Outgoing City Council seen one that 'delivered quite a bit'

By Martin Evans
AFRO Staff Writer

City Council President Clarence Du Burns remembers the outgoing council as one which "delivered quite a bit" for city residents, particularly in terms of maintaining the tax base.

Councilwoman Iris Reeves, D-5th, however, thinks the council has been "not particularly effective" in furthering the interests of the black community.

And outgoing Councilwoman Victorine Adams, D-4th, a 16-year incumbent who was the first black woman to sit in the city legislature, said some progress has been made, but other problems facing the black community have been allowed to persist. "It's been a little bit of both,"Mrs. Adams said.

Seven blacks, a historic high, but no more than were in the outgoing council, were sworn in as members of the City Council Thursday afternoon at the Civic Center.

Only a few weeks ago however, the seven, along with the mayor and the city comptroller, fought for their political lives in a primary which brought a host of controversial issues to the attention of voters.

Many of these issues, which include education, housing, black representation in city government and minority economic development, are likely to help shape the concerns the council will grapple with during the next four years.

Although Mrs. Reeves did not think the council was particularly effective in advancing the interests of blacks the last time around, she is hopeful things will change in the new one.

The primary campaign, and particularly the challenge by former judge William H. Murphy Jr. to become Baltimore's first black mayor, prodded the Schaefer administration to respond to several issues which concern blacks, Mrs. Reeves said.

Mrs. Reeves pointed to the public release of a city Trustees audit, a Board of Estimates decision to extend minority inclusion guidelines to more city contracts and Schaefer administration projects to help spur small businesses as indicative of the administration's response to pressure from the black community.

"I think we are going to see not only through the council but also through the administration that certain things will accrue to the black community," Mrs. Reeves said.

Burns, who must decide which of the 18 councilpersons will chair council committees, has promised that a black will head a to-be-formed committee on education. But so far, although he has promised to name Frank Gallagher, D-3rd, to retain the Judiciary committee chairmanship, Donald Hammen, D-1st, to head Urban Affairs, and probably will allow Timothy Murphy D-6th, to retain control of the Budget and Finance committee, Burns has made no commitment to appoint additional blacks as committee chairpersons.

Currently no blacks are among the council's committee chairpersons.

The council is expected to be less confrontational and more cooperative with the mayor, who under the city charter already has the upper hand in running city government.

Burns, who will have the responsibility of making sure the council runs smoothly, said that is fine with him. The council president often has expressed frustration with factional confrontations and rhetorical exchanges among council members.

"I was spoiled. When I first came in with my first council (in 1971) I dealt with real politicians: the Reuben Caplan's and the Alex Stark's," Burns said.

He became disappointed when councilmembers stopped playing team politics and began using the council as a forum for attacking the mayor, or to address social concerns or other issues beyond its jurisdiction, Burns said.

"There was jobs going around that we should form a foreign relations committee...that we were the best show in town Monday nights," Burns said. "I would love to keep that kind of stuff out of the council."

Of Burns least favorite councilpersons by virtue of their willingness to engage in verbal battles over issues, one, Mary Pat Clarke, D-2nd, is leaving while the other, Kwesi Mfume, D-4th, will remain.

Burns said he was pleased with the outgoing council on the whole, however.

"Even though I wasn't entirely satisfied with the old council we did deliver quite a bit in four years, things that will be tangible in the next few years," Burns said.

Burns referred to council's approval of the Six Flags and the Harborsage projects, approval of plans for four new downtown hotels and the backing of housing projects in Ashland Mews, Poppleton, Upton and in neighborhoods scattered across the city as reasons for his satisfaction with the council's accomplishments.

"They were important to keeping the city moving and to increase the tax base. Without the money you can't do anything," Burns said.

But others say that funding city projects is not enough, and that councilmembers have a duty to be the voice of their constituents.

When city residents are unhappy about issues, then issues must be addressed, they say. Many now fear, however, that with a less confrontational council, important issues will be swept under the rug.

Residential-commercial towers at Penn-North on its way

Plans to build a residential-commercial tower complex near the North Avenue subway station in West Baltimore will go forward, although on a slightly reduced scale, according to city officials and the project's developer.

The complex, which will rise from near the intersection of Pennsylvania and North avenues, originally called for a residential tower with 128 one- and two-bedroom condominium apartments, as well as ground-level retail spaces.

But although the commercial space already is 91 percent preleased, according to the developer, city officials who are helping to arrange the projects financing fear demand for the residential units would not be sufficient to fully sell the building.

James A. McDonald, a black developer, said he agreed to scale down the project to 78 residential units to make it more attractive to potential financers, but was disappointed at having to do so. The retail space is to remain the same.

"In this business you have to bend to try to satisfy a lot of people. I didn't want to but I can live with it," McDonald said.

The project, whose condominiums are priced at between $28,000 and $46,000, and are targeted at low- and moderate income individuals and families, is considered a relatively novel one. Its location in the heart of a relatively depressed neighborhood is considered both bold and potentially risky.

McDonald said the project is being studied by Los Angeles officials as an avenue to home ownership for lower-income individuals there.

The reduction will lower the project's projected cost from about $10 million to about $8 million.

Plans to apply for $2.6 million in Urban Development Action Grant funds to help finance the construction will be pared to a $1.8 million request, according to McDonald. The grant, which is key to the completion of the project, will come up for review by government officials within the next few weeks.

Housing Commissioner Jay Brodie said he is confident the grant eventually will be awarded, and the project will continue to completion.

McDonald said the commercial tenants, which will include Drug Fair, 7-Eleven, Church's Fried Chicken and a number of small shops, will bring 60 to 70 new jobs. as well as additional commercial vitality to the area.

The tower's location near the subway should augment its attractiveness to working tenants, who would be minutes away from jobs in downtown office buildings and stores at Mondawmin Mall and Reisterstown Plaza, McDonald said.

Grenada said to be ripe for U. S. economic investment

By Tyrone Vines
AFRO Staff Writer

Word has come from Washington, that Grenada, although left bankrupt by its former rulers, is in prime economic position for U.S. private investment.

Thus far the Agency for International Development (AID) has authorized $1 million for health projects, $535,000 for power and electric needs, $570,000 for water treatment, $700,000 for road repairs and $185,000 for educational projects.

The United States has allocated an additional $18,475 million in economic aid for Grenada. This revenue will go largely toward repairing Grenada's crumbling infrastructure.

Already there has been a meeting with White House officials and a group of 125 business leaders to discuss private investment potential in Grenada.

The Baltimore County Black Business Alliance Inc., executive director, Willie Scott said, "the Alliance has filed with the Board of Investment Corporation and the Agency for International Development to go to the island in January seeking investment opportunities."

"This venture could be profitable both to the black industry and the small yet vital group of Grenadian businessmen who survived the coup," Scott said.

A group of businessmen will visit Grenada in January, looking to couple U.S. credit and technology with products and labor on the island to stimulate the economy. "This approach would generate employment and income for the Grenadians as well as for the members of the Alliance," said the executive director.

AID officials said the military engineers are still needed because Grenada, although considered secure by military sources, has slipped into a fairly advanced system of decay, with roads, water supply and power systems in shambles.

"Each member of the Alliance is an entrepreneur with resources to provide equipment, and supervision in rebuilding the roads, and completing the airport with the 9,000-foot runway that Cuba was building.

"Development is also necessary to improve the tourism on the island. The Alliance has the membership to supply the commodities needed to rebuild and resupply hotels and business offices," Scott said.

Great Britain and Canada are also considering substantial aid donations for Grenada. Special trade concessions and tax benefits will be allowed for U.S. companies that hold conventions on the island.

AID has indicated in a team-report that Grenada is likely to qualify shortly to take part in the Caribbean Basin Initiative which starts in January.

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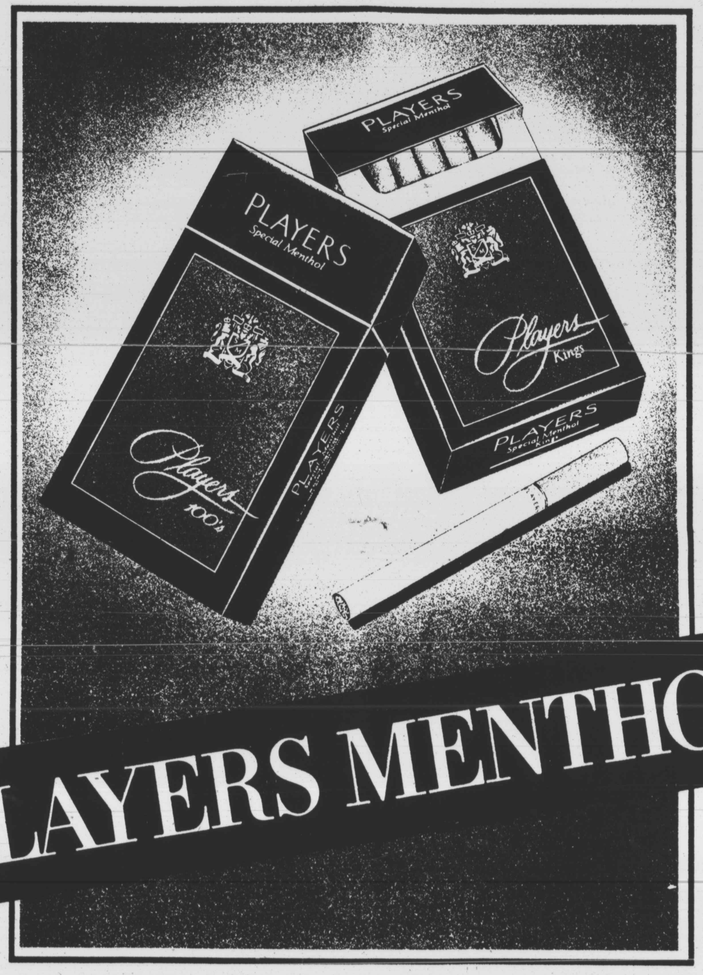

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