

Legislators Back Incorporation Of Fletcher

By MARK BARRETT
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RALEIGH — A legislative committee voted Thursday to give a thumbs up to efforts to incorporate the Fletcher community and a thumbs down to an incorporation move for Wolf Laurel.

And Buncombe County legislators said they will move quickly to draft a bill to set up the Fletcher incorporation after smoothing over a disagreement about who would be the town's first mayor.

The Joint Legislative Commission on Municipal Incorporations voted unanimously to recommend incorporation of the 3,100-person community in northern Henderson County after being told the city of Asheville had withdrawn its objection to the plan.

But the six-member commission unanimously decided not to back incorporation at Wolf Laurel, a resort town on the Madison-Yancey county line with 57 full-time residents.

"They didn't have enough people" and "they don't have much of a plan to get organized," said commission co-chairman Rep. Gordon Greenwood, D-Buncombe.

The recommendations will likely make and break moves for incorporation by members of the two communities, Greenwood said.

Approving the Fletcher proposal was a fairly simple matter for the commission once Asheville's objections were removed, Greenwood said.

"Fletcher meets every qualification for being an incorporated town," he said. "They have industry in the town, they're well distributed, the town's developed."
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Fletcher

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State law prohibits the commission from favorably recommending incorporation bids for a community within five miles of the boundaries of an existing town if the existing town objects.

Asheville's City Council voted in favor of the Fletcher bid Feb. 20 after being told its charter would include a guarantee that Fletcher would not annex any land in Buncombe County.

Buncombe County legislators and Sen. Bob Carpenter, R-Macon, and Sen. C.W. Hardin, R-Haywood, met with a group of supporters of Fletcher incorporation for about 45 minutes behind closed doors after the commission meeting.

The issue of who would be the town's first mayor had been hotly

disputed since a group supporting incorporation put forth a plan that would have had Pat Ritchie take the job at a \$20,000 annual salary.

Ritchie later resigned as a candidate for the job — prompting other incorporation supporters to nominate Robert Parrish — then withdrew her resignation.

Residents and legislators decided Thursday to simply set up a four-member town council with no mayor in the incorporation bill.

The board would serve until the town could hold elections this fall, at which time the mayor's job would be filled also, Greenwood said.

With the dispute out of the way, "our chances are very good" to become incorporated, Parrish said.

Wolf Laurel simply has too many problems and too few assets to become a town, Greenwood said.

Just maintaining the community's roads would cost Wolf Laurel residents "a mint of money," Greenwood said.

Several Wolf Laurel residents attending the meeting applauded the commission's decision.

Incorporation "would do nothing for the people of Wolf Laurel," said resident Richard Randel.

But an officer with the resort's developer, Frank Denise, said he may ask legislators to file an incorporation bill for Wolf Laurel despite the commission's recommendation Thursday.