

Johnson planning for return to City Council

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

In a Democratic Primary shocker, Joycelyn Johnson lost her City Council seat four years ago to Derwin Montgomery, who was then a senior at Winston-Salem State University.

Johnson, who served as the East Ward's representative for 16 years, has made it no secret that she wants the Council seat back. The city native formally announced her candidacy in February, months before the July 5 filing period starts. Johnson, Montgomery and possibly others will square off in the Sept. 10 Democratic Primary.

"We had started some work that a number of folks had said, 'I'd like for you to go back and finish working on the things that as a community we had started together,'" she said of her motivation to run, "because we've worked with them before over the years."

She said chief among the most significant achievements of her time on the Council, which spanned from 1993-2009, were the cleaning of a number of blighted areas and landscaping improvements in the ward; pushing for the extension of the down-

town boundaries east to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive; and encouraging development in the area, paving the way for improvements that continue to this day.

"We've been here, we've worked hard in the community over the years," she commented. "A lot of the things that are happening now are not just happening. There were foundations that were laid."

If elected, Johnson, a community outreach coordinator at Wake Forest Baptist Health, said the county's recent revaluation process would be one of the chief issues she would tackle right away. The city native has been outspoken in her criticism of the county tax assessor's process, which devalued many homes significantly, causing homeowners, Johnson included, to lose tens of thousands of dollars in equity. Johnson argued that the revaluation disproportionately affected those in predominantly black and brown communities. Some have accused her of taking the issue on to boost interest in her campaign, but Johnson, who has been a community organizer for more than two decades, said that couldn't be further from the truth.

"I approached Commissioner (Walter) Marshall years ago when



File Photo
Joycelyn Johnson is trying to regain the East Ward seat.

we noticed a property tax value reduction," she said. "There was not a foreclosure issue (then) as one would have you to believe — there is now."

New projects that are coming to the city are also ripe with opportunities that Johnson says she hopes to seize for the East Ward if elected.

"With the Salem Creek Connector coming through, it's an opportunity for additional (projects) because you'll have infrastructure coming to the area

that will lead to other development," she said.

Not being a Council member hasn't stopped Johnson from being involved in the local community over the last four years. She has remained a fixture in the community, working closely with the N.C. Housing Foundation and attending community meetings and events such as Keep Winston-Salem Beautiful's Community Roots Day. She has also signed on to serve as co-chair for a luncheon for the city's more than 50 centenarians as part of Winston-Salem's centennial celebration later this spring.

"I've always been up and about, doing stuff. I don't know that I've slowed down," she said. "I'm just kind of hands-on. I like to plant trees and I liked to get involved and work with folks."

Johnson declined to comment on her opponent's record as a Council member, saying she prefers to focus on her own campaign.

"It's about what I feel I can bring to the table, and not what I feel somebody else can't do," she said. "...All I can say is that we're going to get out there and work hard and try to get 51 percent of the vote."

Montgomery also prides him-

self on his community connections and economic development initiatives. The First Calvary Baptist Church pastor said transparency, accountability and action have been among the hallmarks of his career thus far, citing the regular meetings he hosts with pastors, non-profit leaders, seniors and the East Ward community and improvements to the city's support of small businesses, among other achievements as examples.

"Hopefully, individuals will be able to see what we've been able to do over the last three years. We've been able to do a lot of things, I think, move a lot of things forward," he said. "...I salute her (Johnson's) past work, but as we look now, we're trying to look forward and I hope that the community will look at me as someone who will take the torch and continue to press forward."

Win or lose, like Johnson, Montgomery said his commitment to the community won't change.

"Regardless if there's a title that you have or not, I still want to work for this community," he declared. "This community has made me who I am and I feel I have an obligation to give back."

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