

Glenarden's challenges require a leadership change

Williams' return as mayor would be best for city

The conduct of Glenarden officials during the past few months has been an embarrassment. Meetings have been highly contentious due to personal conflicts among leaders and residents (the Feb. 14 meeting ended with a councilman being accused of assault, which the prosecutor's office declined to pursue); and many on the council were upset they didn't learn of the city manager's two-week resignation notice until the day she left.

Mayor Gail Parker Carter, who is seeking re-election, points to the council president, Margaret T. Dade, for much of the tension and communication problems, but offers few solutions. Dade is running unopposed for re-election.

Parker Carter's opponent, former mayor Donjuan L. Williams, however, brings the experience and focus on teamwork to implement his plans for the city. Williams was mayor for three terms from 1995 to 2001 after serving on the council for three terms. He could not run for mayor again in 2001 because of term limits.

Since that time, he has served three tours in Iraq as a member of the U.S. Army Reserves and says serving in the war zone and helping train others for battle has been a humbling experience and provided him with a new perspective regarding the importance of teamwork. Some of his goals are to re-establish the Department of Youth and Family Services and rewrite the city charter to address structural problems, such as the city manager and treasurer having the mayor and entire council as their bosses rather than one direct supervisor.

During his tenure as mayor, Williams reduced the city's overall debt by 48 percent by securing a Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development and Infrastructure Bond; he addressed storm drainage problems in Wards 2 and 3; and secured state funds for the acquisition and renovation of the American Legion Building on Martin Luther King Jr. Highway.

Parker Carter touts her Youth Achievement Initiative, an education and career program, as one of her top successes in her two terms as mayor. The program has suffered, however, because of a lack of funds.

There are two contested races for Glenarden City Council in Wards 1 and 3. In Ward 1, there are three candidates vying for two seats, and The Gazette endorses Carolyn Smallwood and Marsha Peeks. Former councilman James Herring is also vying for the Ward 1 seat, but he has been more of a source of contention at council meetings rather than a consensus builder.

Peeks, a manager at Catholic Charities, wants to pursue programs to keep teens occupied when out of school, such as bringing back Midnight Basketball, and says she wants the council to be more respectful of each other.

Smallwood wants to improve training for city employees to cover areas such as ethics, which she said is not emphasized enough in training.

In Ward 3, there are two candidates vying for one seat, and The Gazette endorses Councilwoman Jennifer

Jenkins, who won the seat earlier this year in a special election. Jenkins, who worked in Williams' administration, also wants to improve the city charter and pursue a tot lot for 7th Street.

Her opponent, Judy Diggs, lacks specifics on her plans.

Strong contenders abound

in most Cheverly wards,

except for Ward 5

Some Cheverly wards have a good problem: Many well qualified candidates vying for council seats in the May 2 election. Unfortunately, Ward 5, suffers the opposite problem, and has no one running for the council seat.

All five of the council seats are up for election. In Ward 3, incumbent R.J. Eldridge is running unopposed. In Ward 1, incumbent Laila Riazi faces one challenger, Preston L. White. In the other three wards (2, 4 and 6), the incumbents are not seeking re-election, but there is a wealth of strong candidates.

The most competitive race is in Ward 2, where there are four serious contenders, but Mary Jane Coolen receives the nod because she brings the best mix of experience, ideas and community knowledge.

Coolen is a former aide to Del. Jolene Ivey (D-Dist. 47), is vice chairwoman of the board at Joe's Movement Emporium in Mount Rainier and has lived in Cheverly for 20 years. She wants to improve code enforcement and public safety by hiring at least one more dispatcher for the city police department. Currently, there is only one dispatcher who works until 5 p.m., so emergency calls to city police after that time must be routed through county dispatchers.

The other Ward 2 candidates — Rachel Audi, a former adviser to two U.S. senators; John Dotson, a former congressional aide; and John LeGloahec, who works for the U.S. Archives and ran for this seat two years ago — all have solid ideas, but Coolen's past work in Annapolis will better serve Cheverly than the other candidates' experience on Capitol Hill.

In the Ward 1 race, The Gazette endorses incumbent Laila Riazi, who was appointed to the seat last year. Her ward includes the site of a former Giant grocery store, which is being replaced by Aldi grocery store, set to open in the fall. Aldi has been heavily criticized for not accepting vouchers for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, a service Giant provided, so Riazi hopes to encourage the grocer to work better with the community.

Her challenger, White, is a former U.S. Senate staff member and a White House appointee working in the Environmental Protection Agency. His focuses are on economic development and environmental concerns, both worthy goals, but Riazi's municipal experience gives her the edge.

The Gazette endorses former councilman Fred Price Jr. for the Ward 4 seat. Price last served on the council in 1991 but remains well-versed in the town's issues and is focused on efforts to unite and get residents more involved in the community.

The other candidates for Ward 4, David C. Thorpe, a software developer and designer, and Steven Wayne Johnson, a telecommunications engineering consultant, have good ideas but lack Price's municipal experience and knowledge of the issues.

Neither of the Ward 6 candidates, Velinda Carter and Carolyn Cook, completed a candidate questionnaire or responded to interview requests, so The Gazette makes no endorsement in that race.