5 in North Carolina, which means all election changes, however minor, must be pre-cleared by the United States Department of Justice. In 1985, the Board of Commissioners agreed to the current structure of the Board. In addition, the General Assembly approved a Local Act approving the restructuring. Pursuant to the Consent Order and the Local Act the Board of Commissioners went from five to seven members and four year terms. In addition, four districts were created and three At-large seats. Pursuant to the Consent Order one district would have to have at least 55% minority voting age population.

Attorney Cox stated that after the 1990 census there was not enough deviation to require redistricting. In 2001 and 2011, there was enough deviation to require redistricting. He noted that we kept the same four districts and three At-large seats, but we had to move the district

boundary lines a little bit to comply with the “one person, one vote”. He said there are three ways to restructure the Board of Commissioners. One is to meet the statutory requirements and have a public referendum. The second way is by a Local Act of the General Assembly. The third way is by a Local Act with a Public Referendum.

Mrs. Stamper stated that in her job as GIS Director she was involved in both the 2000 and the 2010 censuses. She said in 2000, Pasquotank County had a population of 34,897, with 40.05% black and 43.05% non-white (Asians, Latinos, etc.). In the 2010 census, the population was 40,661, with 37.76% black and 43.29% non-white. She said the population is not becoming any whiter or any blacker, but is becoming more “mixed” race. Up until the 2000 census a voter had to say they were black, white, Asian, etc., but in the 2010 census you could say that you were up to fifty three different combinations. She explained that when the information is reported back to the County it is done in census blocks. She said the information that is given is very general and no specific information is given. She noted that the census is performed every ten years. She said we can assume that people have moved into the County in the last two or three years, but we do not know that and the only time that we get an official count that we can use for redistricting/population purposes is when the censuses come out.

Mrs. Stamper noted that when we are redistricting or restructuring there are traditional redistricting principles that are used, which include compactness, continuity, respect for political subdivisions, respect for communities of interest, and protection of incumbents. She said the Department of Justice does not want to see districts that stretch from one end of the County to the other. The districts must all be connected. She said we try to keep communities together that share common interests and we try to make sure that incumbents are not pitted against each other. She went on to say that we do not want to put our minority population in a worst situation than they were before the election.

Attorney Cox stated that Pasquotank County has litigated this issue in the past, which makes things a little bit unique. He said we still have a Consent Order that is in place in the Federal Courts with the NAACP that was signed in the mid 80’s. He said it would need to be modified with the approval of the NAACP and the Federal Court. He noted that it would certainly make things easier if we have something in place that the NAACP agrees with and the Federal Courts will sign off on. He said any changes in the structure of the Board will have to be pre-cleared by the Justice Department.

Attorney Cox explained that the current structure of the Board includes four districts; Northern Outside, Northern Inside, Southern Inside, and Southern Outside. He said one commissioner is elected from each district and three commissioners are elected At-large. Mrs. Stamper said the population of the county is approximately 40,000, so we have to make sure that our four districts are roughly the same size, +/- 10%. She said there are roughly 10,000 people in each district. She stated that the Southern Inside district is our minority district with 66.53% black. She said up until the 2010 census the populations inside in the City and outside the City were roughly the same, but in the last ten years the County grew much quicker than the City. Therefore, when she drew the line she had to pick up some people outside of the city to make the districts roughly the same population.

Mrs. Stamper said tonight the committee is proposing the 2-2-2-1 Plan, which would be to redistrict and restructure the County into three districts; the Central, the Northern, and the Southern. Two commissioners would be elected from each of the districts on alternating years and one commissioner would be elected At-large. In this system, each district would represent about 13,000 people. The Central District would have a 54.24% black population, the Northern District would have a 28.2% black population, and the Southern District would have a 29.0% black population.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. John Kitchen of 1371 Northside Road asked Mrs. Stamper if she is proposing the 2-2-2-1 Plan. Mrs. Stamper answered, not me. Commissioner Sterritt explained that the Governance Committee is proposing that plan, but noted that they are not a decision making committee. He said they are only collecting comments and information from anyone who would like to speak at the four different locations in the county to find out what direction we go. Mr. Kitchen stated that this is the first speech he has given since he left the Pasquotank County Board, but he felt that he had to come tonight and speak. He said he would like to say that he does not have a racist bone in his body and if we do not know that we can ask Commissioner Perry because he

knows the fight they went through to get Mr. Witherspoon's name on the library and many other fights such as who was going to be chairman. He said what he would really like to talk about is what is fair and what is just under the democratic system in this country. He stated that when he ran for commissioner he had two opponents, one in the primary and one in the general election. He said he had to get his goods together and he had to raise money. He went on to say that he had to buy signs and knock on doors. He said it is not fair to some commissioners to have to fight to get elected and have to raise money in order to get votes because they have opposition. He said that is the democratic way. He said to set up districts where some people do not have to knock on doors, raise money, or buy signs and automatically get elected is not right. He went on to say that he wished that Mr. Jordon had run in the Northern District because he is sure today in his heart that he would have been the commissioner instead of Mr. Winslow. He said he would have supported him, but Mr. Jordon never came to him and asked him for any support. He said the precinct meeting was open to all those who were running to come and nobody showed but Mr. Winslow and after a while he volunteered to support Mr. Winslow. He said if Mr. Jordon would have come to him and asked he would have supported him. He said he knew him and knew what he was made of. In his heart, he had said if Mr. Jordon would have run in the Northern District he would have won the commissioners race in that district. He could have beat Mr. Winslow just like Mr. Winslow beat Mr. Lehmann. He said he thinks Mr. Jordon got some bad advice from somebody to run at large when he had been the representative in the Northern District. He said you cannot just walk into office without doing something. You have to ask people to vote for you and all the people you ask will not vote for you, but you have to ask. You have to go to every meeting that you can and be seen. You must stand and talk. He said he remembers after his very first commissioner meeting Dr. Jessie told him he needed to ask him something. He said he told him that he had not had supper yet and Dr. Jessie reminded him that when he ran he said he would be available if somebody had a question and that he had a question and expected him to stay until he answered it. So, you have to be committed to running and you have got to want to do the job and if you don't want to do the job, you have no business in there. Once you get in there, you have to go by the North Carolina laws when you make decisions. He said he remembers one decision that he helped make that involved spot zoning. He said it is illegal. He said he has some people in the room right now that probably feel hard toward him because he voted not to zone a concrete plant in the middle of a residential area. He stated that he is not against black and people that deal with him day to day know that he is not racist. He said he loves everyone and they are all God's people just like he is, but we do not need to set up districts that will favor one person over the other. He said we have one good man in there, but Mr. Perry would not be sitting here if other people on the board had their way. He said he had to talk someone else from running so he could have the job. He said he does not want to have any hard feeling. He will be against it and he will court each one of the commissioners and ask them to vote against it. He said if we do want to do it, we should get a vote together and have the people vote against it. When people file suit against us, we can take it head on because we have lawyers, not the best, but we have them. He thanked everyone for listening to him.

Mr. Hezekiah Brown of 106 Terrilynn Way stated that he has lived here for almost ten years now. He said he came from an area in Alabama and lived through the Jim Crow era. He said it was a very difficult time for African Americans to live through, but obviously things have changed over the years. He said when he looks at the map and listens to some of the things that have been said he asked himself what is a community of interest. What do white folks, black folks and Hispanics really want? He said 90-95% of the people in our community regardless of color want good schools, less taxes, better services, a safe community, respect from each other, and good jobs. He said that is the community of interest that he thinks people really want. He said we get lost in a lot of things when we start talking about the political arena, but fortunately he worked in the political arena for forty years before he came here and he knows a little bit about all sides of the community such as redistricting. He said redistricting is often done to favor whatever party is in the office at that time. He noted that every ten years it changes. He said the Democrats make lines that will benefit them and the Republicans make lines that are beneficial to them. He thinks there is some misconception about what is being asked. He clarified that no one is saying to go out and find an African American and put them on the Board. He said they are saying that under the circumstances, being how people vote, that we need to give African Americans the opportunity to get elected on the Board and not just give it to them. He said he hopes that in our wisdom when the Board of Commissioners makes their final decision that they will make a decision that will also include giving an African American the opportunity to get elected to the County Commissioners Board, not just to place them on the Board.

Keith Rivers, President of Pasquotank County Branch of NAACP, District 12 Director, and State Executive Committee member of 104 Grandview Drive said he would like to make some quick points. He said the NAACP does not want a public referendum. He said whichever map we choose it has to be looked at and insured that it is going to benefit the entire community and it is going to create a healthy political system. He stated that this meeting today is very important. He thanked Attorney Cox for bringing the history. He said we must understand that a year and a half ago when the NAACP introduced the restructuring of the Board it was done because after Hugh Cale there has not been another African American elected to the county commissioners until W.C. Witherspoon. He went on to say that that was only because of the result of a lawsuit that was taken against the City and County. He stated that Bill Owens was the chairman at the time and with their wisdom along with Harold Barnes who was the president of the NAACP at that time and Attorney Penny litigated this they came up with the concept of creating the Southern Inside District, which Commissioner Perry now serves. He said no matter how much progress it looks like we made, we are still a racially polarized voting county. He said it has been twenty six years and numerous other African Americans have run with no results, none, zero. He stated that our election process constantly runs and he thinks that this year is the first year that we have even had a close race, which was in the Southern Outside District. He said we have to remember that when we are going through this process. He said the NAACP wants to ensure that whichever map we choose as a unit and as a team that it will benefit all of the residents of Pasquotank County. He stated that he can't say that and stress that even more. We have to sit down and ensure that this is done correctly. He said if we have a public referendum everything will remain the same. He said his last words to the Board are when Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Civil Rights Act he understood that he would not be reelected. He understood that, but he knew what needed to be done and that without that Jim Crow would continue and in his words he said that voting is the greatest instrument designed by man to fight injustice, so this is not dealing with redistricting, which it is a small part because you have to draw the map, but we are talking about restructuring and what we are asking the Board to do is to do what is right.

Mr. Rivers asked us to look at the map included that shows other counties and their percentages of minority representation. He said if you look at Dare County they have a 3% minority population and they have one minority county commissioner. He said Pasquotank County has a 38% minority population. He said we are not the only county with these disparities. He stated that it is easy to say that we now have an African American president so we do not need these things, but it is not true. He said he is standing here today not to write anything down, not to come and make a great speech, but he has been to the Duke University School of Redistricting and he understands that we can bamboozle people and give them numbers but we are not going to understand this in one night. He stated that what the County Commissioners are going to have to do is what we are doing now. He said we have to do what is right and be honest and be real for a change. We can't solve real issues with political solutions. For once, let's just sit down. We are in trouble in the Northeastern part of North Carolina and many of us know this. The people in Raleigh are not giving us any money this way. We need everybody in this fight. We need everybody in Pasquotank County and one way to start is to stand up and say we have a one out of a seven member board, but yet we have almost 40% African American population. He went on to say that something is wrong with that. He said we can start right now, right here and come up with a concrete map that is going to support and enhance a strong political system and that is the first step in being unified so when we go to Raleigh everybody is fighting for Pasquotank County.

Commissioner Sterritt told Mr. Rivers that he would not want to give him more time than Mr. Kitchen because that would be discriminatory. He invited Mr. Rivers to come to all four of the meetings and tell all the groups what he said today. He said we need to give some other people an opportunity to speak. He thanked him. Mr. Rivers asked if he can make one last note. He said the one map that is being presented he would like to make sure that we tweak it and that it is correct and to let everyone know that it is not the only option, but that it is a viable option. Commissioner Sterritt said there will be a lot of things to do in the next three months.

Someone from the audience asked, "What is the 2-2-2-1 Plan"? Mrs. Stamper answered that the 2-2-2-1 Plan will divide the County into three districts and elect two commissioners from each of those districts for a total of six commissioners and then one At-large. She explained that we would have two Northern commissioners, two Central commissioners, and two Southern commissioners.

Eddie White of 946 Highway 158 stated that he lives in Newland and he has been doing some research for some time and listening to the different things that everyone has been saying. He said most of you here are older in age than he is. He noted that they grew up in a different era and thinking was a little bit different. He said to be frank some of them are sixty or so and that is why we have the problems that we have. He stated that a lot of the people that he went to school with do not think the way that a lot of the older people think. He said they do not necessarily look at one another on the basis of color. He said his son went to a predominately white elementary school, but he was elected president of that school. He asked, "Do you know why?" He said because people look at him for who he is, not the color of his skin. The bottom line we are dealing with here is hearts. Hearts have to change. He said the reason he says that is if you will look in Bertie County, which is a predominately black county, there are more African Americans in Bertie than in any county in North Carolina, yet they have three white commissioners and two black commissioners. He said to look at Wilson, North Carolina, which is very similar with a 57% white population and 39% black population to Pasquotank County which has 58% white, with 38% black. Wilson County has about double the population that we have in Pasquotank County yet Wilson County has four white commissioners and three black commissioners. He stated that the thinking changes basically in the geographic location that we are in. It is obvious to him that people in Wilson do not think like some of the people here are thinking. He said it is obvious because when you look at the ratio of the population it is the same as what Pasquotank County is, yet the representation of the commissioners reflects pretty much what the diverse population of that area is. He said he will say it again, how can Bertie County, a county that is predominately black, have more white representation than Pasquotank County. He said the reason why is economics is what drives politics. In our county right here, if you look at economics, who has the economic power. He said if everybody is thinking of their brother as they should, but most of all it is not that way, everything would be fine. He said when you look at the county however whoever is driving the economics is also driving the political.

Dr. Kurt Hunsberger of 900 W. Church Street said he would like to commend the committee and the Board for going to a great deal of work looking at this idea and he thinks everyone would agree that there are three things that we want to have in our community. One is balanced representation of the populous here. He said we can argue how that happens and whether it is correctly shown in our governance now or if there needs to be a change. He said he thinks Mr. White's comments were wonderful and they have made the same comment in their commission that the young people are seeing things differently and that is a wonderful thing, but he said the question is can we wait for them to grow up enough to take over since we old people have not done such a good job in some ways anyway. Secondly, besides trying to get a balanced representation of our community we want the best people possible to hold these positions and some of the problem as mentioned here it is hard to get people to do the work or make the commitment to do the work probably because they know it is a lot of work once they are voted in. He said he thinks some great people would be women. He said he wants to encourage a black woman to run for the commissioner position. He commended the committee for doing this work and said he thinks it should be done even though we look at it from a lot of different perspectives.

Commissioner Sterritt thanked everyone for their comments. He asked Commissioner Winslow and Commissioner Perry to make some closing remarks.

Commissioner Perry said he thinks he knows everyone here pretty much and just as former Commissioner Kitchen said there is no prejudice in his body. He said Mr. Spence knows him well enough to know that he is just him and he expresses what he thinks. He noted that that comes from God. He said when he looked at the numbers, being a mathematician he could see that in this community, when we look at our political numbers, we know that basically in most cases we vote by race. Whether we say it or whether we believe it most of the numbers that are presented from the elections board shows that whites vote for whites and blacks vote for blacks, in most cases. When we look at the fact that we have four districts with 10,000 people, 7,000 whites and 3,000 blacks in three of the districts, if we vote by race, which we have done in the past, no black will ever win in those districts. When we reverse it to where there are 7,000 blacks and 3,000 whites, being the district that he is in, blacks will win. When you go at large, you have approximately 23,000 white people in this county and about 17,000 blacks, no black person will ever win if we vote by race. He said he understands what the young man said earlier, it is true. He said what we hope for is what young people do, but that is not what we do in this county. He thinks that we are saying wait until tomorrow and things will change, but think about it, we have been trying to do things and do it in such a way that everyone is treated the same. Is

it the same that in Mr. Jordon's district whether or not he won or not that there are 7,000 people that can vote by race and 3,000 people that can vote another way by race. He asked is that a fair situation. He said all he is hoping for is a fair situation, whether it be by race or what. He said he asked the commissioners to help him find a way to elect another minority commissioner and only Hugh Cale, W.C. Witherspoon and Cecil Perry know how it is to be a minority in a political situation and he thinks that the county merits a little more than that. He said we have good people all over this county. He said down here in this community we have Hawthorn Proctor who was a general in the Army. He could come back here and do the very same thing and run for office and never be elected based on those numbers if we do what we have done in the past. He stated that we need to take a good look at what we are doing to make us have a better community. That is his objective. He said we can only have a better community if we all work together. He stated that we think that because we are in here that we are all working together, but we all have different opinions. We do not live next door to one another in our community. In this community, there are black communities and white communities and we all want to be represented. He said we need to think very positive about what we are doing and he thinks to ask to have an inclusion of more minorities is not unreasonable. He said look up here right now, all you have to do is look right up front. He asked do you think this is a representation of our community. He said he does not think so. He thinks that our community can be represented differently. He thanked everyone and said he thinks that we need to take a good look and think about what we are doing. He noted that John Kitchen is still his best friend and he will continue to be his best friend. Mr. Kitchen told Commissioner Perry to call him sometime and tell him about it. Commissioner Perry said we really need to talk about what we are talking about. He said the difference in all of us is opportunity and politics creates opportunities. He said if you think not, go through and look at your work force and look at who is unemployed. He went on to say look at where the problems are in our community. He said our problems are where people are not managing kids and so forth and they do not have jobs and so forth. He said he hopes he did not offend anyone.

Commissioner Winslow said he does not know when the last time was that we had commissioners come to Newland and ask for opinions, but we have that tonight. He said they came to meet and ask all people to come here tonight. He said you are all important to us. He said he does not know how this is going to end up statistically, because if you look at one district as it is now it is 60 some percent minority in Mr. Perry's district and if you go to the 2-2-2-1 Plan it drops back to 54%. He said he is an accountant and he cannot tell us what is fair and it is going to take some time to look at it and see what is fair to all people concerned, but that the men that are up here whether they are black or white care about you whatever color you are. He said he was elected in Newland and a large portion of the people who elected him were black. He said he is very proud of that and he represents them and they mean a lot to him. He stated that he found out tonight that he is a lot younger than he looks evidently, because he agrees with Mr. White that we have advanced. He stated that he has lived in Pasquotank County most of his life other than being in the service and all of us can go back and see the way it was and he is proud of not what it was, but where we are. He believes we have made great improvements and it is not as far as we would like to go in many ways and a lot of things we still need to improve on. This may be the very one thing that we need to improve on, but there are a lot of good people in this county, whether black or white that can represent any of us and care about us and it is important to him that you understand that they are here tonight and they came to you because they care about what you think and what you want and they want to do what is fair to all concerned.

Commissioner Sterritt stated that we the committee looked very closely at the community vision 20/20 steering committee, which is led by Ernest Sutton and Dr. Peel and one of their critical success factors, which he thinks is real important and the governance committee has given a lot of thought to and adopted which is "building on the community's diversity and heritage to develop the partnerships and collaboration needed to create a greater sense of hope and belonging for all citizens".

Motion was made by Commissioner Perry, seconded by Commissioner Winslow to adjourn the Governance Committee meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Chairman Dixon asked for a motion to adjourn the commissioners' meeting.

Motion was made by Cecil Perry, seconded by Commissioner Sterritt to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.


CHAIRMAN


ASSISTANT CLERK TO THE BOARD