

# Will 'old' Leland be left behind?

No one on council from original area

By Adam Wagner  
StarNews Staff

LELAND – For the first time since Leland was founded in 1989, the town council lacks a representative who lives in the area known as original Leland.

Jane Crowder's unsuccessful re-election bid in November means there is no longer a council member from the area, which stretches from the Leland exit of U.S. 74-76 down Village Road.

Leland's roots are in that part of the town, and some – like Crowder – are worried that it could be left behind.

"We just kind of have different needs or different things that I hope that they will look at and see,"

Crowder said, adding that some residents of that part of town would like to see more sidewalks and street lights, in particular.

Mayor Brenda Bozeman is a longtime resident of original Leland, but she moved to Magnolia Greens about five years ago. She is joined on the council by Bob Campbell, who also lives in Magnolia Greens; Pat Batleman, of Westport; and Mike Callahan and Bob Corriston, both of Brunswick Forest.

Bozeman said the council members, who are elected as at-large candidates, are there to serve everyone.

"Our job is to do what's best for the town as a whole," she said. "We represent everybody, not just one section."

Frankie Thomas, who was



Bozeman



Crowder

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the town's mayor from 1993 to 2005 and still lives in "old" Leland, said former councils saw the change coming.

"I don't really have a problem with it," he said. "You live by the sword, you die by the sword."

The original Leland area has been the focus of much of the town's recent activities. On Thursday, the council approved a \$130,000 land purchase on South Navassa Road for the purpose of building a future park. And the town has spent a significant amount of time discussing how to transform Village Road from a retail area with large parking lots to a traditional downtown area with mixed-use buildings.

Crowder did suggest that switching from at-large voting to more of a district concept would guarantee representation for that area. Candidates hailing from original Leland, she said, might have problems



Village Road is the heart of the original Leland area, which no longer has direct representation on the town council. STARNEWS FILE PHOTO

making inroads in communities such as Brunswick Forest and Magnolia Greens.

"Original Leland has, I think, a very big disadvantage," Crowder said, "because the people down in that area don't know the people here."

Thomas agreed that voting by districts could suit the town and that candidates from Brunswick Forest or Magnolia Greens could have an advantage.

"Most of the people in the new developments are from up North," he said, "and of course they feel a kinship

or want to stick together. That's just the name of the game, that's just politics.

During the 2015 municipal elections, for instance, 741 voters cast ballots in Leland's mayoral race at the precinct that serves Brunswick Forest, with 849 votes coming from the Magnolia Greens precinct, according to the Brunswick County Board of Elections. By comparison, a total of 237 voters cast ballots for Leland mayor in the Leland and Woodburn precincts in "old" Leland.

Since the 2007 election,

voter activity in the original Leland precincts has fallen while it has risen in the precincts serving newer subdivisions.

Voters cast 265 ballots for Leland's mayor at the Leland precinct in 2007, for instance, and 123 in 2015. The Woodburn precinct, also in original Leland, had 289 votes in 2008 and 114 in 2015.

In the 2007 election, though, the Belville precinct had 1,324 ballots cast for Leland mayor. That polling place was later split up into three separate precincts, which accounted for 1,901 votes in 2015, according to the county elections office.

Still, Bozeman doesn't think district voting is a viable solution.

"I don't think we're big enough for that yet," the mayor said. "Even Wilmington doesn't do that and New Hanover County doesn't do that, and they're much larger than what we are."

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