

Brown draws challenger in Pender commissioner race

2 Republicans vying to be GOP nominee for District 3

By Bill Walsh

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PENDER COUNTY — Two Republicans are battling it out in Pender County to represent District 3 on the board of commissioners.

Incumbent Republican George Brown, currently chairman of the board, faces a primary challenge from fellow Republican David Fallin. It's a win-and-you're-in primary for these candidates, as no Democrat filed to run in the fall.

District 3 includes Rocky Point and surrounding areas.

Fallin declined to participate in the StarNews' primary preview coverage.

Commissioners make \$12,935 annually, with the chairman making \$16,214. They also receive \$4,800 a year travel allowance.

1. Relations between the school board and the commissioners have been strained for years. What can be done to improve this relationship?

Brown: The very nature of a relationship between school boards and commissioner boards is quite strained for a lot of N.C. rural counties. Schools usually take a significant if not the biggest bite from a rural county's ad-valorem (property) Tax collections. Almost half of Pender's property tax collections will be used for the schools in some way including construction, teacher supplements, operational costs as well as related bond payments or school debt. This type of arrangement has its challenges and this is why it is so important for the school/ commissioner boards to work together.

2. Water - and wastewater — are increasing problems for eastern Pender County. What needs to be done?

Brown: A county water system and wastewater system are very important to industrial growth. A county water system has been implemented to most areas of the county providing alternatives to individual well systems. I do prefer that we don't require mandatory connection for those existing citizens wanting to stay on their wells. But, this does pose problems for the overall funding and resources necessary to grow the customer base and become a cost-efficient system for the users. Our wastewater treatment plant was completed last fall and has been the successful contributor to the seemingly overnight industrial growth recently seen in our Pender Commerce Park on U.S. 421 bringing many jobs to our area.

3. For years, there has been a rural/urban divide in Pender County. What can be done to erase this tension?

Brown: The commissioners work hard to deal with geographical and economic differences associated with the individual communities of our county. We are a diverse area with a more urban atmosphere along our coastal area and transitioning mostly rural as you look westward. One of the most common complaints on our eastern side is traffic and we are awaiting the approved Hampstead Bypass and median projects which will reduce congestion and increase safety. The western side of our county has a different set of challenges we are working on. Broadband /internet is almost nonexistent in certain areas creating difficulties for students, schools and business growth that are elements of everyday life in other areas.

4. Pender County is among the fastest-growing counties in the state. How does the county deal with this challenge/opportunity?

Brown: I believe Pender is now recognized as the second-fastest growing county in North Carolina just behind Brunswick County. This does create problems for our infrastructure such as roads, water, sewer, EMS-Fire-Sheriff's services. It also greatly impacts county services and probably the greatest impact is to our schools. All of these factors weigh heavy as financial burdens and obligations relying on our tax collections. We as commissioners have tried to prepare for this growth by planning and setting things in motion for years prior to now.

For more information and to see all candidate profiles, visit www.StarNewsOnline.com/news/politics.