



MEMORANDUM

AGENDA ITEM #16

DATE: NOVEMBER 2, 2009
TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS
FROM: STAFF
SUBJECT: CORRESPONDENCE AND ATTENDANCE FORM

Information only.

	1/5	2/2	3/2	4/6	5/4	6/1	7/6**	8/3	9/14	10/5		
Ex Officio Members –												
DONN, Gary Florida Dept. of Trans.	P	A	A	A	P	P			P	A		
GOODRICH, Joan Economic Development Liaison	-	-	-	P	P	P			*	P		
GRAY, Tim Dept. of Environmental Protection	P	P	P	P	P	P		P	P	P		
WATERS, Bert SFWMD	P	P	P	P	P	*	P	P	P	D		

P = Present

A = Absent

D = Designee Present

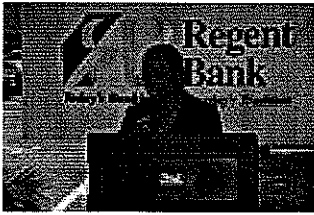
* = Excused Absence

- = Not Yet Appointed

CC = Via Conference Call

** Please note – July & August Meetings Executive Committee Only

WESTSIDE GAZETTE



Sixth Street Plaza Open House marks a victory for the City of Fort Lauderdale and local African American Community

By Charles Moseley

Originally posted 10/7/2009

For those of us 'Black Baby Boomers' who are still around and can recall when Northwest Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Avenue as well as all along Sixth Street housed a number of successful businesses ranging from hotels, night clubs to dry cleaners and grocery stores to a hospital and hardware store; there are signs that the old neighborhood is on its way back to the future.

The Sixth Street Plaza Open House held on October 30, 2009 drew a host of local public officials, community leaders and local residents. This event signaled what many in attendance had hoped for, for many years. Some expressed notions that projects such as these will help jumpstart many other successful redevelopment projects. For some in attendance it sparked memories back to a time when businesses thrived along Sistrunk Boulevard.

To others The Sixth Street Plaza, not only was a reflection of what once was but also gave a glimpse of what many looked forward to in the future for their community.

"Today we have come full circle from a time when some of our clients said that they used to get high upstairs in one of the apartment rooms which used to be in this building to today whereby some of those same persons are part of our 3rd Step Drug Rehabilitation Program which is housed in the very same building you see before you. So today we have truly come full circle," said Maria Freeman proudly as she addressed an audience of well wishers during a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Open House of the Sixth Street Plaza in Fort Lauderdale.

The redevelopment of the Northwest corridor along Sistrunk Boulevard once thought of as a pipe dream by many local residents, now is beginning to take shape-in the form of a number of businesses in and around a neighborhood which had become known for having drug dealers and prostitutes on almost every corner rather than a place once where there was a strong Black middle class who cared about its community.

Back in 1998, Freeman decided to go against the grain and bought a building which sat on the corner of Northwest Ninth Avenue and Sistrunk Boulevard. While many other business owners had packed up and left the Sistrunk Corridor in a mass exodus beginning in the seventies; Freeman was among a new breed of African American entrepreneurs who were willing to take a chance that one day things would turn around and the area would return to what once was a vibrant community during the fifties and sixties.

The building housed a drug store and fish market on the ground floor and a few empty office spaces and rooms for rent upstairs. Freeman says her family was less than thrilled. Despite her knowledge in real estate and construction-by her own admission she knew that this would take a major amount of capital; not to mention blood, sweat and tears to successfully pull it off.

"When I acquired the property, the second floor was used for both residential apartments and office space; although there were no businesses occupying space at that time. All the upstairs apartments were virtually uninhabitable. It was amazing that anyone could live under those conditions. It was apparent that the residents were drug users. A couple of the empty units had leaky plumbing and drug paraphernalia present. Down stairs housed the historic Sixth Street Drug Store which I made the tenant take down and replace the sign to read 'pharmacy'.

The project is the end result of the efforts by Freeman who skillfully parlayed her background in real estate and construction to partner with the City of Fort Lauderdale's Community Redevelopment Agency, Regent Bank and the South Florida Regional Planning Council to help fund the redevelopment project which cost in excess of \$2.5 million dollars.

"The City of Fort Lauderdale infused approximately \$1 million dollars (grants and/or loans) and the South Florida Regional Planning Council provided \$300,000 in gap financing. Regents Bank, the project lender, financed over \$1.5 million dollars. Because the City of Fort Lauderdale was an anchor tenant for the new building, financing for the project was more palatable for the banks. Remember, banks weren't running to put their money on Sistrunk. There had been no major development in decades. However, Regent Bank saw my vision and was willing to take a chance with me. I had already been turned down or delayed approval by numerous banks. A few banks didn't say 'no,' but they didn't say 'yes' either. I was told that they were trying to joint venture with other banks so that they could 'minimize their exposure.' Without the Mayor of Fort Lauderdale and Commissioners and my lenders, this project would not have been possible. Of course my biggest cheerleader was former City of Fort Lauderdale Commissioner Carlton Moore."

Newly elected City Commissioner Bobby DuBose, who represents District III, where the project is located, attended the Open House and took part in the ribbon cutting ceremony along with Mayor Jack Seiler and fellow City Commissioners. Commissioner DuBose pledged to lend his support to the redevelopment of that part of the community.

"I think it's huge for this community. I think it sparks a sense of presence that revitalization is on its way and we need more of this. It's an opportunity for kids who grow up in this community, go off to college, come back to live, play and eat-back like it used to be when my parents and my grandparents were here."

Alfred Battle heads up the Northwest Progresso Community Redevelopment Agency for the City of Fort Lauderdale, the organization which has played a major role in assisting minority business owners along the Sistrunk Corridor by providing technical assistance and grant funding.

According to Battle, "This day is one of many we hope to have in these types of areas. It took a lot of work behind the scenes to do projects of this magnitude. There has not been an abandonment of getting development rolling in this area. It does take a bit of time to go from plans to physical construction from the time period from which this particular project was conceived. There are a number of projects; some of which are just down the street-one in particular which will happen with Cheryl Dickey whose project will have its groundbreaking next week. To make a long story short-if not for the money and the people from key staff positions- elected officials that continuously need to be reminded and worked with to get these types of projects done-it is a process; it's not easy to do it. If it were easy everyone would be doing this type of work."

State Representative Perry Thurston (D- District 93) has a law office and his district office is just a stones throw away from where the event took place. He is among a new breed of African American professionals who see the value of returning to the roots of their community.

"I think this is a great event. The CRA does a wonderful job, the Executive Director Alfred Battle and Assistant Director Ella Phillips are doing great things and hopefully this will spur more activity along the Sistrunk Corridor. I think the future is bright, they have good people working with the organization and I think they have the right vision."

Cheryl Dickey of Dickey & Associates, Inc. along with Freeman represent a growing number of businesswomen who are taking advantage of the opportunities which are occurring in the redevelopment areas in near Northwest Fort Lauderdale. They also include Pamela Adams, a business consultant who has built several single family homes in the area and Attorney Bernadette Norris-Weeks whose law office sits along the Northwest corridor on Seventh Avenue. They all are active members of the Midtown Business Association, which represents the interest of members who work and own business in the near Northwest section of the City of Fort Lauderdale.

"I'm so proud of Maria. We joined the Midtown Business Association about the same time and of course were moving forward to try to make sure there was investment along the corridor and that we moved out projects forward. Here she is with the opening of the businesses, the CRA office and we're just so proud of her. Luckily I've started the ground breaking of my facility on the corner of Northwest 11th Avenue and Sistrunk which will be for retail and office. We just poured the slab today so that's a celebration in itself. We will have a ground breaking on October 13, 2009. So Maria and I are proud to be just moving forward," said Dickey

The Sixth Street Plaza presently houses the Fort Lauderdale CRA Office, Florida Department of Health WIC Office, and the 3rd Step Mental Health Center. Future plans include a pharmacy, a doctor's office and an upscale café called Deja' Vu Café.