

THE GEORGETOWN CURRENT

Davis Kennedy/Publisher & Editor

Chris Kain/Managing Editor

For at-large council

Special elections are notoriously low-turnout affairs, which can make predicting the outcome particularly challenging. So much depends on a candidate's ability to get his or her voters to the polls — and to appeal to the voters who seldom miss an election.

This time, candidates are vying for the at-large seat held by Phil Mendelson until he was elected D.C. Council chairman. The Democratic State Committee selected Anita Bonds to fill the seat on an interim basis; she and four other Democrats are vying for the permanent seat, along with one Republican and one Statehood Green Party member.

Based on our three-hour interviews with all of the candidates, we would rule out four candidates for various reasons. Ms. Bonds, despite her solid experience working for three mayors in key government posts and her service as head of the Democratic State Committee, unfortunately lacked cogent opinions on many of the issues we raised.

Former Council member Michael Brown (who last night announced that he was withdrawing from the race) was well-informed and as personable as ever. But the concerns that led us not to endorse his re-election bid last year — including a reputation for not working as hard as some other members, problems paying his own taxes on time, and his behind-the-scenes push to authorize online gambling without a chance for a public vetting — remain.

We disagreed with Perry Redd, a Statehood Green Party member, on some key policy points. For instance, he wants to put a hold on new charter schools even though many of them seem to be doing a better job than traditional public schools in the city's poor neighborhoods.

Paul Zukerberg makes a strong case for eliminating criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana, but he did not seem to have done his homework on many other issues facing the District.

The other three — Matthew Frumin, Elissa Silverman and Patrick Mara — stood out in our minds as worthy of voters' serious consideration.

Mr. Frumin, an advisory neighborhood commissioner in Ward 3, has devoted untold hours to unpaid city service — as a commissioner, as chair of a community group that helped the city modernize Wilson High School and as a member of the task force studying the possibility of undergrounding our utilities. He spoke persuasively on many education issues, but we were a bit disappointed in his lack of reasoned opinions on tax matters. He frequently deferred to the forthcoming recommendations of the tax commission chaired by former Mayor Anthony Williams — as when we asked him whether high business profits taxes in the District lead firms to depart to the suburbs. We expected him to have an opinion on the issue, even if he preferred to await the commission's recommendations before backing a particular solution.

Elissa Silverman brings a wealth of knowledge as a budget analyst for the DC Fiscal Policy Institute and as a reporter for The Washington Post and the Washington City Paper. In part because of her background, we would have expected more forthright answers from her. In our interview, she gave the appearance of avoiding direct answers on tax matters by saying she would await the tax commission's recommendations, or on budget matters by saying she needed more study. Among the questions she deflected: What line items in the schools budget should be supplemented or reduced?

In contrast, we were impressed with Patrick Mara's reasoning in our interview, even if we did not always agree with his answers. Mr. Mara, a Republican, pledged to focus on education, fiscal responsibility, and open, honest government. And he would provide a worthwhile counter-balance to legislators looking to spend every dollar in the D.C. treasury: He suggested that it's time to consider tax relief for businesses and individuals now that the city has strengthened its reserves.

Mr. Mara represents Ward 1 on the State Board of Education, where he has earned a reputation among his colleagues for being a hard worker — and for showing a willingness to change his opinions when presented with compelling evidence and arguments. He is also able to work well with those with whom he disagrees.

For some strong Democratic partisans, it seems the idea of voting for a Republican is too distasteful to consider, particularly given the national political environment that has grown ever more toxic in recent years. But we would remind voters of the memorable plea from former Council member Carol Schwartz, who would tell voters that there is no Republican way to pick up the trash. We see it as unfair to tar a candidate for local office with every element of a national party platform. Additionally, we believe that Mr. Mara's GOP ties could help the city when it comes to fostering good relations with Republican members of Congress.

We believe Mr. Mara is the best choice — sure to bring the diligent work ethic he has shown on the State Board of Education to the job of legislator. We heartily endorse his candidacy.

An 'Opening Day' to remember ...

Fans by the thousands poured out of the Half Street SE Metro stop and down toward the ballpark.

They passed under the giant American flag hoisted by D.C. firefighters.

The sun was shining.

Hopes were brimming.

Beer was flowing and hot dogs were boiling.

There was even a big organ bleating "Take Me

Out to the Ball Game."

The organist was Dick Smith of Baltimore — yes, the home of that other team — who told us he felt the Washington Nationals "could go all the way" this season.



TOM SHERWOOD'S NOTEBOOK

Monday's home opener drew 45,274 paying fans, the highest ever for a regular-season Nats game.

Young star Bryce Harper electrified the ballpark with home runs in his first two at-bats. Pitching ace Stephen Strasburg threw seven quality innings. The Nats beat the visiting Miami Marlins 2-0.

So, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the season of promise for the Nats. The National League East champions are picked by many to make it to the World Series this year.

"It was a gorgeous day, a great game and you could not have started the season on a better note, all around," said Ward 2 D.C. Council member Jack Evans, who along with then-Mayor Tony Williams and Council Chairman Linda Cropp was a principal supporter of the ballpark. "The baseball experience has proven to be even better than I anticipated it would be. That's a success story."

None of the thousands of fans who passed by our NBC4 camera were complaining that the ballpark cost too much when it was built six years ago. No one was complaining that the national recession had slowed development around the ballpark. And no one was saying that Metro couldn't handle the crowds.

(OK, some people, including editors of The Washington City Paper, were grouching that beers in the stadium have topped \$9.)

David Splitt, a lawyer and former District government official, showed up with his vintage 1960s jacket from the old Washington Senators. He had a bit of trouble still snapping the buttons shut.

"It fits me," he insisted, adding, "My Woodstock T-shirt won't fit me anymore. This one will barely fit." Known for his sharp sense of humor, Splitt told us that the baseball jacket was a little tight because "it has to go over all the excessive muscle I've

gained through the years."

Now back to reality.

Restaurateur Bo Blair only got to peek at the game on television. He runs the wildly successful "Fairgrounds" just outside the center field gate. It's an expansive, undeveloped space that he leases and fills with beanbag games, bars and live music.

More than 6,000 fans were partying at one point in the space Monday.

Blair notices, like we did, that more and more fans are wearing Nationals gear rather than for the Yankees, Red Sox and other more established teams.

"Yeah, that's probably one of the nicest things going on," Blair told us. "People are jumping on the bandwagon, getting behind the Nats. In the years past, the Phillies coming down, the Red Sox and the Yankees — it was so many more of those fans in the stadium."

Blair, who sponsors food "Truckeroos" at the site, is the owner of several local restaurants. He likes what he sees with development starting to pick up in the ballpark area after the last recession.

"Five years ago, when we started out, it was incredibly desolate down here. A wasteland," Blair said. "Year by year we're really getting a lot of new businesses on board. A few new restaurants have opened a few blocks away."

The restaurant chain Gordon Biersch has just opened at 100 M St. SE near the ballpark. It's been packed since a soft opening last Friday.

The ballpark is in the Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District, which is also promoting new housing and retail for the area south of Capitol Hill and along the Anacostia River. The area has about 40,000 daytime employees, including the headquarters for the U.S. Department of Transportation.

If you look carefully, you're seeing a whole new city being built along the Anacostia and up the Washington Channel in Southwest, where \$2 billion in construction will soon transform the waterfront.

(Full disclosure: Your Notebook has been an owner in Near Southwest since 2007.)

Baseball didn't bring all of this development. But the winning Nats are adding rocket fuel to development plans in the area. It's a real team, and it's helping to make Near Southwest a real place in the minds of the rest of the city.

Tom Sherwood, a Southwest resident, is a political reporter for News 4.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Deer culling has local supporters

Your March 20 article regarding the deer cull in Rock Creek Park gave the impression that residents of nearby neighborhoods were largely opposed to the effort. We are writing to state that we wholeheartedly support it, as we explained in a letter to Jonathan Jarvis, head of the National Park Service.

As extensive users of Rock Creek Park, we know that this reduction in the deer population is much needed and long overdue. It will benefit the ecology of the park, the neighborhoods surrounding the park, and the health of the deer herd itself.

We thank Park Service officials for their leadership in this effort, and for putting up with the

misguided efforts to prevent it.

Nicholas and Karen W. Zill

Chevy Chase

Buttercup spraying expensive, unsafe

The White House is planning on canceling tours. Yellowstone Park may open late, close early, and be guarded by fewer park rangers. Some convicts in federal prisons may enjoy early release in order to save money as part of the government's mandatory sequestration.

But the National Park Service continued with its annual \$82,000 spraying of a dangerous pesticide along the banks of Rock Creek Park in one of the busiest urban parks in the nation. The target of the agency's chemical assault? The dreaded buttercup, which the Park Service has designated an "invasive species." (Several other plants will be targeted, including a variety of the honeysuckle.)

Among the many ironies is that one federal agency literally is pouring money down a drain — that is, to the edge of a picturesque creek flowing to the Chesapeake Bay. The chemicals were applied on two floodplains with rain forecast before applying, and then the rain did fall.

The District has passed the Pesticide Education and Revisions Act of 2012, whose regulations are expected to ban the use of toxic pesticides to within 25 feet of a waterway. As this rule will go into effect Oct. 1, the National Park Service will need an alternative to herbicides next spring if they want to target this plant.

Halting the chemical spraying may be a savings that can help our economy as well as foster better spirit toward park users and neighbors.

Julia Randall

Chevy Chase, Md.

Alan Cohen

Chevy Chase, D.C.