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## Blacks Accuse College Park Of Delaying Ward Plan Filing

By FAYE EDMUNDSON

The Neighborhood Voters League has accused the City of College Park of "dragging its feet" in the filing of a new ward redistricting plan to the Justice Department.

The city was ordered to redraw voting wards and to hold new city elections as soon as possible in 1977 by a federal court ruling in December. The ruling was the result of a suit filed by the Voters League challenging the redistricting and seeking black representation. The court ruling was returned against the city on the basis that when College Park redistricted in 1968 the redistricting plan was not submitted to the Justice Department for approval as required by the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

A new redistricting plan was adopted by the College Park City Council on February 21, 1977.

In a press conference held Monday the Neighborhood Voters League questioned why two months later the plan has not yet been submitted to the Justice/Department.

W. J. Freeman, president of the Neighborhood Voters League, stated "The city is purposely dragging its feet and acting in bad faith in resolving the reapportionment suit filed in 1976. On December 8, 1976, the Federal District Court ordered the City of College Park to submit all violations of the 1965 voting Rights Act to the U.S. Justice Department for approval and to hold new city elections as soon as possible in 1977." Freeman said that in a conference call with Justice Department officials last Friday, "we were informed that a reapportionment plan had not yet been submitted."

College Park City Attorney George Glaze, who has been handling preparations for submission of the plan to the Justice Department, was not available for comment.

Members of the Neighborhood Voters League and others blacks involved in the redistricting effort expressed concern at the press conference that the plan would be submitted in time for an election to be held in 1977.

Johnny Robinson, one of the plaintiffs in the original suit, noted that it may take three to six months for the plan to be approved and preparations to be made for the election. "People in the community who want to run for office need time to campaign," he said.

In addition, he said, citizens will have to be notified of

changes in wards and polling places.

After the plan is approved, there will also be much paperwork required, such as compilation of new voter lists, before the election can be held. City officials have indicated in the past that it may be December, 1977, when the regular city election is

scheduled, before the election ordered by the court can be held. In the election, the mayor and all members of the council will have to run again.

Robinson indicated that the Voters League is currently talking to attorneys to see if there can be some legal action taken to speed up the city's submission of the plan. It was

also indicated that support and assistance of the Justice Department would be sought.

Robinson and Mrs. Eloise Thomas, who also spoke at the press conference, questioned why the Neighborhood Voters League had not yet been presented a copy of the official plan adopted by the council.

"... The Voters League has requested on several occasions that the city forward a copy of the final reapportionment plan to us for review, but as of today city officials have not forwarded that plan" Robinson said. Robinson stated that the city had agreed in earlier negotiations (See BLACKS, Page 2A)

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to present the plan to the Voters League before submitting it to the Justice Department. Robison added that the Voters League had received a letter from the city in March saying that they would receive a plan.

J. Stanley Alexander, research director of the Voter Education Project, who was involved in developing a redistricting plan submitted by the plaintiffs which was rejected by the council, said that the delay will have an "impact on elections and on voter participation. "We consider the delaying tactics on the part of the city as serious." It demonstrates "the difficulty which blacks face in gaining entry into the political process," he commented.

"We don't want to wait four or five years to get the kind of representation we want," Alexander also said.

The plan which had been submitted to the council by the plaintiffs would have created

two primarily black wards in College Park. The plan adopted by the city in February creates one black ward.

Also speaking at the press conference was Bill Gardnier, who has made several appearances before the College Park City council concerning high electricity rates paid by apartment residents.

Gardnier, a resident of Charlestown Town House Apartments, said that he was concerned that apartment residents receive representation under the new redistricting plan. As proposed, he said, the plan would place apartments along Camp Creek Parkway in several wards, diluting voting strength.

"We've been referred to by city officials as transients," Gardnier stated, adding that he had resided in Charlestown apartments for seven years.

"We'd like to have our interests represented," he commented.