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Full house packs District 9 forum

Homewood takes center stage with candidates

by Christian Morrow
Courier Staff Writer

Of all the contenders for the Pittsburgh City Council District 9 seat attending a recent candidate's forum in Homewood, only Randall Taylor expressed a vision for the entire district.

"We have to look at more than Homewood. East Liberty should be the center for business," he said.

"Larimer could be a mix of homes and light industrial, and Lincoln-Lemington and Homewood should be our bedroom communities with just small stores in case you need something late at night. We need one (development) plan—not five or six."

The forum was held Feb. 18 at Community College of Allegheny County's Homewood-



CARLISLE



DAILEY



HODGE



JACKSON



SAMSON



TAYLOR



WRIGHT

Brushton Center. The African-American Chamber of Commerce and Westinghouse High School sponsored the event moderated by New Pittsburgh Courier Publisher Rod Doss.

During the forum, Democratic nominee Twanda Carlisle said parents are partially responsible for the theft, violence and drug trade threatening dis-

trict revitalization.

"We have to check our children," she said.

"You don't bring \$1,000 into the house and not know it's there, or buy a new pair of \$100 shoes with no job."

Carlisle also acknowledged her predecessor and former boss, Valerie McDonald Roberts, was

not "out in the district" as much as she should have been.

"She was no (Rev. Duane) Darkins, but she did some good things," said Carlisle.

"I would be more visible, more community ori-

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ented. So when I have a fight Downtown, I want you with me."

Judging from the cheering, standing-room-only crowd at the forum, Carlisle has tremendous support compared with her opponents. That support, however, came mostly from Carlisle's campaign supporters.

The other candidates—Taylor, Bill Dailey, Leroy Hodge, Joe Jackson, B.J. Samson and Duane Wright—also elicited the crowd's approval at some point during the two-hour forum.

All seven candidates attended the debate—a first since the forums began. They are competing to fill the unexpired term of former Councilwoman Valerie McDonald Roberts in a special March 5 election. The position pays \$50,605 per year.

District 9 includes parts of East Liberty and Garfield, Larimer, Lincoln-Lemington, Balmer, Homewood, East Hills and North Point Breeze.

During the forum, the candidates responded to questions dealing with helping Black business owners and professionals, and questions on public safety and economic development from the audience.

Wright said new development in the district and a return to safe neighborhoods will not happen unless residents "do what it takes" to change



DORIS CARSON WILLIAMS

"The Westinghouse plan was on the (drawing) board before you got on the school board," said Hodge. "And the elementary school is part of the 're-segregation plan.'"

On the issue of helping Black businesses, the candidates agreed District 9 has been denied a piece of the economic development pie.

Samson said she would audit city departments to determine how contracts are awarded and where money is spent. She would also examine city banking practices to see if African-Americans are included.

Dailey said his priority would be reopening the Rite-Aid drug store on North Homewood Avenue, which closed last year, and providing the needed security for it and other businesses to prosper.

Hodge said he would "follow the money" and make sure a greater portion of city funding goes to the 9th District.

Carlisle said because she's a member of the city's Minority and Women-owned Business Committee, she has been responsible for "millions of dollars" awarded to Black businesses.

But she added, "We don't get our fair share."

Those who attended the forum were pleased with the turnout, though not entirely with the candidates.

Connie Balthrop, Operation Nehemiah president and CEO, said there are several strong candidates, but none mentioned East Hills.

"We have housing and community service issues in East Hills, and I wish I'd heard something about that," she said.

Ed Gainey, aide to state Rep. Joe Preston Jr., D-East Liberty, said the forum was great, but the candidates have to put the community's needs ahead of pre-conceived plat-forms.

"I didn't hear any of that," he said.