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## In Lenoir recount, Beal still wins

Virginia Annable Nov 22, 2017



Jonathan Beal and Kimberly Edmisten

The room was nearly silent but for the regular sound of a scanner and the rustle of papers. Three people sat around a large, wooden table, judiciously calling out numbers and signing off on them.

The Caldwell County Board of Elections and elections staff recounted the ballots from the Nov. 7 Lenoir City Council election Wednesday morning while Councilwoman Kimberly Edmisten and Councilman-elect Jonathan Beal sat patiently waiting.

Edmisten asked for a recount on Monday because in the final canvass of ballots, she lost by just five votes. Beal supported her decision because of the narrow margin but said he was still confident.

“What’s most important is making sure the count is accurate. I’m happy with whatever is in that box,” Beal said, gesturing toward the ballot scanners, where two election office staff slid each ballot in.

Once a precinct’s ballots were all scanned, the machine printed a receipt tallying the votes, which Director of Elections Sandra Rich and two board members compared to the election night numbers. Only the number of votes for Beal and Edmisten were counted.

Edmisten said watching the process made waiting less anxiety-inducing.

“I wish everyone could see how meticulous the process is,” she said. “It’s reassuring.”

Between precinct ballot counts, Beal and Edmisten occasionally whispered to each other. They talked about their dogs, Thanksgiving plans and the election process. While they were rivals in the election, they’ve known each other since high school. When Edmisten competed for the title of Miss Caldwell County in the 1980s, Beal even played taps for her speech in the pageant.

After two hours, the recount was done and the results confirmed: Beal won by five votes.

Beal said he’s glad Edmisten called a recount.

“It takes out any question,” he said. “You know, when it’s this close, it’s nice to know for sure.”

Beal will be sworn in at the Dec. 5 council meeting by his father, retired Superior Court Judge Beverly Beal.

“I’m ready to go to work,” Beal said. “I’ve already had so many meetings with city staff and I’m ready to dive into the learning process.”

The Dec. 5 meeting will be Edmisten's last, but she said she isn't done with serving the city, whether on a different citizen-led board or volunteering.

"I won't be going away any time soon," she said. "I've learned so much, and there are some initiatives I'd still like to be involved with."

While the recount didn't change any results, Edmisten said it was worth it to verify.

"I think it feels more complete," Edmisten said. "Either of us would have done it, and it's nice to have that verification."

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