

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2006 AT 5:30 P.M. AT CITY HALL. MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Alton McCollum. COUNCILPERSONS: Buddy Sandifer, David Walker, Betty Mack, and Nancy Foster. CLERK: Bruce Watson. VISITORS: Phyllis Overstreet, Alzena Robinson, Franklin Bamberg, Douglas and Lisa Stokes, Jerry Durgan, Craig and Janeth Walker, Sharon Hammond, Beryle Shuler, and Paulett Plowden.

Mayor McCollum called the meeting to order and Councilman Walker gave the invocation.

Councilman Walker made the motion to approve the agenda to include the amendment of item 2A to discuss the donation for the Wild Game Supper. Councilperson Mack made the second. All approved. The motion carried.

Clerk Watson took the roll with everyone being present except Councilpersons Johnson and Boykin. He informed Council that Councilman Boykin could not attend due to his job.

Mayor McCollum informed Council that the voting districts were out of proportion member wise. He said Mr. Bobbie Bowers had drawn up a redistricting plan which was a fair plan. Mayor McCollum informed Council that according to Bamberg's population each district should represent around 622 people. Mayor McCollum told Council that an error was found in Plan One which Mr. Bowers presented at the last meeting and since then Plan Two had been drawn to correct the error.

Mayor McCollum asked Clerk Watson to explain Plan Two.

Clerk Watson explained that Council in considering redistricting must look at numbers of people in each district. He told them not to be concerned with the color of someone's skin, their social or income level but that they must try and equalize the number of constituents that each member of Council represented. Clerk Watson said since the first district plan was drawn and approved almost 20 years ago that the districts have become very disproportional. He told Council that an error was found in Plan One and that Councilperson Foster was shown as living in District 5. Clerk Watson presented Plan Two which had Councilperson Foster in her correct district and gave Council a sheet comparing Plan Two data to the Benchmark Plan data. Clerk Watson informed Council that the Benchmark Plan which took the present districts and included 2000 census data had Councilperson Mack's District with 768 people, Councilperson Johnson's with 378, Councilman Walker's with 480, Councilman Boykin's with 676, Councilperson Foster's with 520 and Councilman Sandifer's with 911 people. He asked them to notice the large discrepancy between Councilperson Johnson's District and Councilman Sandifer's District. Clerk Watson told Council Plan Two now averages each district near to 622 people in each district with districts 1, 2, 3, and 4 remaining majority minority. Clerk Watson told Council that Mr. Bowers was concerned with the requirement of one person one vote which meant each Council member was required to have an equal number of people in their districts as possible. He explained that Plan Two shows no major retrogression in

the minority districts. Clerk Watson informed Council that cities were not required by law to redistrict even though counties were required to redistrict after each census. He said he had learned that Council was not required to hold a public hearing but that it would be up to Council as to how they involved the public. He informed Council that they were required to have two readings of an ordinance to adopt the new district plan. Clerk Watson went on to say that the minorities were the majority overall in the City of Bamberg with 52% of the voting population.

Councilperson Foster said she felt the figures looked good to her in Plan Two.

Councilperson Mack said she was concerned as to why the redistricting had not been done earlier. She voiced that it needed to be done after the next census since it would be confusing to the voters so close to an election.

Councilman Walker said he would like to hear from the voters to get their thoughts on the new plan.

Mayor McCollum said he felt there was no better way to hear from the constituents than what was taking place tonight.

Councilman Sandifer informed Council that he was losing one third of his constituents and voiced that the old district plan was not a level playing field. He said at present he was representing more people than everyone else on Council.

Councilperson Foster said the numbers in Plan Two looked fine.

Councilperson Mack said she was concerned with the timing.

Councilman Sandifer asked what more could they ask for in Plan Two.

Councilperson Mack voiced that the redistricting was new to her and that she had no objection to the even distribution of people but that she was concerned with the timing.

Councilman Sandifer then made the motion to approve accepting Plan Two and to move forward with the redistricting process. Councilperson Foster made the second. All approved except Councilperson Mack who abstained from voting. The motion carried.

Councilman Sandifer made the motion to donate \$400.00 to the 2006 Bamberg County Wild Game Banquet. Councilperson Mack made the second. All approved. The motion carried.

During the Announcements:

Councilman Sandifer informed Council that the event honoring Representative Rhoad was well attended and appreciated by Rep. Rhoad who became emotional at times.

Councilperson Foster informed Council that the Christmas Parade would be held the first Saturday in December and that the County Tree Lighting Service would take place on the first Sunday of December.

During questions from the audience:

Mr. Franklin Bamberg asked Council why they wanted to change the voting districts at election time?

Mayor McCollum said no one group of people had lost any ground with the proposed plan. He informed the audience that he had realized the need to redistrict and said he felt it needed to be worked on to get it done.

Mrs. Lisa Stokes read a prepared statement in which she said she supported Council's decision to look at redistricting. She said their decision was quiet hurried and that she was concerned with the redistricting during the Holiday Season. She said Council was sending the wrong message and that their decision seemed to be preconceived. Mrs. Stokes said several plans needed to be presented and that any new plan should not go into effect until after the April election. She said that Council would not want any citizens to believe they were behaving opportunistically in hopes of obtaining self serving results. Mrs. Stokes said Council needed to take several months to study and present to the public several options for voter realignment. She said she wanted to see a breakdown of statistical data for the voting population in addition to total population that Mr. Bowers submitted. Mrs. Stokes proposed that Council not allow the redistricting to become effective until one and a half years after it had been approved so no one would be accused of trying to manipulate or influence a particular election.

Mrs. Stokes asked which election would be the first election affected, when did the first discussion take place by Council to redraw the district lines, who contacted Bobby Bowers, why was 2000 census data being used, how many people were in each district at this time, how many plans were presented as models in 1987 and what was the population statistics for those eligible to vote as opposed to the total population?

Councilman Sandifer voiced that he was on Council in 1987 when there were seven white people serving with all members at large. He explained that Mayor Hicks felt it was not fair and wanted everyone represented. Councilman Sandifer said they voted for the present district plan which included black and white council members. He said the plan worked then and that it would work now.

Mrs. Stokes said the present proposed plan was not for the citizens of Bamberg. She said she thought Council would hold a public hearing and that the process was unfair and ridiculous. She asked Council to slow the process down and hear from the public. Mrs. Stokes told Council they did not want them here tonight. She told Council she liked them but didn't like what they were doing.

Mrs. Alzena Robinson informed Council that she had received 20 calls from concerned citizens. She asked why they were moving to redistrict now when the election would be held in April when three black districts would be up for election. She asked why they used 2000 census data instead of waiting for the 2010 data. She said she had a problem with no public hearing being held and said if asked by the Justice Department that she would object due to the process being on fast track.

Mr. Douglas Stokes told Council that he had been researching the 2000 census data which was decreasing each day. He told them his numbers were more accurate and asked them to look at his figures.

Mr. Craig Walker told Council he was concerned with the timing and said their decision seemed to be a rush to judgement. He voiced that only one plan had been presented and questioned what other plans made it to the trash. Mr. Walker told Council the community was waking up and that people were now willing to engage Council. He asked them to embrace a public hearing and said folks were tired of being told where they were going. Mr. Walker said Council had a quorum so they acted.

Councilperson Mack said Councilperson Johnson was asked to express her concerns although she was not present at the meeting.

Councilman Walker said he felt a public hearing was needed and said he did not understand what he was voting on and if he had known more that he would not have voted the way he did.

Mr. Craig Walker told Councilman Walker that he voted to support the plan anyway.

Councilperson Foster told the audience that Mr. Bowers was depended on by everyone in the state to help with such plans and that he tried to keep council members in their present districts. She said citizens can participate in the process and told them they had access to everything each council member received.

Mrs. Alzena Robinson questioned Council as to why District Four now went up into Elizabeth and Oak Streets?

Mrs. Stokes said Councilman Walker's voting on something he did not approve of proved her point. She said they had been some discussion and said Council had told Mr. Bowers what they wanted in a plan. She said everything will be eventually disclosed and that it would bite Council hard in the butt.

Mayor McCollum said he felt good about the plan and said Mr. Bowers had drawn the districts in a fair way and that the redistricting had not changed any district but had made each councilperson's representation fairer.

Mrs. Janeth Walker told Council the issue was not with redistricting but the timing. She said if Council cared they would get the community involved. She said it was disturbing

that Council would move so quickly. She said her opinion obviously didn't count and said it was appalling and disturbing.

Mrs. Alzena Robinson said she saw no problem with the map but had a problem with the timing.

Mayor McCollum voiced again that he saw no problem.

Mrs. Robinson said the problem was with the timing of the three black districts coming up for election.

Clerk Watson informed Council that they had to have two readings of an ordinance in order to adopt the new plan and said there was still time for the citizens to get involved.

With no further business, Councilman Sandifer made the motion to adjourn. Councilperson Mack made the second. All approved. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

ATTEST:

Clerk

Mayor