

MINUTES
LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MONDAY, MARCH 14, 2005

The Lincoln County Board of County Commissioners met on March 14, 2005 at the Lincoln County EMS Training Facility, John Howell Memorial Drive, Lincolnton, North Carolina at 6:00 PM to discuss methods of election for Commissioners.

Commissioners Present:

Thomas R. Anderson, PE, Chairman
Carrol D. Mitchem, Vice-Chairman
Buddy Funderburk
Marie Moore
Alex Patton

Others Present:

Stan B. Kiser, County Manager
Jeffrey A. Taylor, County Attorney
Amy S. Long, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order: Chairman Anderson called the March 14, 2005 meeting of the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners to order.

Commissioner Patton gave the Invocation and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

County Attorney Jeff Taylor gave a presentation from At-large election of Commissioners to Election by Districts. He outlined the types of districts that can be utilized (electoral and residence districts) and methods used to change district elections, which are:

- 1 - Referendum on resolution passed by Commissioners
- 2 - Local act passed by General Assembly at the request of Lincoln County's legislative delegation based upon a request for such legislation from the Board of Commissioners to our legislative delegation.

He also discussed the requirements to increase the size of the Board of Commissioners and have both District and At-Large Board members.

Public Comments: Chairman Anderson opened the floor for public comments.

Peter Browne stated that he lives in the Catawba Springs township. He stated that for fairness of representation, the district boundaries would have to go with population. He stated that he would be in favor of district representation with 2 seats at large. He stated that setting boundaries needs time and input from citizens. Mr. Browne stated that he feels very strongly that it should be put before the citizens in a public referendum.

D. Clinton Harris, 4611 Sierra View Drive, stated that he is against district representation because he doesn't see the need for it. He stated that Commissioners are pretty well spread out and he does not see a problem. He stated that he hopes the Board will take into account the population and he would only be in favor of the change if at-large members are added.

George Goodman stated that he is totally opposed to a district representation system without at-large representation.

Sylvia Holmes stated that she has thought for years that there should be district representation, due to the sense of unfairness with the current election method. She stated that there probably should be at-large members added. Ms. Holmes presented a district map by population.

Ray Holmes stated that has been a resident of the Catawba Springs Township for 21 years. He thanked the Board for originating the proposal and stated that he strongly supports district representation. He stated that 5 districts with 2 at-large members is the most sensible way. Mr. Holmes asked the Board to do what is best for the county and have a referendum.

Wayne Vinzant stated that he is a Catawba Springs resident and is neither for nor against district representation. He asked what issue the Board was trying to resolve, how to get there, and if the cure is worse than the problem. He stated that a proposal should be put forth and public input should be received.

Bob Sarabia stated that he lives in the Catawba Springs township. He asked what initiated this proposal.

Commissioner Mitchem stated that fair representation was what initiated the proposal. He stated that the Board is on a timetable for this to go to Raleigh.

Mr. Sarabia asked if the Commissioners had Mr. Taylor's information before tonight.

Chairman Anderson stated that this is the first organized attempt to look at district representation and that the information was received by the Board at the meeting.

Mr. Sarabia asked for the Board's consensus as to which method would be preferable. He stated that he prefers electoral districts.

Jim Hallman, North Brook II Precinct, stated that he agrees with the majority and is in favor of district representation. He stated that he is in favor of district representation, with a 5 member board. He stated that he prefers Option 1. He stated that the US House bases districts on population and a number of surrounding counties have district representation. He stated that he is in favor of preserving the current Board and is opposed to turning this matter over to a committee.

Mary Harris stated that she thinks she is against redistricting. She stated that there should be more input and discussion concerning this matter. She spoke concerning drawing districts and the possibility of challenges. Ms. Harris voiced concerns about reducing the field of qualified candidates. She stated that at this point, she is against district representation.

W.J. Waters stated that he is a Lincolnton resident. He stated that the Board should follow Mr. Hallman's suggestion using residential districts with everybody voting on them.

Wayne Mitchem stated that he lives in Vale and would support district representation. He stated that the ultimate goal is to provide equitable representation on the Board. He stated that if 2 at-large seats are added, the possibility is there for 3 members to be from the same area.

Chairman Anderson stated that he would like to give each Board member a chance to speak concerning the information Jeff Taylor presented.

Commissioner Mitchem asked Jeff Taylor to explain the 10% variation. He presented maps drawn by Raleigh, which are based on the 10% rule. He stated that the Board is trying to eliminate what may happen in the future, because representation should be fair for all citizens. He stated that this is not an issue about East Lincoln vs. West Lincoln. He stated that he was elected to serve all the people in Lincoln County. He stated that the School Board election is townships, City Council is based on wards, and US Congressman are based on districts. Commissioner Mitchem stated that he and Commissioner Anderson talked about this 2 years ago when he came on Board.

Commissioner Moore stated that she is not in favor of district representation. She stated that she took an oath to serve all citizens of Lincoln County. She stated that she went through the election process and intends to represent Lincoln County. Commissioner Moore commented that the process has worked and continues to work well, so she does not think it needs to be changed. She stated that there needs to be public input and public hearings and there would need to be at-large members. She stated that it should be based on population and current figures should be used instead of the 2000 Census figures. Commissioner Moore said that she does believe in fairness and equal representation and wants people to be able to vote for who they want in office. She stated that she would like to see the Board hold meetings in the east and west and she would like fair representation on county boards. Commissioner Moore stated that if Commissioners take an oath to serve all citizens, she doesn't understand why this issue came up or why it is necessary.

Commissioner Funderburk stated that if the Board goes with districts, it should be based on population for equal representation. He stated that he feels it should be voted on county wide. He stated that all officials should be elected by the whole county. He stated that the Board is here to look after all the citizens and need to represent all the people.

Commissioner Patton stated that there is only one way in his mind that this got started. He stated that over recent years in Lincoln County, the west is worried about east taking over and the east is worried about equal representation. He stated that with the map presented, there is equal representation. He stated that he would only be in favor of this if the whole county voted on all candidates. Commissioner Patton said that currently there are five Commissioners from all parts of the county and he would like to see that it remains this way.

Commissioner Moore stated that she has been told that the maps could be drawn 100 different ways. She asked if current statistics are used if it would be drawn the same way. She stated that the county needs a large pool of qualified applicants and if it goes to district representation it may eliminate people that would serve the county well.

Mary Harris stated that she doesn't understand the inherent unfairness of allowing any person in Lincoln County to run for Commissioner and allowing them to be elected by a majority of the citizens.

Commissioner Patton stated that Mecklenburg County has had most of their Commissioners living on the same street. He stated that Lincoln County is such a diverse county, the eastern and western ends have different issues. He stated that there is an advantage to have Commissioners from different areas. Commissioner Patton said that district representation would not keep people from running, they may just have to wait until the position is open in their district.

Commissioner Mitchem stated that citizens are more comfortable talking to someone in their own community.

Commissioner Moore stated that this morning, she had a West Lincoln resident come to her to talk about West Lincoln issues. She stated that she has had calls from citizens in all different areas and doesn't know that people feel more comfortable with people in their own area.

D. Harris thanked the Board for their hard work. He stated that the census is very outdated and current population numbers should be used.

John Marrow stated that he is a Denver resident and believes that there should be county wide voting, with districts based on population. He suggested redistricting every 10 years based on population. Mr. Marrow recommended moving slowly on this.

There was a discussion concerning the maps and how they are drawn.

Commissioner Anderson thanked everyone for their input. He summarized the meeting and spoke concerning districts and population. He stated that if it is the pleasure of the Board to move forward to district representation a schedule must be established. The first objective would be to get a district map that all members agree upon for the current

population. If the Board has decided that taking this to the Legislature is not an option, it would allow time to get a district map drawn. Next, the Board could adopt the district map.

A MOTION by Commissioner Mitchem to continue to consider modification of Lincoln County's structure of government and to do so in such a manner that whatever method of restructuring will be placed before voters and will not be pursued as a local bill through Legislatures.

A PROCEDURAL MOTION by Commissioner Moore to establish a committee to study the matter to get public input and feedback. This committee will be to pursue the pros and cons of district representation and will come back to the Board with a recommendation.

Commissioner Mitchem stated that at the last meeting, the Board of Commissioners were appointed to study this.

Commissioner Patton stated that the best way to get feedback is straight to the Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Funderburk stated that the Board can have public meetings. He stated that the Board voted unanimously at the last meeting to appoint themselves to study this.

Vote on Commissioner Moore's Procedural Motion: 1 – 4

AYES: Moore

NOES: Anderson, Mitchem, Funderburk, Patton

Vote on Commissioner Mitchem's Motion: 4 – 1

AYES: Mitchem, Anderson, Patton, Funderburk

NOES: Moore

UPON MOTION by Commissioner Mitchem, the Board voted unanimously that a map which defines the proposed districts be prepared and presented to the Board in no more than 60 days.

Chairman Anderson recommended that Commissioner Mitchem and Commissioner Moore serve on a subcommittee to work on preparation of these maps.

Adjourn: Chairman Anderson adjourned the meeting.

Amy S. Long, Clerk

Thomas R. Anderson, PE, Chairman

Board of Commissioners

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