

Voters file new petition to move polling place

By **JAMES MCGINNIS**

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Russian-Americans and Indian-Americans at the Creekside Apartments filed a second petition with Bucks County Monday, once again alleging voter disenfranchisement and demanding a closer polling place.

The petition was signed by 23 residents of the apartment complex on Knights Road in Bensalem, according to attorney Kathryn Boockvar, who filed it on their behalf.

Deena Dean, director of the Bucks County Board of Elections, said changes to the voter district would be impossible before the April 22 primary.

For many years, Creekside residents could vote at their apartment complex's community hall. Last year, the voting machines were moved to Polanka Hall, a mile away. The county said it was responding to two letters from Bensalem residents who believed the apartment complex was unsafe.

Last week, the Bucks County Commissioners held a hearing on the Creekside poll. Republican Commissioners Jim Cawley and Charlie Martin rejected a petition to move the machines back to Creekside. Commissioner Diane Marseglia, the lone Democrat, said the polling place should be moved back.

The new petition asks the county to create a new voting district specifically for Creekside, with a polling place inside the complex.

The move to Polanka "resulted in a significant abridgement of these citizens' right to vote, and voter turnout for this precinct plummeted," the petition said. "The majority of voters ... are naturalized citizens of Russian and Indian descent, are elderly or infirm, and many cannot or do not drive."

Changes to the voter districts would need approval by the county and the state. That could take several weeks or months, according to Dean, who said, "It's a very lengthy process before new voter districts are drawn up. There would need to be public hearings and a decision by the courts."

Other neighborhoods and retirement communities have asked for their own voting districts, but all have been turned down, Dean said. Federal law mandates that voter districts conform to census block lines from the most recent decennial census, she said.

Boockvar said she offered free legal assistance to the residents because she was outraged by the change.

"Bensalem and the county argue that this area is not safe for voters who have to come there on Election Day. But if that's true and it's not safe, then what's being done for these apartment tenants who have to live there 365 days a year?" Boockvar said.

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