

Voters Turn to Weigh in on Local Controversies

Written by Steve Frank

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Voters are getting their say today at the ballot box after two years of local controversies. It will be interesting to see how voters react to issues such as Boone's development ordinances, criticized as too restrictive and enacted as the county tried to sell the old Watauga High site, effectively killing the sale. It was a matter that became a serious point of contention between the Boone Town Council and Watauga Commission, and led to the restructuring of sales tax distribution in the county, costing Boone some \$2 million in revenue. While Watauga Commissioners are not on the ballot this time, only two sitting council members are on the ballot—and only one seeking to return to his seat, that being Rennie Brantz. Councilman Andy Ball is running for Mayor, but will return to his council seat if he loses. Two other current members are not seeking reelection. And speaking of Brantz, a conservative blog, *A Watauga Conservative*, reported that Brantz, an ASU professor, did not file required paperwork with the university, the blog quoting Dayton Cole, General Counsel for Appalachian State University confirming that Brantz did not file a required petition, required of ASU employees seeking elective office. It was not clear whether ASU might take action over the omission.

But Boone is not the only seat of controversy, with sides drawn in Beech Mountain on a number of issues, including the Genesis Wildlife Refuge, operation of the Buckeye Recreation Center, and issues that have spun out of the central issues around the town board there. Candidate sign destruction and tempers flaring at town board meetings have further polarized the town—and the election.

An indication of the interest in the election is evident in the numbers of early One-Stop voting with 1154 voters casting ballots at the Commissioners meeting room—the early voting poll for all of Watauga County, with over 100 mail-in votes also in as of yesterday morning. And with Boone Mayor Loretta Clawson stepping down, it adds up to an interesting referendum on the state of affairs in local towns.

Voters will cast their ballots at a single polling place in Beech Mountain, Blowing Rock and Seven Devils, but in Boone, eight precinct polling places will be open—not all of the eight precincts are fully located within the Boone town limits, so if you have any voting questions, call the Watauga County Board of Elections at (828) 265-8061 for assistance. Election coverage starts on High Country Radio as soon as first figures are released after 7:30 this evening.

In reference to the photo rotation, Watauga Election chairman Luke Eggers points out that the group with signs taking reports of voting problems are not affiliated with the elections boards, and that anyone experiencing voting problems should contact the Watauga Board of Elections immediately. The number is in the previous paragraph.