

The Fayetteville Observer: "A History of Separation Studied"

By Julia Oliver, Published May 2, 2004

Civil rights organizations are studying the way black communities have been affected by their exclusion from some Moore County towns. The Cedar Grove Institute for Sustainable Communities, a nonprofit organization in Mebane, uses advanced mapping technology and North Carolina census data to find boundaries drawn along racial lines. It also looks at where utilities are built.

The institute says that Pinehurst's boundaries, while not unique in their exclusion of black communities, raise concerns. The boundaries keep some unincorporated communities under zoning control, but do not provide them services. Pinehurst controls zoning within a two-mile radius of the village.

The institute's research has gotten the attention of the Center for Civil Rights at UNC's law school. "It seems like something that is both old and new," said Jack Boger, the center's deputy director. He considers the new mapping technology a fresh look at discrimination that may have been going on for a long time. He said the center wants to find out whether black communities are being excluded in a manner that violates civil rights protections. "We want to find out the extent to which this is permissible and appropriate."

Anita Earls, director of advocacy and senior lawyer at the center, said she is concerned that residents are being regulated without a voice. "They don't have control over their property and they don't have representation in the body that does have control over their property," she said.

Responsibility for the phenomenon that some have called "municipal underbunding" is unclear. Town alders in Moore County say that decisions to annex are based in economics, not race: Towns are most likely to consider annexing wealthy neighborhoods that can bring in taxes to offset the services the town provides. The towns say that the communities that seem excluded have resisted annexation.

Andy Wilkison, Pinehurst's village manager for 15 years, said maps showing the racial disparity in and out of the village boundaries are misleading. "I think if you just looked at the map and didn't know the background, you would think, 'Gosh, Pinehurst is trying to keep those people out,'" he said. He said residents of Monroe Town and Jackson Hamlet, a black neighborhood to the south of Pinehurst, were asked whether they wanted to be part of the village. Afraid of higher taxes, they said no, he said. "These maps don't tell you that story."

Recent meeting

The Center for Civil Rights met recently with members of four black communities in Moore County that do not have reliable water or sewer service, said Heather Hunt, a fellow at the center. She said the center is trying to help the communities figure out whether they would like to be part of a town.

"A lot of people have questions about, what does it mean to be annexed?" she said. "We're here to tell them, 'if this is what you want, here is the procedure.'" Hunt said the center has met with people from:

A neighborhood northeast of the airport off N.C. 22 that has neither water nor sewer service.

A neighborhood between railroad tracks and Saunders Road that is almost surrounded by Aberdeen and has no water or sewer service.

Jackson Hamlet, which is sandwiched between Aberdeen and Pinehurst and has water, but no sewer service.

Taylortown, an incorporated town to the north of Pinehurst that has both water and sewer, but has had problems with water quality.

Because a federal grant brought Monroe Town water and sewer service last year, and because the center did not have any contacts there, Monroe Town was not included, Hunt said. But she said the difference in racial makeup between Pinehurst and Monroe Town is striking. "It just seems kind of egregious when you're outside the town but you're surrounded by it," she said.