

Who Is YOUR Buncombe County Commissioner?

Which of the five commissioners represents YOUR community and its particular needs? Does one of the commissioners live in YOUR community? Have you EVER had a commissioner who lived in your community? The vast majority of Buncombe County citizens have NEVER had a commissioner who actually lived in their community. Generally speaking, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners is usually composed of a group of citizens who live in the center of the county (often within the city limits of Asheville) with an occasional representative from out in the county.

Buncombe County citizens would all be better represented on the Board of Commissioners if we changed our method of electing our commissioners from an *at-large* method to a *district* method. Currently candidates file to run for office and are voted upon by all of the citizens of Buncombe County in an *at-large* process. The result is a Board of Commissioners largely chosen by the city of Asheville where the population density is greater. In the *district* election process, candidates would file to run in the school district in which they live. Each would be elected only by the citizens within that district in which the candidate lives. The result would be a Board of Commissioners made up of representatives from EVERY school district EVERY ELECTION. This is the method used to elect our state and federal representatives. Many of the larger counties in North Carolina also use this method to elect their county commissioners.

Better representation for all Buncombe County citizens is the most important reason for choosing the *district* election process for electing our commissioners; however, there are some additional benefits to this method. One benefit is the reduced cost of running for office in a smaller geographic area. The cost of running for public office in Buncombe County discourages many good citizens from even trying. Another benefit is greater accessibility and thus better accountability. A commissioner living in a given community is much more likely to come into contact with those he represents as he goes through his daily routine. Odds are that most of the people in the grocery store, at the gas station, at the school play, or at the ballgame are going to be the people he represents. With our current system, how often do you bump into one of our representatives? And if you do bump into them, do you feel comfortable talking to them about issues which are of concern in your community? The closer a representative is to those he represents, the better he will know them. Hopefully, that familiarity will result in better representation.

A common argument against the *district* election process is that each representative would only be concerned with the needs of his own district and that nothing would get accomplished. Those who are aware enough about the current process know that the real concern is that the clique will be disrupted and that it will be more difficult to make deals when no one is looking. Is that a bad thing?

There are two means by which our method of electing Buncombe County Commissioners can be changed. First, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners has the authority to change the process. Second, the NC Legislature can make the change from Raleigh. At the present time, it seems that the status quo is too comfortable for either group to step

up and do the right thing. We, the citizens of Buncombe County, are going to have to convince our elected officials that we wish to make this change in our election process.

Citizens For Change, a local group of concerned citizens, is currently circulating a petition to change our method of electing our Buncombe County Commissioners from the *at-large* process to the *district* process. Our goal is two-fold. First, we plan to collect enough signatures to make it clear to our elected officials that the people want a change. Second, we want to educate the citizens of Buncombe County about their options. Many folks are not aware that we have a choice about the method we use to elect our Buncombe County Commissioners.

Every citizen of Buncombe County has a stake in this issue. Please make it a point to learn about the *district* election process. If you agree that this is the best method for Buncombe County, please be sure to sign the petition. Better yet, join us in our effort.

For more information or to get a copy of the petition, go to our website www.citizensforchange.us. No computer? Call 683-3701 or 253-5709.

Dr. Kathie Lack
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