
WEST END NEWS

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Summer 2000

Candidates Forum by Herm Kramer

The WECA candidates forum was held at the Dorchester County Public Library on Tuesday evening, June 6th at 7:00 P.M.

All the candidates for the offices of City Council in Ward 1, Walt Vickers, Verna Asplen, Larry Bohlen, and Dwight Green; in Ward 3, Octavene Saunders, Lee Weldon; and the six candidates for the office of Mayor, Armond Hayward, Ray Shelly, Eugene Tolley, Joe Dickerson, Cleveland Rippons and Tony Thomas were present.

There were over 70 people in the audience, filling the meeting room to capacity.

Opening remarks were made by our President, Edgar Williams, and the moderator was Vice President Herm Kramer.

All the candidates were allotted six minutes to answer the same four questions and for any pertinent remarks they wished to make. The speaking order was the First Ward, Third Ward, and then the Mayoral candidates. The speaking positions were chosen by random draw.

Our timer for the evening was Community Pride Chairperson, Donna Casarotti.

Past President Marge Hull then moderated a reading of written questions submitted by the audience. The candidates were allowed two minutes each to respond, starting with those in the First Ward.

The formal part of the forum concluded at 9:00 P.M. with closing remarks by Edgar Williams. A lively discussion followed as the chairs were stored away and continued out into the parking lot.

If you missed this, you lost a great chance to get a better understanding of the candidates for these offices and how our democratic system should work. However, a summary of the comments made by the six candidates who will be on the ballot in the General Election is provided in this issue to help you understand their positions on the issues of concern to WECA.

Please remember to vote for the candidate of your choice on Tuesday, July 11th, for a better Cambridge and for the West End of this city in which we live.

Forum Questions

Often the most significant asset of a family or a small business is the home or building where they either live or work. The City has already enacted historic district zoning as one means to encourage the renovation of older and historic buildings. The next step is for both the City and County to encourage additional renovation efforts so that people who do renovate their buildings are not penalized by having their property tax assessments raised once the work is completed.

Question #1: *If elected, how will you actively support Article 9, Section 204.1 of the Maryland Annotated Code which enables a municipality to grant a short-term tax abatement on the increased value of the property and building once the work is completed?*

The State of Maryland provides low interest loan assistance to homeowners for repair and rehabilitation of their homes through a number of housing rehabilitation programs administered by the Special Loans Program of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. From July 1997 up to this date only 22 applications for assistance have been approved for all of Dorchester County...There are a substantial number of owner occupied homes within the First and Third Wards as well as in the rest of Cambridge in which the owner would qualify for assistance from these programs.

Question #2: *If elected, how will you work toward having the Cambridge Housing Department or another City official or entity assume responsibility for educating city residents about the housing rehabilitation programs of the Special Loans Program, and provide assistance to homeowners with the application process?*

The Main Street Program has proven itself successful in downtown revitalization for over 1,500 communities across the country. This is a self-help program that provides us with assistance from the practical and experienced experts in marketing, promotion and renovation. The local community is expected to improve the Downtown financially and materially and to foster a good climate for the program.

Question #3: *If elected, how will you work towards making the Main Street Proposal a reality for the revitalization of the downtown of Cambridge?*

The West End Citizens Association (WECA), a Neighborhood Action Group was formed in 1992 to protect and enhance the quality of community life for all residents of the West End. For the 300-plus members of WECA, our home and property represent our single most valuable asset. The quality of life in the neighborhood in which that property is located determines its value to us and to our future.

Question #4: *If elected, how will you work with WECA to continue to protect and enhance the quality of life in our Community?*

Following is a summary of the responses given to these questions by the six candidates who will be on the ballot for the General Election on July 11, 2000.

First Ward Candidates

Larry Bohlen --

Question #1: supports tax credits for rehabilitation by private homeowners, but feels they should also be extended to those who buy commercial buildings and restore them. Finds it almost insulting that assessments are raised on those who have spent the time and money to keep up their properties.

Question #2: is troubled by how little people know about existing low interest loans and other programs available through the state. Public access to information should be demanded and given. Thinks that DPW is the organ which should be used to disseminate this information. Suggests a series of forums, articles in newspapers, as well as seminars by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Question #3: an advocate of the Main Street Program. Member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Has seen and read of its success in many similar communities. Feels Cambridge is an ideal example of the type of community Main Street was designed for. Private, government and public sources coordinated together with our goals and visions. We can't just hope for the best, we must set goals to reach and when those are reached, set new goals. Main Street is an ideal avenue to set and meet goals.

Question #4: has been a member of WECA nearly since its inception; served term on Board of Directors. Believes absolutely that citizens organizations such as this are imperative for good government; acting as watchdogs and information gathering sources, keeping government agencies' hands on the pulse of people's needs and concerns.

In closing, Larry Bohlen said he believes in vision and structuring of goals for this city, for its preservation, continued growth and development.

Verna Asplen --

Question #1: agrees that we need to have tax abatements, incentives to repair historic homes. We should implement this one state law and possibly enact other laws.

Question #2: aware there are housing needs and there are programs already out there; we need to join them. Suggests hiring housing counselor to assist homeowners with reverse mortgages, first time home buying, foreclosure counseling and landlord incentive counseling; help in acquiring grants for community development, local administration of the state special loans program, promote homeowner tax credit program, act as a clearinghouse for information regarding housing issues and network with all government and private agencies for assisting citizens. Said we have to go to Easton for these services now.

Question #3: Main Street is a tool we should use; we need to set goals, time goals, so the application can be completed by January 2001. It will provide the tools for business owners to revitalize their stores and improve business plans. We can start this progress but the organization needs to be fully implemented.

Question #4: as City Commissioner she would want to protect and enhance the quality of life in the whole city. The West End has been her home for 37 years; joined WECA in 1992.

In closing, Verna Asplen cited her background and leadership roles in social work, real estate and in the community as reasons to vote for her. Said she is dedicated to high ethical standards for all city personnel and officials. Believes in brainstorming as a way to get ideas for the future. Wants a partnership with the community, will be working with you in the First Ward and the City.

Third Ward Candidates

Octavene Saunders --

Question #1: the Maryland Municipal League has recently passed legislation authorizing tax abatement for properties to be rehabilitated, effective July 1, 2000. The governing body (county or municipality) can set the amount and duration of property tax credits subject to special limits set forth by the tax property code of Maryland. Can't say she would support Section 9 until she has studied the current and new laws. The city has already held a work session to talk about tax credits; originally for landlords but was expanded to include businesses and home owners. Said there has never been any doubt that the Commissioners were looking for a tax credit for persons who upgraded or kept their property up and had the assessment raised. We don't raise the assessment, the State does.

Question #2: the Cambridge Housing Department is an arm of enforcement, not an educational department that has the

qualifications or the time necessary to enhance or inform the public about the home programs, special loan programs, state mortgage loan programs. There are many programs out there and “special loans” is not an umbrella program but just one program. Don’t have to go to Easton for housing counseling, just have to understand where your services are. There is a paid agency that has been here over 35 years on High Street. DCDC has qualified HUD-trained counselors, of which she is one. DCDC is already opening up a satellite office in the Hurlock area for housing counseling and loan programs to rehab and buy homes. It is not the city’s responsibility to advance, to advertise, or write articles for state-funded programs. All you have to do is pick up the phone. They’ve been to Cambridge, Hurlock, and will be in Salisbury this month. They are doing this all over the Shore. The Cambridge Housing and Inspection Department should not have to have additional priorities to bring about home ownership and rehab programs, when you pay your taxes for DCDC to do such a job. It’s their job to do it, we’re just not accessing it.

Question #3: people think Main Street is dead because nay-sayers have gone around making an election issue that the Main Street committee is not working. It is not true; this month we have a tour scheduled in another town that has a Main Street-type project and we’re going to go and learn from them. We also have a member who has recommended that in July we have Cindy Stone and many other town managers of Main Street come to Cambridge, do an open meeting and make sure we are on the right track. So, it’s not dead, it’s not a lack of planning, it’s just being cautiously worked on.

Question #4: when WECA started, championed the Historic District. As Commissioner, have pushed for 6 years to get the Historic District for WECA. Brought state people here; worked with everyone to make sure we got the Historic District. Will continue to work with all groups. And, while we’re asking what can the city do for WECA, would ask what can WECA do for the whole city.

Lee Weldon --

Question #1: tax abatements provide incentives for growth and improvement. Property owners who improve their property should be rewarded. Absolutely supports participation in this program and would also enter into discussions with the county to see if that layer of taxation could be abated for we who live in the city and pay both city and county taxes. Would look for a minimum 10 year abatement for a larger renovation or restoration and perhaps a 5 year abatement for less costly improvements. Would set the break point as a percentage of the initial assessment in relation to the amount of money spent on the improvement.

Question #2: need cooperation at the county level. Ideally, the program should be administered at the county level with a central office in Cambridge, the county seat. Branch offices would administer the program in Hurlock and perhaps Vienna. The DCDC branch in Hurlock could serve as a pilot program for the county with Cambridge playing a leading role in expanding the availability of these programs or information about them. There are other different programs through the State that protect low income property owners from rising assessments. And to protect tenants from rising rents as a result of rising property values. Mortgage assistance for low and middle income families is available; however, the publicity machine needs to be worked a little bit harder to make people aware of these things.

Question #3: Main Street is very much alive. Working alongside Commissioner Saunders on that committee. A lot of issues involved; main thing we are trying to do in the time that we are taking is to put together an education program to educate ourselves as a committee and also to make sure the information gets out to our community. A lot of people have a stake in our downtown and we want to make sure that information is not only presented to them but is presented with their ideas as a part of it.

Question #4: served on WECA Board for past year; would resign post as active director if elected, since would become obligated to represent entire ward. As a Commissioner, the best way to work with WECA would be to work with all the neighborhoods in Ward 3 to help eradicate drugs and crime, stabilize housing, bring back the downtown and show the most diverse ward in the city that it is possible to represent a wide spectrum of people effectively. Hopes to do this with balance, fairness and without confrontation. Time would be divided between meetings with West End, Pine Street, housing authority and downtown. Also intends to help other neighborhoods form strong associations and strengthen the ones already in place. These organizations provide the backbone of the city government and when issues are discussed in the neighborhoods and ideas are organized, the Council can’t help but listen.

In conclusion: Lee Weldon said it takes two key elements for successful, effective government: 1) community groups and individuals who are willing to raise their voices, and 2) leadership that is willing to listen.

Mayoral Candidates

Ray Shelly --

Question #1: city already has an Enterprise Zone program for businesses. Applying some of these same principles to home owners, could set a “bright line” that is the minimum the city

would accept. Anything below that minimum, we would fine you. Need to make a “bright line” above that and say “look, this is where we expect any reasonable person to be.” Do you get anything for that? “Nope.” But, if you go above and beyond the call of duty and add thousands of dollars of value to your home, we ought to have some kind of rebate or a percentage of the amount you spent so that it “sunsets” in so many years.

Question #2: thinks this might come under the purview of the city’s grants administrator. Said they certainly should be able to take a look and see what extra things are already there.

Question #3: would work with the state, city commission, civic groups like WECA, Chamber of Commerce, citizens or any other entity to maximize our opportunities for the revitalization of downtown Cambridge.

Question #4: will work with anyone if they are going to improve our quality of life, our opportunities for the people. Grew up here. Remember when it was a quaint, beautiful town. People here are still beautiful, and yes, things have changed. Open air drug markets are popping up. People from all wards go to drug markets. Need to do everything we can do to get rid of this cancer or it will spread throughout our city. Wants to say to WECA, you give the people a voice. Beyond that, don’t always come to the city and say we’re against this or that. Think of new programs, something you can put your time and money into and say “we will support this, we will put this together for you.”

In closing, Ray Shelly said he’s a “stick in the mud” who doesn’t smoke or drink; but he does go to the VFW where all smoke and drink. He’s a trustee there, their chaplain and has been Exalted Ruler at the Elks for a year and handled their meetings. Will have to earn your respect but is not perfect; will learn on the way. Says he is a strong leader and will be working as a full time Mayor.

Cleveland Rippons --

Question #1: believes that the premise of a short-term tax abatement or credit on the increased value is a viable one. But would like to see in place or even help create a package that clearly lays out the calculations to be used to determine the abated amount and its longevity. Too many things are done quickly, or not without rationale, but if this is one of the programs that can benefit Cambridge, what we need to do is right from the open make the complete financial and tax implications available to anyone who is contemplating renovations. What he advocates most is an openness to the public, which he feels has been lacking in our government. Everyone here tonight wants to be your servant, to work for you. But, once in

office, lot of people forget they are servants of the people, elected by the citizens.

Question #2: ties in with the first because it relates to city and county together. In his opinion, there has not been a good relationship between the city and county. One of the top priorities of these people that are elected is to structure a relationship that caters a strong rapport between these two bodies. Each is not self-sufficient; they should be working together. In deference to the statement that we do have a location (DCDC), on High Street, and they do have other duties, but 22 applications in three years? Believes there is room for improvement.

Question #3: is in favor of it as one tool. It’s not a panacea, there’s no one thing that’s going to revitalize the downtown overnight. To negate looking at any of the other things is not, in fact, to be the government. Wants to eradicate the secrecy. There was a group heading the Main Street Program, trying to get it working, now there’s another group. It’s courtesy to let the previous group know what you’re doing and let them have input since they were in there from the beginning.

Question #4: as far as working with WECA, your group and any group which has as its primary focus the betterment of Cambridge, deserves the support of its elected officials.

Main Street by Armond Hayward, II

Contrary to popular opinion, the Main Street Program is not dead. The Steering Committee will be traveling to Greensboro, MD on June 23 to visit and learn from an active, revitalized downtown. As was pointed out by both Commissioner Saunders and Lee Weldon at the recent WECA forum, the Steering Committee is taking the necessary time to explore Main Street and other programs that have been implemented in other communities in order to learn from the experiences of others to make sure we take the right approach.

The successful completion of the revitalization project in Greensboro involved the cooperation of a number of funding agencies with the town and various contractors and directly addressed Governor Glendening’s Smart Growth initiative.

Rezoning Issues by Steve Del Sordo

Members of the WECA Zoning Committee are meeting and working on suggestions that could be incorporated into the new zoning and subdivision regulations. These will be presented to the WECA Board for approval when completed.

The zoning consultants have agreed to meet with us over the summer, and there will be a number of public hearings on the new zoning regulations.

Property Transfers by Carroll Dail March 13, 2000 through June 5, 2000

Brooks, John R. & Bobbe Kaye 302 Academy St., Unit 103A	\$187,500
Handley, Edwin D. 515 Glenburn Ave., Unit 201	\$63,010
Sampson, Tanya D. 409 Willis St.	\$67,500
Kennelly, Frances V. 606 Water St, Unit 3	\$65,000
Weiler, Martha W. 5 West End Ave.	\$90,000
Waters, Craig N. 104 West End Ave.	\$108,500
Asplen, Kevin Wayne 515 Glenburn Ave., Unit 214	\$72,500
Thomas, Marion C. & Anthony J. 113 West End Ave.	\$50,000
Conti Mortgage Corp 435 Oakley St.	\$28,000
Tolley, Morgan B. & Katie P. 114 Somerset Ave.	\$135,000
Barnes, Michelle 105 Oakley St.	\$174,000
Lane, Brian E., Sr. & Connie Prena 411 Willis St.	\$67,300
Griffith, Bonnie B. 209 Glenburn Ave.	\$235,000
McAnulty, James G. & Anne W. 1101 Hambrooks Blvd.	\$250,000
Levy, Florence F., Herbert W. & Carol Ann 707 Travers St.	\$44,250
Hopkins, John Root 600-1 Water St.	\$123,500
Smith, Patricia Langeluttig 302 Academy St, Unit 102A	\$187,500
Cameron, Ronald 702 Glasgow St.	\$65,000

WECA Board Sets Goals

At the WECA Board meeting on May 16, 2000, the goals and objectives for 2000-2001 were approved unanimously.

They are:

1. Promote and support Historic Preservation Guidelines.
 - ♦ Begin publicity campaign on benefits.
 - ♦ Establish web site and information clearing house.

- ♦ Serve as citizens' advocate as needed.
 - ♦ Encourage and participate with city in educating public and establishing a more efficient process.
 - ♦ Identify and promote any needed changes in the code.
2. Ensure that the new Cambridge Zoning Revision will protect, preserve and improve West End neighborhoods and property values.
 - ♦ Produce a specific zoning proposal for the West End, which will encourage single family housing, provide appropriate multi-family housing placement and preserve neighborhood character.
 - ♦ Promote development and adoption of uniform rental codes, rental and licensing fees, and a requirement for development impact costs.
 - ♦ Ensure that zoning changes are compatible with the comprehensive plan and Historic District Guidelines.
 3. Continue improving relationships with the city government.
 - ♦ Include Mayor, Council, and Department Heads in newsletter distribution.
 - ♦ Write annual and special occasion letters to Mayor, Council and Commission Chairpersons.
 - ♦ Develop continual working relationship on projects of interest; e.g. Historic Preservation and Zoning Review project.
 - ♦ Assist city officials in monitoring enforcement of current codes and rules to ensure timely action.
 4. Promote and increase home ownership in the West End.
 - ♦ Develop relationships with realtors to promote benefits of family ownership in West End.
 - ♦ Educate West Enders about available loan/tax reduction programs.
 5. Prepare an annual budget, develop a financial plan, and carry out at least one significant fund-raising activity.
 6. Sponsor one or two special events for West Enders, perhaps as a fund-raising activity.
 7. Encourage creation of neighborhood associations in other Cambridge neighborhoods.
 8. Support civic initiatives which the Board believes will generally benefit our community.

Directors elected for 2000-2001 at the April 18th annual meeting are: Edgar Williams, president; Herman Kramer, vice president; Jackie Vickers, secretary; Andy Madera, treasurer; Doug Kyle, membership; Donna Casarotti, community pride; Carroll Dail, neighborhood data & oversight; Brenda Hayward, publicity; Lee Weldon, special projects; Marjorie Hull, past president.

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General Election

July 11, 2000

If you don't vote, don't complain!

Calling all West Enders...

We have chosen to distribute this issue of the WECA News to all households in the West End because of the importance of the upcoming election. This issue contains summaries of each candidate's comments at the recent Legislative Forum and is provided in the interest of helping you make your decision as to which candidates to support.

This issue also outlines the goals and objectives WECA plans to pursue for the betterment of the entire West End community. If you are not already a member, please consider joining WECA and add to the strength of your Neighborhood Organization. As all the candidates have stated, the impact of a Neighborhood Organization **is** felt in our City Government and we **can** make a difference.

The nominal annual membership fee provides you with the quarterly WECA News mailed to your home, bulletins on issues or activities of significant interest to West Enders, and supports WECA's efforts on your behalf.

Membership is just \$5.00 per year for a single member household, or \$10.00 per year for a household of two or more members. Mail your membership to The West End Citizens Association, Inc., P. O. Box 13, Cambridge, MD 21613.

The West End Citizens Association is a non-profit 501-c-3 organization and your membership fee is tax-deductible.