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Thursday, March 6, 2008

Civil unions, housing crisis dominate Cheverly forum

Residents hope representatives will champion deceased senator's visions

by Natalie McGill | Staff Writer

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Following the Jan. 12 death of Sen. Gwendolyn T. Britt (D-Dist. 47) of Cheverly, members of Cheverly grassroots political group Progressive Cheverly hope their newly elected state senator will champion some of her same ideals such as support for civil unions.

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The group held a District 47 community forum on Friday at the Judith P. Hoyer Early Learning Center for residents to address any concerns with elected officials. The forum featured the entire District 47 delegation, including Sen. David Harrington (D-Dist. 47) of Cheverly and Dels. Jolene Ivey (D-Dist. 47) of Cheverly, Victor Ramirez (D-Dist. 47) of Cheverly and Doyle L. Niemann (D-Dist. 47) of Mount Rainier. Progressive Cheverly Co-Chairwoman Aimee Olivo said her group holds annual public forums for the delegation to talk with community members.

After a moment of silence for Britt, a bulk of the discussion centered around the progress on passing a same-sex marriage bill Britt was going to sponsor.

"I do believe that marriage is between a man and a woman," Harrington said. "But it doesn't mean people who don't believe in that should be outside of that debate."

Harrington asked attendees how many of them would say marriage is between a man and a woman, and about 10 people raised their hands in agreement. Harrington said the best part about civil rights is putting differences aside and discussing the issues.

"The people who raise their hands want dialogue," Harrington said. "No one is saying they want to get rid of the civil rights part of it."

Ramirez said in Annapolis he represents people and not his religious beliefs, adding there are 400 rights guaranteed to married couples that partners in civil unions are not entitled to. These rights include primary child custody and hospital visitation rights.

"They're paying taxes, doing everything we asked them as a resident in the state of Maryland," Ramirez said. "We live in, I still believe in, a state that separates religious ideals."

David Thorpe, 36, a Cheverly resident for six years, was also concerned about the future of civil union legislation after Britt's death.

"She was very supportive of it so now that we have a new senator, he's a bit wishy-washy on it," Thorpe said. "You can always have a dialogue but you have to pass a vote."

Cheverly resident John Sullivan said he was concerned about the housing crisis brought on by the use of subprime loans where first time home buyers were lured in with low interest rates only to see them skyrocket to the point where they had to consider foreclosure.

"The entire mortgage crisis is brought on by two people — greedy real estate agents and greedy

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loan officers,” Sullivan said. “These people have been working in conjunction with each other, not caring what happens until they get their commission.”

Ivey suggested a need for buyer education since first time homebuyers might not be aware of what finances are necessary to advance each step in homeownership, but she added buyers need to be financially responsible and know what they can and cannot afford.

Ivey said the 47th district is ranked 17th out of 47 districts in the number of home foreclosures and the rate has not peaked yet. Niemann said the bulk of the foreclosures would happen in August and September.

“The government has a huge package of bills dealing with foreclosure,” Ivey said. “It’s an issue that’s getting a lot of attention. I hope the attention is getting a result. It’s really tragic for people.”

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