

Life After Earmarks

Nonprofits in Wards 7 and 8 Protest Funding Cuts

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ



Citizens United display civic "report card" in front of Wilson building at Sep. 16 budget protest]

“It’s gonna get ugly in DC,” Ward 8 resident Trayon White announced at a recent Citizens United rally.

Over the summer, millions in non-competitive “earmark” funds for the new fiscal year were first reduced by the mayor and then cut entirely by the Council. The Sep. 16 rally, one of several organized to protest the cuts, stressed the importance of nonprofits in the city’s poorest communities. Neighborhoods east of the Anacostia are already suffering more deeply from the recession and will be hardest hit in loss of services, White and others argued.

Jauhar Abraham and Ronald Mouton of Peaceholics referenced 60 shootings that had occurred across the city in the previous 30 days, arguing that violence will only increase as programs like theirs lose funding.

Wanda Aikens of the Ward 7 Arts Collaborative said before the rally that funding “was eliminated without understanding.” She fears that “African American men will suffer most” and that the entire community will “suffer negative behavior” as a result.

Melvin Deal, of the African Heritage Dancers and Drummers, added, following the protest: “Those of us who provide community services stand in the gap between murder and hope and engagement. People come to us for a brief moment of reprieve.”

Several rally participants suggested that earmark funding was not considered problematic until more made its way east of the river. Others said the cuts were an over-reaction to difficulties with particular charities.

“The decision had nothing to do with geography,” Council Chair Vincent Gray responded, in a Sep. 30 interview, noting that the Council had supported the earmarks, “when we thought there was money.” But the revenue shortfall necessitated large cuts.

Gray added that earmark funding is meant for one-time needs or special programming and that earlier legislation had already prohibited earmark funding for any organization in consecutive years. “We need to get these organizations into the mainstream funding process,” he said. “I would hate to think that any organization is basing its future on earmarks.”

Participants visited councilmembers’ offices but were unable to meet with Gray on Sep. 16. Gray reported spending an hour with the activists on Sep. 30, however, explaining the city’s financial situation.

“The City has to put priorities in place and be mindful of the impact of their decisions,” Reverend Anthony Motley, Ward 8 minister and candidate for DC Council at-large, said on Sep. 16. In these troubled times, he said, more attention to youth and substance abuse prevention will be needed. Motley advocates a re-allocation of existing funds. “We need all three branches of government working together to create a safety net for those who would otherwise fall through the cracks.” ★

Ward 7 Networking

Association Promotes Local
Business, Hiring Locals

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

Music, food and the prospect of further economic development brought neighbors together for two Ward 7 events on September 19. The Ward 7 Business and Professional Association (W7BPA) hosted an "Economic Development Showcase" early in the day and "Jazz on the Avenue" the same evening.

Showcase participants had the opportunity to discuss local development projects and related job opportunities with Blue Skye, Forrester Construction and Skyland LLC. Tony Robinson, representing the city's Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization, brought information about construction of the new H.D. Woodson Senior High School. Deanwood Heights Main Street, East of the River Family Strengthening Collaborative and the Washington DC Economic Partnership also shared information.

Councilmembers Yvette Alexander (Ward 7) and Kwame Brown (At-Large) participated in the showcase, held at the Pennsylvania Avenue Baptist Church, as did mayoral candidate Leo Alexander (no relation) and several ANC commissioners. The event's focus was on hiring Ward 7 residents, small business incubators and affording contracting opportunities to local businesses.

Jazz from the Marcus Young Trio drew neighbors together again for an evening "community mixer," held at the UPO Washington Senior Wellness Center on Alabama Avenue. Councilmember Alexander returned for this event. Council Chair Vincent Gray also participated along with approximately 50 others.

Now in its third year of operation, W7BPA hosts "Developer Breakfasts" and "Strategic Breakfast Meetings," as well as "4th Thursday" networking events each month. To learn more about these events and other efforts to promote business development in Ward 7, contact Julius Ware, president, at 351-9569 or president@Ward7BPA.org. ★



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