

# DELRAY INTELLIGENCE REPORT

April 2011

## **Debate over Vice Mayor selection**

Historically, the Delray Beach City Commission has avoided egotistical tiffs over the position of Vice Mayor by simply rotating who serves.

That tradition has taken a lot of the intrigue and jockeying out of the decision of who sits one heartbeat away from the Mayor's seat. The Vice Mayor fill in when the mayor cannot attend an event, sign a document or run a meeting.

This year, in a very unusual move, Commissioner Angelita Gray made a motion to retain Commissioner Adam Frankel as Vice Mayor even though he just completed his term. Making this even more unusual is the fact that it was Commissioner Gray's turn to assume the position.

Commissioner Fred Fetzer, the senior member of the commission, objected to retaining Frankel leading to a somewhat awkward moment at what is typically a routine organizational meeting held to swear in commissioners and assign liaison roles etc.

But when City Manager David Harden confirmed that the position is usually awarded on a rotating basis, Gray backed away and reluctantly accepted the title of Vice Mayor. Why the reluctance?

Newcomer Tom Carney was named Deputy Vice Mayor, a title that most—but not all—commissioners eschew even if they serve in the role.

## Speaking of Vice Mayor Gray...

In an otherwise innocuous article in the Delray Forum, Gray acknowledged that she is pondering a run for mayor when the seat opens in 2013.

Incumbent Nelson McDuffie will be term-limited and unable to run.

Gray said she is being encouraged to explore the possibility and is attracted by the notion of being the first African American woman to hold the seat. In fact, no African-American has been mayor of Delray Beach.

The article spurred some conversation among long time politicians in Delray. According to some observers, Gray has not distinguished herself on the commission and has actually rubbed some long

time leaders the wrong way. Some feel Gray's focus and outreach to the community has been limited to the minority community, a community she upset early in her tenure when she supported The Villages project developed by the Auburn Group in the southwest neighborhood. Supporters say she has a compelling personal story—small businesswoman, past CRA Commissioner and beloved parents who were leaders in the community.

Others see a scenario in which Gray could be elected; namely apathy. If nobody runs for the job, a distinct possibility considering Delray's paucity of candidates, Gray could capture the seat merely by filing for it.

Speculation on who may replace McDuffie ranges from former commissioners and mayors getting back into politics to new Commissioner Tom Carney. After 2 years on the Commission Carney, Carney will have 4 years remaining before he is term-limited.

### **Restaurant moratorium?!**

The Downtown Development Authority is asking the City Commission to impose a moratorium on new restaurants between Swinton Avenue and Fifth Avenue in an effort to take a breath and assess the city's future as a retail destination.

It has become evident that Atlantic Avenue has become a restaurant/nightclub destination and has enjoyed wild success as a result. But increasingly there is concern about the future viability of retail, especially as some retail establishments have been converted to restaurants or cafes.

One property whose future may be impacted by the call for a moratorium is the VFW building on First Avenue. The VFW is moving to U.S. 1 and the building has been purchased for an impressive number by a local real estate investor.

While no application has been made, speculation is that the site may be converted into a restaurant.

At press time, the DDA has not heard back from the Commission or Manager on the moratorium.

What do you think?

Is a moratorium a good idea? Is retail viable on the Ave? Or should we not seek to fix what isn't broken? Send your responses to [admin@fod.org](mailto:admin@fod.org)

### **The cost of ethics**

When Nelson "Woodie" McDuffie ran for mayor in 2009 he promised a detailed plan for ethics reform including lobbyist registration an ethics board etc.

To date, those mechanisms do not exist. But the county and its municipalities are moving forward on a wide ranging ethics platform as a result of a voter-approved referendum.

We have heard that the cost of complying with the new ethics regime could range from \$40,000 to \$180,000 a year. While the high end seems ludicrous, the \$40,000 plus figure seems likely.

Thanks to County Commission corruption issues which ensnared commissioners Newell, Masilotti and Delray's own Mary McCarty—it appears that there will be an ongoing cost to maintaining clean government.

Some would argue it's a small price to pay for clean government. Others call it a costly overreach that still won't stop those foolish enough to practice corruption.

Regardless, as taxpayers we should understand that these new costs will most likely never go away and are just as likely to increase over time.

Call it a corruption tax.

### **Speaking of funny business**

Operation Dirty Water, a state attorney and Sheriff's Office investigation, has ensnared former Delray Beach Deputy Public Works Director C. Danvers Beatty.

Beatty, who left the city to work for the North County Improvement District, is among 13 people facing charges.

"Operation Dirty Water" is an ongoing investigation into allegations that employees of an engineering contractor, Chaz Equipment, conspired to compensate municipal and county employees for awarding them contracts to do business in their cities and counties.

Stay tuned..the State Attorney's Office is predicting more charges.