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Culpeper supervisors begin redistricting work in county

BY DONNIE JOHNSTON
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If anyone in the town of Culpeper didn't know, recently released census figures make it clear.

West Fairfax District is where most of Culpeper County's growth occurred during the past decade.

The population of that district, along the southwest side of U.S. 522, has swelled to more than 9,000 residents since 2000 and will cause the most concern for redistricting efforts.

The county Board of Su-

perisors got its first look at individual census figures during a work session yesterday and began a two-month-long task of redrawing lines for Culpeper's seven magisterial districts.

Federal law requires that those districts be reshaped after every census to make sure every resident is properly represented.

The county now has a population of 46,689. County Planner John Egerston, who has been working with the Rappahannock Rapid Regional Commission's

software, told the board that the optimal population of each district would be about 6,670 people.

Using this as a base, West Fairfax would need to lose about 2,600 people to comply. On the other hand, the Cedar Mountain District—where the population has remained fairly stable over the past decade—would need to pick up about 1,100.

And it might need to pick up 1,000 more. That's because the census numbers for Cedar Mountain include the approximately 1,000 in-

mates at the Coffeewood Correctional Facility.

County officials say pending legislation in the General Assembly would let counties choose whether to include prison inmates when calculating district sizes.

"It doesn't make sense to include them if they can't vote," said Supervisor Sue Hansohn.

And Supervisor Steve Nixon quipped, "How are you going to campaign down there?"

Hansohn's Catalpa District is the only district

besides Cedar Mountain and West Fairfax that would need a major revision. It falls almost 1,000 short of the 6,670 goal.

While there was talk of moving part of West Fairfax into Salem and part of East Fairfax or Stevensburg into Catalpa, supervisors wanted more time to study the issue. They asked Egerston to bring back several possible scenarios for the board's next work session March 7. Board members agreed that the simplest redistricting scenario would be best in order

to avoid voter confusion.

Several supervisors, especially Tom Underwood, want to see data before the next meeting. Underwood had asked that the figures shown yesterday be given to supervisors before the meeting, and he walked out early because they weren't.

"I was told that we should all show up here ignorant, without the data," Underwood said.

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