

Hot real estate market forces Uptown changes

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As a result, many black-owned businesses were pushed out of inner city areas. Disparity reports conducted in 1993 and 2003 stated that the systematic closure of black businesses was intentional, and that city officials have indeed discriminated against African Americans.

"The city has put a system into place, and now they are perpetuating it," said Grier. However, that is not how Kennedy perceives it.

"I don't believe it's intentional," he said. "It's a type of adjustment, and people need to learn to adjust."

Kennedy, whose family owned the land the barbershop was on, admits they were fortunate, and that the situation is different for others.

"I had a lot of families and friends that had to move away," he said.

The city is planning to put condos and retail space in the area that Superior Barbershop stands on, and Kennedy hopes to go back. "I'd like to get space in the retail part and continue to work in the First Ward," he said.

While Charlotte's growth as a business engine may explain its urban development, small business owner R.L. Bradford wants a little more honesty.

"When people use the word 'urban' they think it will mean more diverse, but it's been flipped," said Bradford. "The whole complexion on 7th and McDowell is changing, just as in New York, Harlem's whole complexion is changing," said the former New Yorker. "I am not one to negate progress, but they are making it an exclusive environment."

The University of Maryland's James McGregor Academy of Leadership also conducted a study, "Charlotte: a Company Town," which also examined the issues of the 1960s and Charlotte today. "When the largely black second ward in the core of the central city was cleared with urban renewal funds in the 1960s, black families were scattered and an important sense of community was destroyed," former Bank of America CEO Hugh McColl, wrote in a paper that resulted from the study.

The study when on to say, "As Charlotte's economy and population continue to soar, in the poor inner-city neighborhoods crime rates are high and job-skill and educational levels are low. Meanwhile, affluent newcomers, increasingly conservative, move to the sub-

urbs, apathetic to both the ways of 'old Charlotte' and its increasingly urban problems. Charlotte is at a crossroads."

Grier doesn't see a crossroads, but more of the same. "The same battles we fought in the '60s and '70s my kids are still fighting now," she said. "The city of Charlotte has no concern for black folks."

Grier uses the study to emphasize her point, explaining that the 1993 Study listed that 1,000 black homeowners and 73 black businesses were lost during urban renewal. And while the city paid again in 2003 for a study showing the same results, Grier said, "They haven't done anything about it, because it's only black people."

Yet, Grier does not place all the blame on the city. "Who at the top fights for black people," asked Grier? "We have no leadership, no plan, [and] no agenda to correct what has been [done] against the black community. All these people getting all these community awards, why? They don't do anything for the black community."

And the man you might have thought would have been yelling the loudest about this, just smiled sadly, as he fondly remembered all that his business did do for the community. "We always tried to help," said Kennedy. "As a small business, you become part of the community, you become like a member of the family in that way." Kennedy said he will miss the students from Central Piedmont who always came by to get their hair cut.

"It's just disheartening to see a business that had been there for thirty years, that couldn't afford to stay," said Bradford regarding the closing of Superior Barbershop. "City officials are not making it easy to maintain a business in Uptown. We as a people are always inclusive of everyone else," said Bradford, citing the CIAA as a prime example of an event that did not just benefit black businesses. "But we're not getting the same in return."

Kennedy expressed that he was glad that his father started the business in 1947 and then passed it to him. "It's a good family tradition. I would like to pass it on to my children," said Kennedy.

Although most of his customers followed him, Kennedy hopes to still be a part of Uptown's development. "My main concern is growing with the city," he said. "I just don't want to be left behind."



Grier



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