



YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

# POWHATAN TODAY

Powhatan, Virginia

I. XXV No. 8

The hometown paper of Linda Perry

February 23, 2011

## Supervisors name redistricting panel

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The Powhatan Board of Supervisors has appointed a redistricting advisory panel to collect input from citizens about the pending reconfiguration of county voting districts.

District 5 Supervisor Carson Tucker said the intent is to “cast as wide a net as possible” to collect and report feedback from the community. Each supervisor nominated a citizen and the School Board can appoint its own representative to the panel.

According to 2010 census information, the county’s total population grew 25 percent over the past decade to 28,046 residents. District 3, the largest district by population, has 2200 more residents in it than District 5, the district with the fewest residents.

The county’s inmate population factors in as the great uncertainty: The boundaries of Powhatan’s five voting districts would change drastically if the Board of Supervisors excludes inmates

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from the population count.

According to Tucker, inmates comprised 14 percent of the population in District 3 in 2008 and more than 30 percent in District 5.

In an editorial published in this week's Powhatan Today, Tucker asserts the standard of one person-one vote is compromised because "the votes of the Supervisors of District 3 and District 5...carry slightly more weight than the individual votes of Districts 1, 2, and 4."

"I always wondered why inmates were included," District 3 Supervisor Robert Cosby remarked during a recent workshop.

A bill that would have permitted localities to exclude prison populations that exceed 12 percent of the population of an individual voting district was passed over indefinitely in the Senate last week. Localities already have the option of omitting prison populations when they exceed 12 percent of the county's total

population.

Peter Wagner, executive director of the Prison Policy Initiative, a non-partisan think tank, praised Powhatan for creating the redistricting advisory panel but said the apparent failure of the bill strips communities of the chance "to decide what they want."

Localities should have the opportunity to make that choice, he said – whether to include or exclude prisoners from the population count.

Wagner believes the census counts prisoners in the wrong place, which he said "is a problem for democracy," both in the prisoners'

home community and in the locality where the prisoner is held.

If prisoners are excluded from the populations of Districts 3 and 5 the boundaries of those districts would have to expand to take in more – likely white – voters. And substantial adjustments to two voting districts would necessarily impact the other three.

District 5 was configured so that black voters would have "as meaningful a voice in the governance of the county as possible," Tucker wrote. "It is clear from the way that Powhatan's African-American population is spread throughout the county that a 'majority

minority' district is not possible. To create such a district, it would be necessary to gerrymander in some bizarre way."

Tucker's initial proposal to the board of supervisors called for the advisory panel to include a representative from the local NAACP – because he said it is not enough for panel "to be pure," it "needs to appear pure."

"We are not trying to dilute the black vote, or to give the appearance of trying to dilute the black vote," Tucker said in January.

District 2 Supervisor Jason Moore objected to the panel including any special-interest groups.