

Glenarden mayoral candidate misses election forum for trip to Africa

Former mayor said he skipped event after being told other candidate would not attend

by Natalie McGill | Staff Writer

The Glenarden candidates' forum Wednesday took on some international intrigue after one mayoral candidate decided to take a last-minute trip to Africa after he said he was told the other mayoral candidate would not be attending.

Mayor Gail Parker Carter, who said she told forum organizers she may not be able to attend because of a death in the family, did attend. Her opponent, former mayor Donjuan Williams, said he paid \$7,700 for airline tickets on Tuesday to travel to Sierra Leone to meet with its president in search of jobs and economic opportunities for the United States, a project he said he has been working on for eight months as part of his business, DJ Williams and Associates, a company that specializes in government relations, economic development and political campaign consulting.

"I was told that she had a death in the family and would not be there by the president of the civic association," Williams wrote in an email after Wednesday's forum. "There is over \$840 million sitting out there for development of Sierra Leone from USAID and the World Bank and others sources. They need Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in order to tap in to the monies."

Many of the candidates running in Glenarden's election and residents who attended the forum pledged to simply work together and that goals such as economic development and improving city services will fall into place.

There are two contested races in addition to mayor. Former councilman James Herring, challenger Marsha Peeks and current councilwoman Carolyn Smallwood are running for two Ward 1 seats. Jennifer Jenkins, who won the Feb. 9 special election to fill the Ward 3 seat former councilman George W. Reid vacated when he moved to Illinois, is running for a full term against Judy Diggs, her special election opponent.

Voting takes place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. May 2. Absentee ballots must be returned to the city's municipal center by 5 p.m. April 29.

Williams said in a prepared statement that was read at the forum that multiple military tours overseas led him to see "the differences between political trivia and meaningful political purpose" and that residents are Glenarden's greatest assets, Williams served three tours in Iraq as a member of the U.S. Army Reserves.

Parker Carter said her accomplishments include securing Glenarden \$800,000 in grant money and increasing the number of officers from two to 10. She said she will work to maintain funding sources for programs such as the "Senior Initiative Program" and the "Youth Achievement Initiative," which includes activities such as the Youth Broadcast Training program.

Current Councilwomen Margaret Dade (Ward 2) and Elaine Carter (At large) are running unopposed for two

Ward 2 seats and Celestine Wilson and Maxine Phifer are also running uncontested in the at large race. Phifer is the president of the Glenarden Civic Association, the sponsor of Wednesday's forum, and she confirmed that she did tell Williams that Parker Carter would not be attending the forum. Phifer said she supports Williams in the mayoral election.

Peeks said the passion she saw in other residents about the city's future inspired her to run. She said a community isn't just about a budget and expenses but about timely constituent services. She said she hopes to maximize undeveloped city land and to see more police patrolling the streets.

Herring said he was able to secure \$600,000 in grant money that went toward projects such as park renovations and police department equipment during his tenure as a councilman from 2003 to 2006. He said he wants to see if he can get back \$2 million in developer impact fees from the Woodmore Towne Center, money he said was initially promised during the Jack B. Johnson administration to build a police department at a designated empty city lot.

Herring said he wants to institute policies and procedures to keep the council transparent such as back in 2004 that required the Gold Room coordinator to fill out a contract, then have the person at the front desk collect money and then have that person deliver funds to the treasurer, instead of just letting the Gold Room coordinator handle all of the funds.

Smallwood said if re-elected she would like to look into annexing areas such as Landover Mall into the city and make the site of the Martin Luther King Jr. Recreation building a meeting place for youth and seniors.

Jenkins, who was sworn in earlier this month, said she wants more than three weeks on the council to prove herself. She is proposing rolling the tax rate back to 29 cents from 33 cents per \$100 of assessed value, claiming when taxes go up the quality of service should rise as well. She also wants professionals who live in the city to volunteer their time and knowledge to teach the area children how to be business entrepreneurs.

Jenkins said she is all for the annexation Smallwood suggested but she is unsure if anyone would want to be a part of the city right now if the mayor and council can't work together in harmony.

"Before we start bringing more people into the family we need to fix the family first," Jenkins said.

Diggs said she wants to plan community meetings geared toward seniors who don't rely on the Internet to look up programs to assist them or tips about appealing their home assessments if they think they are too high, she said.

Erika Gardner, a 46-year Ward 3 resident, said she supports Parker Carter because she wants to see a woman lead the city.

Gardner, who hasn't made a decision yet on the Ward 3 race, said she wants to see residents take more civic responsibility by going to city council meetings where she's seen discord.

"I can't take it," Gardner said of the council meetings. "It was like that 45 years ago and it's getting steadily worse. There is no progress. We have not matured."

Ward 3 resident William Washington, a 25-year resident, said he wants to see speed humps on Glenarden Parkway like he sees throughout the Kentland section of Landover and a city welcome committee that greets

new residents and tells them city codes they must follow. He said after watching the city council meetings he doesn't think a resident should take an open seat if they're not there to move the town forward. Washington declined to share his choices for both his ward and the mayor's race.

"I'm just a concerned citizen that wants to see a change," Washington said. "I'm tired of this bickering in meetings."

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