

YMCA drops out

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YMCA on Davidson Street. The McCrorey YMCA, north of I-85, is too far from the area, according to Judy Mooney of the YMCA. That agreement reportedly called for a \$1 per year lease and payment of operating expenses approximating \$90,000 per year for five years, with a declining payment in subsequent years.

With the YMCA proposal off the table and Greenville resi-

dents on hand, council decided to institute an evaluation of how Greenville and Belmont center are used now and to use focus groups to find out what residents want to be in the center.

"They decided to develop a process for submitting proposals, including the homeowners association," Sadler said. "We did express an interest in operating that center ourselves."

"The YMCA said they would

not want to be in competition with the community at all," Sadler said.

Lynne Jones Doblin of the neighborhood redevelopment department said the study process will use a survey of the centers as currently operated by staff and with the help of a consultant and a series of focus groups with those who use the center to determine the desired mix of services.

"Then if it's appropriate, we will develop a proposal for how the centers are to be managed," Doblin said. "The staff will bring back a recommendation to council through

the City Within a City committee.

"The best guess is we will complete the review process by end of this fiscal year and come back to council in the summer."

"We may take a look next year at the other two centers (Amay James and Alexander Street)," Doblin said.

"We are trying to be open to other ways of doing business," she explained. "It's an issue of asset management - are these facilities providing the greatest benefit to the citizens they can. It is an issue we have been looking at for several

months."

Community input is the key, Sadler said.

"I think we can rest assured they are not going to get as much out of (the centers) as they could, as long as the neighborhood is not involved. Right now we have an interest

in developing and running program in our own community center."

"If the city decides to keep it and run it themselves, they need to put some human services programs back in the center."

Howell "indomitable"

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One of her biggest achievements has been establishing uniformity in the minority achievement effort.

"Schools were doing everything and calling it minority achievement. But I wanted something else. I wanted our children learning how to cope with being children of color in this society and how to overcome any barriers that would be placed in their way because of that unchangeable fact," Howell said. "We have designed a 'standard operations procedure' manual. We call it the White Notebook. For every level, elementary, middle and high school, it shows what to do for children. Everything has to be tied to building them up in the classroom, improving academic achievement."

Making minority achievement viable hasn't been easy, Howell said. There's too little staffing and money is always tight. Still, she presses on.

"It has been a struggle. We have limited resources. I solicit volunteer help from corporations. I solicit donations," she said. "And I solicit them for partnerships with schools, in order to extend the financial and human resources of my office. I am the only professional staff person in my department."

"Some limitations are by design, but I have worked hard to overcome those. That means I work day and night. This award tells me it is all worthwhile."

"It has taken a toll on me physically, emotionally and spiritually. Many times I have not had the support of my superiors. Just the existence of the program tells the school system something it does not want to hear. That's why the school system has not given the program more support for staff resources."

"I have not received a lot of recognition. But my director, since the latter part of '95, has

been very supportive. I feel like she is out there fighting for us. It sounds if with this lady's leadership we will have some progress."

The new director is now Anne Udall, daughter of former U.S. Secretary of Labor Morris Udall. Udall is coordinating director of gifted and curriculum programs.

"It is hard to continue the battle. Parents and children would never know how I had to fight when I got back to the office."

Howell is a Durham native who came to the school system after working at Johnson C. Smith University in the sociology and urban studies departments, a job she took after a series of positions in Charlotte.

Despite several disappointing job losses and failure to pass the N.C. bar exam, she has persevered and feels she is where the Lord wants her to be, Howell said.

She came to Charlotte after graduating from UNC Chapel Hill's law school. Her undergraduate studies were at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Fla. She majored in Afro-American Studies and Spanish at Eckerd.

"I came to Charlotte to practice law and worked with Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont. But after two tries, I didn't pass bar exam and lost my job with legal services. Then I became a housing counselor with Family Housing Services. Then they cut Family Housing's funding. Last hired, first fired. I was out of a job again. When you are terminated it hurts."

"That really made me go back to the drawing board. I asked Lord why is this happening to me? After a series of temporary jobs, I met Rev. William White at Little Rock AME Zion Church. He hired me to run day to day activities of the church. There I met Coleman Rippey, who was head of the sociology department at Johnson C. Smith. He offered

me a job to come and work as a sociology professor. I worked there for the next six years. I filled in for a professor who was having a problem pregnancy. When she came back, I was moved to the Department of Urban Studies.

"Teaching was always a love of mine. Even when I was losing jobs, I felt my life was on the right track. I couldn't sit and wallow in pity and say 'why me.' You learn from it. I've always been a fighter. My strength comes from the Lord. My motto is FAITH - a Fantastic Adventure in Trusting Him. That's been my salvation. That's been the joy of my life."

Howell is a member of New Town Road Community Church in Waxhaw, where her husband plays for several choirs and she directs the children's choir. The couple have three children, boys ages 11

and 8 and a daughter aged 6.

Howell said she is trying to work herself out of a job.

"If the curriculum celebrates and acknowledges all people objectively...if people who work in schools can love and accept all children, I would be out of a job, I am working to change the system so that what we teach, how we teach and the way we love these children makes it so we don't need this program. Until we do, we will continue to lose our children. And we are losing them..."

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