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Commentary

The Third District Has Great Potential

(This is the final part of a four-part series on the Third District which examined the history, economic structure, social and educational elements of the district in light of a local recall election that will take place next month.)

By Eric L. Wesson

The Third District has the potential to be the best district in Kansas City hands down.

When I first started writing this series, one of the first things people said to me after reading the first two articles was, "Is there anything good about the Third District?" My answer would have to be, "Yes".

Ms. Carol Edwards, executive director of the Oak Park Neighborhood Association and Ms. Charlene Burditt, chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the Oak Park Neighborhood Association, lead a group that is also making an impact on improving the quality of life in the Third District.

Ms. Burditt shared an incident in which her actions led to the saving of a neighbor's life. "I had noticed that one of my

neighbor's mailbox was full and his car had not moved in a couple of days. I knew that this was unusual for him. I called Major Marcus Harris. He and some other police officers gained entry to the home and found the man with his neck broke in the middle of the floor. He could have died. My neighbor is now in a rehabilitation center," said Mrs. Burditt.

Ms. Edwards has started a development corporation so that she can develop some of the vacant land in the Oak Park area.

Oak Park's flagship program, Christmas in October, is funded by the group. They get no outside funding for any of the programs that they implement.

This is just another example of the social awareness and neighborhood cohesiveness that takes place within the Third District and the dedication of those who wish to improve their community. I do not believe that there are any community groups like Vineyard, Oak Park, and Ivanhoe in any other district that has taken the lemons that they have, such as high crime, insurance red lining, low incomes, and made lemonade.

The Third District has the best means of transportation in the city. You can easily connect to any freeway in the city and you can easily access public transportation from any street to get to any place in the city you need to go. And the Third District has the most developable land in the city and is close to all major streets.

The Third District has had its

problems politically with representation for the "entire district" for the past several decades. Although some areas have prospered, the overall conditions in the Third District have not improved to help the masses for quite some time.

Currently, the Third District is under the microscope because of political controversy surrounding the attempt to have Councilwoman

Councilmembers Bring \$7 Million Development Into The Third District

Council members Troy Nash and Sandra McFadden-Weaver recently announced the passage of legislation that will pave the way for a \$7 million housing development in the Mannheim Park Urban Renewal Area.

Neighborhood Housing Services, in partnership with Swope Community Builders, proposes two multi-family structures of 20 units each.

This project is Phase II of the Twin Elms Housing Development and will be located on the west side of the 4100 block of Paseo.

Phase I, completed last year, is the Senior Housing project located on Paseo. Twin Elms II will offer 20 two-bedroom and 20 three-bedroom units of which the rental units will be income restricted to 60% of the

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median area income.

"We are very pleased with this additional positive economic development in the Third District. I am looking forward to the completion of the project that will bring more quality housing for some of the families in our community", said Councilwoman Weaver.

Councilman Nash added, "We also want to thank Neighborhood Housing Services and Swope Community Builders for their continued involvement in the Third District. We are lucky to have such quality organizations willing to commit

their resources and skills to these important projects for our residents."

For more information on either of these issues, contact Councilwoman Weaver at (816) 513-1608 or Councilman Nash at (816) 513-1605.

Saundra McFadden Weaver removed from office. This action that has divided an already politically shaky community.

By a majority vote of the people in the Third District, almost two years ago, Councilwoman Weaver was elected to represent the people of that district.

"Recall elections should be held when a person has committed a crime, but recall is bigger than any candidate and it should be for a just cause. Absent the violation of any law or Missouri Ethics commission violation, a person should be allowed to serve out the terms of their office," said Councilman and Alan Brooks.

Under the guise of holding elected officials accountable, a small group of people were able to get enough signatures, 1,331, to have a question placed on the ballot for a February 8 election.

"We are deeply disturbed and disappointed with the representation of Ms. Weaver. Her blatant disregard for home owners in the Third District and her non-responsiveness to neighborhood concerns is appalling. We need a change in representation," said Ms. Quinnetta Fristoe, one of the organizers of the recall.

The questions voters in that district will decide is whether the Councilwoman shall be recalled. If she is, then who should take her place? The choices to replace her are Richard Tolbert, Marilyn Simmons, Diane Charity and Ronald Williams.

The feedback that we received at THE CALL about the tactics, which some of the petitioners used to get the signatures, were questionable at best.

Even though the cause to hold elected officials accountable is commendable and I would agree with anyone who would step up and say let us hold them all accountable, but to single out one person for unproven allegations and for not answering 3,000 e-mails is a bit extreme and in this matter, the allegations sound quite personal.

Audrey Charity is listed as one of the Committee Petitioners. She helped gather the required signatures to get the recall question on the ballot. She is also the daughter of Diane Charity who is running for the seat. Both women can be seen on news clips turning in the petition.

Candidate Charity, who lives in Parade Park, has been upset with the Councilwoman for quite some time over problems that she had when she was employed by Councilman Terry Riley. Ms. Charity alleges that she elected to resign after hearing about a letter that the Councilwoman had forwarded to Councilman Riley.

Councilman Riley has stated that the allegations Ms. Charity has leveled against the Councilwoman were untrue and that his decision to not renew her contract was his decision and his alone, and he was not influenced by anyone.

As well, Ms. Charity has taken issue with some comments Ms.

Weaver made at a meeting held at Parade Park some time ago. Ms. Weaver states that the allegations were not true and that Ms. Charity mis-represented what she said.

Ms. Fristoe, resides in the affluent residential sub-division, Renaissance Cove. She charges that Ms. Weaver has failed to meet with residents of that sub-division who have sought her support for the infrastructure completion they were promised and shown before residents started purchasing property in that area.

Out of 34 neighborhood associations, three home associations, 96 block clubs and three tenant associations only three are listed in the recall petition as having a problem meeting with her. They are Martin Luther King Village, Washington Wheatley Neighborhood of which Marlon Hammons, one of the, is president. Hammons charges that Ms. Weaver has been missing in action by not attending meetings his group has called.

THE CALL contacted Michael Colbert, former president of the Martin Luther King Tenant Association.

"She missed about three meetings, but anything that we needed to get done and everything that she promised to do, she did. She would have me fax her the problem and she would get right on them. If she did not show up, our Councilman-at-large, Troy Nash, would be there. We do not nor did we support the recall, but since we come under Washington-Wheatley, Marlon Hammons listed us on the complaint. We said that people could sign the petition if they wanted. I do not believe that many people, if any, signed the petition," said Colbert.

"People were worried about the petitioners going door to door in the complex, because we are senior citizens and some of us are handicapped. They started before it was approved by the King Board. After we met with our lawyers, we found out that it was not legal for them to come in and collect signatures, so they stopped. The Councilwoman has helped us a lot and I do not know where we would be without her," stated Colbert, who now serves as the public relations spokesperson for the association.

King Village is not the only group that does not support the recall. In the past few weeks, the Citizens' Association and Freedom Inc., have voted not to support the recall nor endorse any of the candidates, but the position of both groups is that the allegations leveled against the Councilwoman do not rise to the level of having her removed from office.

Councilwoman Weaver came under fire last August for changing her position on the proposed downtown arena. At one time she did not support it, but changed her mind in favor of it and on election day campaigned against it.

Ms. Weaver stated that there was nothing in writing to make sure that minority and women owned business received a viable portion of the \$250 million construction project

and the city cannot monitor close enough to make sure the rules governing minority participation are followed. Ms. Weaver's concerns were confirmed when City Auditor Mark Funkhouser recently released his report on the arena and the bidding process because bidders were not required to identify their minority-owned and women-owned enterprises in the bid. This was what Councilwoman Weaver was fighting to prevent.

No one person or even two people will ever be able to change the total conditions in the Third District. It has been politically neglected far too long and divided just as long.

To rebuild the Third District, it will take a concentrated effort on the part of city, county, state and even the federal government as well as the residents of the Third District pulling together toward a common goal and leadership that has the ability to unite the entire community, present a plan and be able to sell the vision on how to get from Point A to Point B with that plan.

I am not saying that Ms. Weaver is the leader to do what I have outlined and I am not saying she couldn't. I am saying that she deserves a chance to redeem herself. I too have had to track her down to get to the bottom of some things. Neither am I saying any of the candidates will be able to do a better or worse job as the current representative. Endorsements are done by THE CALL's publisher.

I am saying that I believe that she has learned a lesson and should be given the opportunity to finish out her term. By the time a new person got into that position, learned their way around City Hall and built alliances, it would be time for that person to seek re-election and he or she might not get re-elected and nothing will have been gained.

Further, given the fact that there are some economic development plans in the work, be they long or short term, it is important to not change drivers in the middle of the race. The next person coming along might not see that vision and not put enough effort into the plan and it dies by the wayside. When that happens, and believe me it will, we all lose.

I like to dream the impossible dream. My dream is that all of the candidates running for the office and the heads of all of the neighborhood associations come together work out their differences and come up with a plan that unites, not divides, the Third District and make that plan work for the next two years. At the end of that time, if things are not better, then prepare to run for the seat.

I think Bishop James Tindall said it best in a recent conversation I had with him.

"Freedom has a recall method in place. We implement it at the end of the candidates term by running someone against the person," he said.

Good point.