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## Dunlap chosen for county board

**School board member picked in special Democratic party election to succeed the late Valerie Woodard.**

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George Dunlap was announced the winner of a special election to name a successor to Mecklenburg County District 3 commissioner Valerie Woodard on Monday at Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center. ROBERT LAHSER - rlahser@charlotteobserver.com

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Mecklenburg Democrats picked George Dunlap on Monday to represent District 3 on the county commission until 2010, casting him as the likely deciding vote in ongoing partisan fights over property values and an uptown ballpark.

Dunlap said he still has questions about how the county should proceed on both issues and wants answers before voting. He's scheduled to meet county leaders this morning to get more information.

Commissioners could appoint Dunlap at their meeting tonight.

Dunlap, 52, a school board member, was elected to succeed Valerie Woodard, who died this month of a rare blood disorder. She had served since 2002 and was running unopposed for a fourth term in the district, which covers parts of east, central and north Charlotte.

Before Woodard's death, Democrats held a 5-4 majority on the county board. They have been evenly split the past two weeks during talks related to the baseball plan and property

revaluations.

The board's Republicans said they want the county to delay a scheduled countywide property value reassessment by a year because the housing market is too unstable. Democrats want to proceed to help residents whose values have already slipped since the last revaluation in 2003.

Democrats also want to keep alive plans for a Charlotte Knights baseball stadium and a related purchase of land for a Third Ward Park, but some Republicans have said the county shouldn't spend the money now, given the worsening economy.

Dunlap said he has followed both discussions, but that much of what he's heard has been through media coverage. He wouldn't hint at his positions at this point.

"I'm a researcher, I try real hard not to vote on emotions," Dunlap said. "I don't want to just go off half-cocked and vote irresponsibly either, so there is some information I need to help me, I hope, come to a correct decision."

### **Special election**

Dunlap bested six candidates to win the District 3 seat, though it took three tries for him to secure a majority of votes.

Initially, 11 people had expressed interest in the post, but four were not nominated Monday at the special election by precinct leaders, elected officials and other party leaders who live in District 3.

In the end, Dunlap walked away with 52 percent of the votes cast, defeating longtime party activist Geneal Gregory, who got 28 percent of the vote and Dwayne Collins, Woodard's former campaign manager and chair of the Black Political Caucus of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, who had 21 percent.

Before the vote, Dunlap touted his long service to the district and noted that he represented the same neighborhoods in 13 years as a school board member that he would as a commissioner.

"We hope Mr. Dunlap will embody the principles of my political mentor," Collins said, referring to Woodard.

Part of that, Collins said, is advocating for resources to fight HIV/AIDS and to complete the proposed Eastway Park, which Woodard supported.

Collins also said Woodard would have supported the uptown baseball stadium deal and the immediate revaluation of property taxes.

Monday's election came together quickly, one week after it was announced by local Democrats. Party officials said state law required they recommend a successor for the rest of Woodard's current term within one month of her death.

This is the third time in less than a year that local Democrats have held a special election to fill

a vacancy in an elected office. Last December, Charlotte attorney Nick Mackey was picked by party members to succeed retiring Sheriff Jim Pendergraph.

But that election was controversial, and commissioners refused to appoint Mackey. They argued at the time that state law did not require the board to back the party's choice, and that commissioners could name their own replacement.

Mackey's victory was eventually overturned by a panel of the state Democratic party, which ordered a new election and required the local party to reorganize its precincts. However, commissioners did not wait for the new election and named Mackey's opponent, then-Deputy Chief Chipp Bailey, as sheriff.

This time, however, many commissioners say they are required by law to go along with the Democrat's pick.

### **Controversy ahead?**

Still, vice chairman Parks Helms, a Democrat, said he expected some "gamesmanship" from some Republicans.

Republican Bill James said he wants to delay the appointment until the county can review the election as it did with the sheriff's seat. He said he wants that to include a review of Dunlap's background, including personnel files related to his public duties and any complaints against Dunlap by a former school board member and one current member.

He also referred to a 1991 incident in which Dunlap, then a police officer, was suspended for hitting a female officer.

But Republican Dan Bishop said Sunday that assuming the Democratic party did a "competent" job of nominating a candidate, "we're obliged to pick their nominee and I'm not going to do anything to try to delay it."

Dunlap's school board seat is open for appointment.  
Staff writer Christopher D. Kirkpatrick contributed.



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