

HELTER SHELTER

BY RACHELLE L'ECUYER

Serving the homeless is one of the most controversial services a city provides. This controversy has again reared its head regarding the proposed use of the Abrams Federal Building as a downtown homeless shelter and transitional housing facility to be operated by New Life Evangelistic Center, which already operates a shelter for men, women and families just blocks away. As a member of the Affordable Housing Commission for the City of St. Louis (AHC), I have asked myself what are the “best practices” in homeless services and where do they fit within the framework of St. Louis?

On the one hand, homeless services are best located in places that are convenient to transportation and jobs, allowing the homeless to easily find work and make their way back into the stream of society. For example, many of the service organizations that serve the homeless are located in the central corridor of the City, in proximity to both public transportation and major commercial districts. More broadly, many areas of St. Louis City house homeless services, promoted as “transitional services,” generally serving smaller populations of homeless clients. These services are considered “best practices” by many service organizations and national advocacy organizations, and they co-exist peacefully with a residential neighborhood. In many cases, residents of the communities are not seen as threatening, and the facilities become an important part of the neighborhood.

By contrast, 500 to 1,000 residents—as is being called for in the Abrams Building proposal—are daunting for most neighborhoods; the traffic and overflow of such a facility suffocates even commercial and industrial districts. Sheltering this many people in one facility represents the “warehousing” of the homeless, and does not provide a solution to homelessness.

Why would anyone even consider putting so many homeless people in one building anyway? Federal law is clear in one sense. “Title V of the McKinney Act imposes requirements on federal agencies to identify and make available surplus federal property, such as buildings and land, for use by states, local governments,



Abrams building in the background of Kiel.

WILL WINTER

and nonprofit agencies to assist homeless people.” Seemingly this is a very charitable and well-meaning act, but in some cases a homeless service is not the best use for a “surplus” building. Such is the case of the Abrams Federal Building, a non-descript, white cement façade structure, facing Market Street, a high-profile boulevard housing many

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CRAZY MONEY

LARRY HANDLIN

TV once again told a sad story. Legions of protesters gather outside the doors of a St. Louis Public Schools Board of Education meeting, while inside district officials tried to convince the public of the district’s plight. Late night interviews with board member Rochelle Moore detail the specifics of her arrest, and days following bring stories of petitions to remove her from the board. Meanwhile, the numbers are clear on the District’s finances, and maybe worse than popularly thought. While most attention is focused on the \$23 million the SLPS management is trying to trim, the reality is that the deficit for the 2004-5 school year is projected to be \$54 million without any

cuts. With the cuts, the shortfall is expected to be about \$31 million. Even more stunning is that assuming \$23 million is cut in the upcoming year and no further cuts are

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made, the SLPS will not balance its budget until the 2007-8 school year. Furthermore, the SLPS will have to build back up its monetary reserves and is only expected to have about \$10 million in reserves by the end of the 2008-9 school year.

The degree of this crisis is further seen in the fact that at the end of the 2001-2

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THE ARCH CITY CHRONICLE (ISSN 1544-7936)
IS PUBLISHED TWICE A MONTH
BY NEXTFLOOD PUBLISHING LLC.

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SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIVE THANKS TO

Thomas Crone, Lynn Josse, Sean
McWilliams, Mary Lisa Penilla, Laura Winter

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MO, 63163.

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EDITORIAL

Moses named his first son Gershom, which the Bible tells us means “I have been a stranger in a foreign land.”

Indeed empathy and compassion for strangers is a central teaching of the Bible. Five times in Exodus; fourteen times in Leviticus; seven times in Numbers, and seven times in Deuteronomy. No less than thirty-three times throughout those first books does God tell the Jewish people how to treat the stranger. In nearly every case, the commandment is the same – there is to be one law for everyone.

Like so much of moral law, there is no justification for this imperative. But there is a refrain, a reminder, echoed in the name of Moses’ first-born: “You were once strangers.” At the heart of justice and dignity lies compassion. And the most enduring lessons of compassion are learned by being the person on the outside, the Other, the hated, the misunderstood, the despised, the unheard, the stranger. It softens the heart with understanding and heightens the soul’s hunger for righteousness.

One might think that in America, a nation of immigrants, of all places, this sentiment would be instinctual. One need look no further than the very birth certificate of the country, the Declaration of Independence, to find “All men are created equal” standing as the cornerstone of our laws.

Yet at this writing, in Jefferson City and in Washington D.C., some legislators seek to change our constitution, to pluck out a certain people and deny them equality under the law. Outlawing marriage for a segment of our citizens would undermine the moral foundation of our society.

Not from ordinary citizens has this urge to rewrite the constitution come. Instead, tragically, this maneuver is being instigated and inflamed by political and religious leaders.

Some politicians seem sincerely gripped by fear – namely, homophobia – while others are opportunists, ready to play on it, if it brings more votes. Some clergy see their duty in reciting archaic teachings, regardless how uninformed or bigoted. While others have glommed onto the issue to rail against a society they no longer understand, or wish to.

Regardless of motivation, future generations will judge these leaders – and their institutions – for their hard-heartedness, and self-centeredness. And for the sin of treating the stranger unjustly. Strangers who deserve it as children of God, and as citizens of the United States of America.

DAVE DREBES

WHO KNEW?

1. Mushrooms 2. World War I, when the US went to war with Germany 3. Soap manufacturer 4. He sold used text-
books to freshmen that they didn't need. 5. 1861

1. During prohibition Stone Hill Winery in Hermann Missouri converted its wine cellars to the production of what?
2. In 1914 one fourth of all St. Louis high school students studied German. By 1922 the number had dropped to less than 1 percent. What led to this dramatic decrease?
3. Eberhard Anheuser and his son-in-law Adolphus Busch started a small brewery in 1860. What was Anheuser’s previous profession?
4. What did Al Cervantes do to get suspended from St. Louis University High School?
5. What year did the last slave auction take place on the step of the Old Courthouse downtown?

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VOTE COUNT

November 2002, citizens across the state voted on whether St. Louis should receive “home rule”—the ability to determine whether the county offices (which perform such functions as mandated by the Missouri Constitution) would be elected or appointed. “Home Rule” did not change any of these offices, only created the possibility for change. Still, opponents of making these offices appointed urged followers to vote No against this first step. Within the city one can see that voters in north-side wards were more likely to vote against the measure, perhaps an expression of skepticism that the rearranging would have a beneficial effect on quality of life. Some observers believe that the predominantly African American north-side does not trust the powers that be that have conceived the need for reform. Also the beleaguered Ward 20 which was subjected to aldermanic shuffle in the 2000 redistricting had the lowest turnout, perhaps also feeling that the power-brokers were less interested in their interests than they claim.

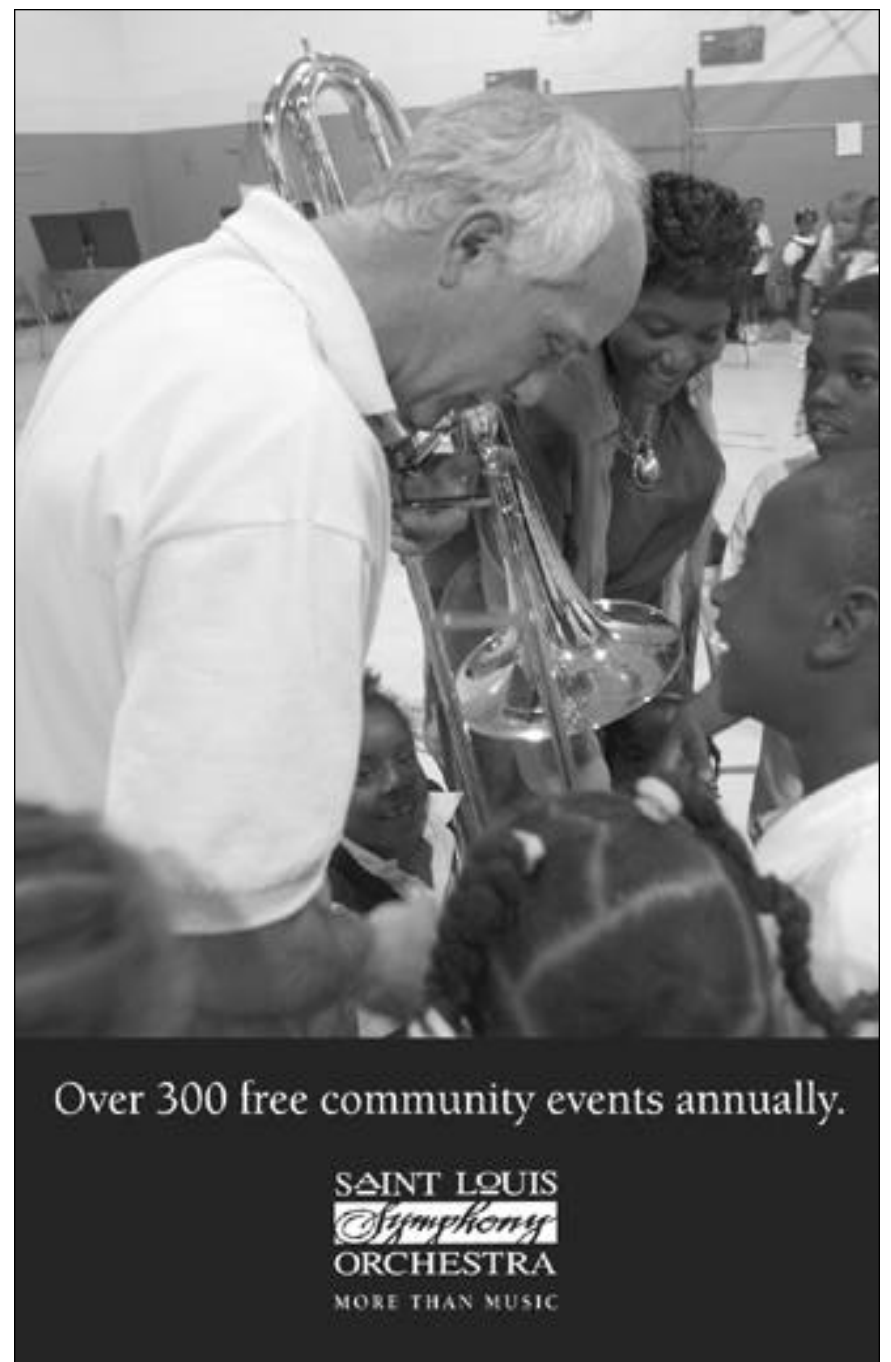
The Advance St. Louis team looks forward to this coming November to put an actual charter reform proposal on the ballot for approval from city voters. They will have to look at these results and count the votes as they devise a strategy to pick up votes on the north side. We would note that Home Rule passed in the city with 66%. Any proposed charter changes will require 60% approval from the voters. That 6% margin of error will quickly disappear if details of the reform create controversy as expected. They will have to pick up votes elsewhere to make up what they lose – perhaps by improving turnout in high approval wards or depressing turn-out in high disapproval wards.

DAVE DREBES

Ward	Turnout	Total Votes	Yes Votes	No Votes	%approving
Ward 1	47.17%	2,517	1,163	1,354	46.20%
Ward 2	50.60%	2,338	1,072	1,266	45.85%
Ward 3	39.59%	1,605	711	894	44.30%
Ward 4	44.00%	2,004	1,004	1,000	50.10%
Ward 5	43.46%	1,624	875	749	53.88%
Ward 6	52.31%	2,903	2,071	832	71.34%
Ward 7	49.46%	2,518	1,894	624	75.22%
Ward 8	54.12%	3,258	2,565	693	78.73%
Ward 9	42.66%	1,980	1,311	669	66.21%
Ward 10	53.51%	2,991	2,228	763	74.50%
Ward 11	47.91%	2,525	1,640	885	64.95%
Ward 12	60.52%	4,263	2,731	1,532	64.04%
Ward 13	54.40%	3,285	2,399	886	73.03%
Ward 14	55.00%	2,742	1,992	750	72.655
Ward 15	51.45%	2,787	2,102	685	75.42%
Ward 16	66.79%	5,298	4,019	1,279	75.86%
Ward 17	45.84%	2,316	1,856	460	80.14%
Ward 18	44.94%	2,247	1,153	1,094	51.31%
Ward 19	40.69%	1,365	854	511	62.56%
Ward 20	33.71%	1,255	747	508	59.52%
Ward 21	48.71%	2,575	1,202	1,373	46.68%
Ward 22	42.86%	1,777	889	888	50.03%
Ward 23	62.64%	4,829	3,515	1,314	72.79%
Ward 24	56.01%	3,884	2,940	944	75.69%
Ward 25	46.09%	2,088	1,447	641	69.30%
Ward 26	47.62%	2,672	1,337	1,335	50.04%
Ward 27	48.06%	2,650	1,128	1,432	45.96%
Ward 28	55.74%	3,969	3,411	558	85.94%

OTHER INITIATIVES

Name	Description	Date	% in Favor	% Opposed
Prop Y	Approve MSD bonds	Feb-04	69%	31%
Prop S	Change charter on specifications for bids	Apr-03	64%	36%
Prop A	Approve Airport bonds	Apr-03	57%	39%
Amendment I	Home Rule authority for St. Louis	Nov-02	66%	34%
Prop A	Tobacco Tax	Nov-02	54%	46%
Amendment N	Change charter on local fines	Nov-02	53%	47%
Amendment O	Change charter on civil service rules	Nov-02	60%	40%
Amendment Q	Change charter on Health Director qualifications	Nov-02	76%	24%
Prop U	Amend local use tax for demolition	Nov-02	60%	40%
Prop S	Require local vote on public sports financing	Nov-02	55%	45%
Prop B	Statewide transportation tax	Aug-02	33%	67%
Prop 1	Change charter on civil service	Aug-02	53%	47%
Prop 2	Change charter on civil service	Aug-02	53%	47%
Prop 3	Change charter on salary	Aug-02	55%	45%
Prop H	Approve local tax for health and housing	Apr-01	58%	42%
Prop 6	"Change charter on salaries, city contracting"	Nov-00	68%	32%
Prop C	Regional vote on Metropolitan Parks	Nov-00	77%	23%
Prop 5	Local use tax for health	Nov-00	46%	54%
Prop 1	Approve Public School bonds	Nov-00	71%	29%
Living Wage	Approve living wage for city contracts	Aug-00	77%	23%



CAMPAIGN UPDATES

Filing for the March 2005 local primaries is still over eight months away. However, look for pundits to start more carefully paying attention to local election currents and filings. In between now and then will be the August primary elections—contests for nominees for Circuit Attorney, Sheriff, Treasurer and Public Administrator, state representatives and senators, and Democratic and Republican committee people, all virtually deciding the eventual winner in our one pony town—and the crowded November general ticket. Most county-wide offices have become virtually uncontested fiefdoms, where incumbents dominate elections through the privileges of their offices and—some—substantial election resources; this and next year’s contests seem little different. On the aldermanic level, the key question is whether committee and state representative elections in August and November will presage strong local opponents in the March, 2005, primaries. At the citywide level, the triumvirate of Mayor Francis Slay, Darlene Green and Jim Shrewsbury has lurched into a workable rhythm, though potshots between the Slay’s and Green’s staffs could indicate that opposition will emerge against the comptroller over the next year. Finally, will Francis

Slay be the first mayor since Vince Schoemehl to face no credible opposition in his reelection efforts? Slay has seemingly most of South St. Louis political establishment happy and content, and about a third of north St. Louis aldermen on cordial terms. Sure, the bet is that Republican challenger Michael Chance will throw his hat into the ring, but the Democratic challenger will be the key.

Of course, with charter reform thrown in, all bets are off. The current charter indicates that all elected officeholders must be allowed to complete their elected term—meaning that all county offices elected this November would serve for at least the next four years and all other local officeholders are only potential candidates next year. And any reduction in the number of aldermanic seats could mean that incumbents face each other in the fight for their political futures.

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Election War Chests, St. Louis Political Incumbents		
Name	Office	Cash on Hand
Francis Slay	Mayor	\$477,253
Darlene Green	Comptroller	\$101,000
Jim Shrewsbury	President, BOA	\$41,815
Gregory Daley	License Collector	\$112,442
Sharon Carpenter	Recorder of Deeds	\$1,689
Ronald Leggett	Collector of Revenue	\$440
Larry Williams	Treasurer	\$3,949
Jim Murphy	Sheriff	\$19,981
Gerald Nester	Public Administrator	limited activity
Jennifer Joyce	Circuit Attorney	\$60,347
Marianno Favazzo	Circuit Clerk	\$5,800
Irene Smith	1st Ward	limited activity
Freeman Bosley	3rd Ward	limited activity
3rd Ward Democratic Committee		\$1,636
April Griffin	5th Ward	\$19,989
Phyllis Young	7th Ward	\$45,649
Kenneth Ortmann	9th Ward	\$25,511
Matt Villa	11th Ward	\$11,445
Alfred Wessels, Jr	13th Ward	\$13,322
Jennifer Florida	15th Ward	\$12,408
Joseph D. Roddy	17th Ward	\$54,043
Michael McMillan	19th Ward	\$114,469
Jordan Chambers	19th Ward Organization	\$13,167
Bennice Jones King	21st Ward	\$400
Gregory Carter	27th Ward	limited activity

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Kotkin's Candor

Lost in the fallout of consultant Joel Kotkin's pointed comments about downtown—that it sucks—are the more interesting comments about the city and region:

> On Neighborhoods:

"These emerging neighborhoods are, in many ways, St. Louis' best bet on its future ability to attract young professionals and entrepreneurs. In this sense the impact of one turnaround area—whether University City, Ferguson, Maplewood or Tower Grove—is incalculable."

> On the Problem:

"People do come to St. Louis in their 20s to find educational and early work possibilities. The problem lies when they get older and find that better opportunities lie elsewhere."

ELSEWHERE

GOING-ONS OUTSIDE OF ST. LOUIS

> SAN DIEGO, CA

In an effort to save taxpayer money and help protect the environment, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors moved to prohibit county departments from purchasing sport utility vehicles without reasonable justification. (Associated Press)

> POTOMAC, MD

Marwood, a 20,000-square-foot, 33-room, 11-bathroom river-front estate, is for sale for \$7 million. Besides being home to the Gores, the Kennedys and Franklin Roosevelt at different times, it was also home to the Pulitzer family. The mansion built by millionaire Samuel Martin in 1931 for his wife, Jane, a former Ziegfeld Follies dancer who later left Martin and married into the Pulitzer family. (The Washington Post)

> BOSTON, MA

In an effort to send a message of unity and support for the constitutionally-protected right of same-sex couples to marry, more than 500 religious leaders across the Commonwealth are mobilizing their congregations to "Pray for Justice" and take action to inform elected officials about the broad support within many religious communities for same sex marriage, and the wide-spread opposition to the passage of any constitutional

amendment that would write discrimination in to the Massachusetts State Constitution. (U.S. Newswire)

> SAN PABLO, CA

A decades-old agreement between West Contra Costa Unified School District officials and their employees is threatening the financial stability of the school district. In exchange for accepting lower salaries, employees and their spouses were promised health coverage, paid in full by the district, for the rest of their lives. Health coverage to employees' retirement years will cost the district \$9.5 million this year. Meanwhile the district faces the prospect of shuttered libraries, no high school sports or guidance counselors in the fall.

Furthermore West Contra Costa officials project that by next year, health care costs will jump 15 to 20 percent. By 2010, the district will be spending more than \$12 million annually on health benefits for people who no longer work there. Actuaries say that even if the district stopped offering lifetime benefits to new teachers it would still be on the hook for \$275 million, and the district has no money set aside to pay for it. (SFGate)

> BURLINGTON, VT

Burlington became the third city in the United States to offer city employees the

option of buying medication in Canada, in defiance of FDA warnings and possibly federal law. The fact that many prescriptions are sold more cheaply in Canada is the driving motivation. (WPTZ)

> PHILADELPHIA, PA

About 200 public health advocates rallied against President Bush's plan to expand abstinence-only education, calling instead for teaching youngsters about condoms and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. The advocates also criticized an upcoming congressional hearing on whether condoms should carry labels warning that they do not protect against a little known, but widespread, sexually transmitted disease. They fear such warnings would lessen use of condoms. (Associated Press)

> BUFFALO, NY

Buffalo's largest business advocacy group, Buffalo Niagara Partnership, released a position paper saying it was "staunchly opposed" to the construction of a casino by the Seneca Nation of Indians in downtown Buffalo. The board cited three reasons in opposing the casino saying it: Is incompatible with downtown Buffalo's urban design, Is not supported by downtown's major employers, Will not bring out-of-town dollars to the city. (Buffalo Business First)

CLAY AND CAUTION

It seems everyone—the Post Dispatch, the St. Louis Americans and reformers in general—didn't appreciate Congressman Lacy Clay's comments on St. Louis' charter reform process. However, could it be that in them there is some smart political advice? At a time when the city—if not the regime—is politically divided on certain issues—police/community relations—some halting steps towards some sort of resolution could help both heal some of the racial divisions of the city as well as demonstrate that charter reformers want more than just a more orderly government.

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CRAZY MONEY cont.

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school year, the Saint Louis Public Schools had reserves equal to nearly \$40 million. One year previous to that, the reserves were at \$55.4 million. By the end of the 2002–3 school year the reserve was in the red by \$12 million—meaning that during the year the SLPS spent nearly \$52 million more than it took in. At the end of the current year the operating fund is expected to have a \$38.6 million shortfall.

Initial confusion over the financial problems has turned an already confusing subject into one that causes most people's eyes to glaze over. Perhaps one of the most useful explanations for the SLPS finances comes in the initial report from the State Auditor Claire McCaskill, an explanation largely consistent with materials presented in early July 2003 by the SLPS management team. For the current school year, if the District had done nothing, it

would have ended with a deficit in the general operating year-end fund of \$73 million. By making cuts, the SLPS has trimmed that down to projected \$38.6 million deficit.

A second number that was confused in media reports was the end of the calendar year balance of the general operating fund—which, if no changes had been made, would have been in the red by \$99 million, making the district insolvent. The reason for such a cash flow problem is that in December the SLPS must make a payment of \$20 million to the teachers' pension fund and property tax receipts are received in January and February. To cover this, the District made cuts, received some property taxes early, and then borrowed money from desegregation capital funds.

McCaskill's report provided warning signs that were seemingly ignored. In December of 2002, the prior SLPS administration used \$4.8 million from a combined account of restricted and unrestricted funds to cover costs.

Restricted funds are those designated for specific purposes such as Federal Title 1 funds and desegregation capital funds, and typically should not be used for other purposes. In fact, to tap the desegregation funds in 2003, the SLPS had to come to agreement with plaintiffs from the suit and

Hammonds did recommend cuts for the next year, but with a negative year-end balance, increased cuts were then necessary.

Coming to the current 2004 fiscal year, the new Board and management team put together a budget that leaves the SLPS spending more than it takes in for the general operating fund. This is illegal under Missouri state law, though McCaskill pointed out that in circumstances such as this, it is probably better to avoid more drastic cuts than to meet the letter of the law. Some critics have keyed on this issue and suggested that passing an illegal budget might provide reason to remove Board Members. This ignores that many of the same critics have criticized the Board for reducing expenditures at all.

Beyond this year, it appears that at least three more unbalanced and illegal budgets will be passed unless future cuts are made. The target of \$23 million is to stop the "bleeding," in terms often used in SLPS' talking points. \$7 million of the cuts will go to pay back a portion of the desegregation funds borrowed for this year and the other \$16 million will reduce expenditures to the point that the district can slowly reach balanced budgets and then build up reserves. The cuts this year will reduce the 2005 fiscal year deficit by \$7 million.

Given this bleak picture, how can the District make it through another December and another \$20 million payment to the teachers' pension fund without going insolvent? The size of the cash flow problem has been significantly reduced so that in December of 2004, the SLPS will be able to issue Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANS)—short term borrowing to keep the District afloat from

Continued on page 8

> *The Other Options*

There are three possible ways the District could solve the problems of continued financial insolvency, even beyond the cuts being proposed. First, the district asks voters for an increase in taxes. Most surrounding the SLPS are concerned that voters might not approve such a request without a permanent superintendent in place and without a reduction in the perceived chaos at meetings. Most voters do not have students in the schools and thus receive their impressions from the nightly news. Furthermore, as 'Community' member George Cotton proclaimed there would only be a tax increase over his dead body at the last SLPS Board meeting, School Board opponents would campaign actively against such an increase. Second, a lawsuit against the State of the Missouri over desegregation funding may be resolved down the line returning significant amounts of money to the SLPS. The SLPS has won at the trial court level, but Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon has promised to take the case all the way to the State Supreme Court. Third, the SLPS could make more cuts, though no one is looking forward to another round of very public fights.

have the court approve the plan. (In May and June of 2003, the SLPS administration again tapped \$6.8 million in such funds to cover end of the fiscal year cash flow shortages.) Even with this borrowing, the State Auditor's report shockingly found that "while the district's general operating funds have been experiencing cash flow deficiencies since early in fiscal year 2003, there was no evidence of cash flow projections being performed." In other words, while the district was having problems meeting its expense requirements, there was no attempt to forecast future revenues. Fiscal controls were so lax during the 2002–3 fiscal year that no one can produce evidence of standard cash flow projections even being a concern to the prior administration.

Many watching the financial debacle wonder what could have happened to cause such a nightmare. The simplest answer is that expenditures increased 8.8% from fiscal years 2001 to 2003 while general operating fund revenues declined by 5.1%. Why the extra spending? First, the District had agreed to a much-needed three-year increase in salaries to keep the District competitive with other public school systems in the area. Increases in salaries and benefits accounted for this increase and other spending had decreased by about 3.4%. Secondly, on the revenue side of the equation, state payments decreased by nearly \$26 million over the 3-year period. About \$12 million of this was due to increasing payments to charter schools and \$14 million was due to a simple decrease in state funding. While increasing charter school payments also mean decreasing students, the marginal savings for a district of the size of the SLPS is minimal. Local revenues were largely constant during this period.

Third, significant problems existed in the way the previous administration reported budget numbers to the Board of Education. During the 2002–3 school year, the board passed amendments to the budget decreasing revenues by \$15 million and increasing expenditures by \$12 million. Those amendments did not include projections of the impact on the year-end balance, nor were monthly updates provided for the general operating fund or the reserves. Essentially, the Board of Education was flying blind in relation to any budgetary decisions. Furthermore, even once the prior administration realized the general operating fund would be negative by the end of the 2003 fiscal year in December of 2002, it made no significant cuts.

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CRAZY MONEY cont.

Continued from page 7

December until February when property tax revenues come in. SLPS management was less clear in explaining how it can be solvent while running a \$31 million deficit, but it appears to be due to money management and the selling of assets.

The SLPS Administration has offered four unpalatable options to cut \$16 million from the next fiscal year's budget. The reality is that none of them will improve student performance, so the challenge for the public is to find the least bad one with which to go forward. While this budget will not immediately improve the District's ability to educate students, it will right a financial wreck and begin a slow process to make the District financially stable again; that is the first task is improving student achievement in the long run. < END >

A & M IN DC

Among the special guests at March 10 St. Louis Public School Board of Education meeting was a special contingent from the District of Columbia, in town to review the work of takeover firm Alvarez & Marsal. The group got caught in the fuss outside and caused a mild furor when security forces cleared the doorway to give them entrance. D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams has followed the lead of St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay in an activist approach towards public education. Like St. Louis, commentators and political pundits across the political spectrum in D.C. agree that the public school system is failing to educate substantial numbers of students. Auditors in the District government detail contracting problem, overpayments, and unaccounted expenditures. Already reeling from a number of challenges, public school officials suffered another set-back with the murder of a student at one of the area's high schools, and subsequent disclosure that the school administrators had failed to provide adequate oversight for a \$45 million security contract.

Now with the resignation of the fourth superintendent over the last seven years—with the system operating in that time under three separate schemes of governance—a group of metropolitan power brokers, including Mayor Williams—have called for a new approach. Under a bill introduced by a council ally, the District would abolish the current elected school board, create a board to advise the mayor on educational policy, and transfer authority for D.C. Public Schools to a new cabinet-level District of Columbia Public Schools.

There is no news of how the D.C. delegation regarded the performance of Alvarez & Marsal; however, should Roberti be considering a move to the District, a little research will show that school politics are equally contentious in that town. Students and activists have been rallying against public school budget cuts for the last year, and a new federally imposed voucher program could continue the drain of students away from the beleaguered district. News from elsewhere on the Mid-Atlantic coast shows that the work of an educational take-over firm could be in high demand. Baltimore's school district will end March \$75 million in deficit; a loan from Republican governor Bob Ehrlich will keep the doors open, but he has stated his preference to place the district in receivership and institute a new "business structure" to manage the district and sort out its affairs.

WILL WINTER

PROPERTY HIKES UNDER CONSIDERATION

The reluctance of the St. Louis Public Schools and city officials to pursue a property tax hike is even more striking given the number of surrounding districts that are considering some scheme to infuse more local public resources into the system. (By contrast, the idea of expanding education resources from either the state or federal level is a politically dead issue). Illinois districts just went through a round of requests; meanwhile, many districts on the west side of the river have initiatives on the upcoming April 6 ballot, hoping that the off-season election will help with a more favorable reception by voters. Passage of them is by no means assured, and the widespread dissatisfaction with property tax hikes could mean their defeat in some suburban areas.



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HELTER SHELTER cont.

Continued from page 1

prominent government and cultural buildings. Maintaining this building for the proposed use would cost over \$1 million annually and bring 10,000s of clients over the course of a year to a heavy tourist area where commercial and retail services are already very vulnerable as Downtown rebuilds itself. Allowing the homeless shelter is only a recipe for disaster; the service cost, even beyond the building maintenance, is exorbitant.

However, as a commissioner of the AHC, for me the real question is how can we serve the homeless and serve them well? A "best practice" model for homeless services can be found just a few blocks north of the Abrams Building. With annual operating costs of just \$750,000, St. Patrick's Center offers transitional services, such as job training, to help the men and women they serve get back on their feet. Dan Buck, CEO of St. Patrick's, is adamantly opposed to the plan to turn the Abrams Building into a homeless shelter. Having publicly opposed the plan on several occasions, he believes that there is a better solution to homelessness than "warehousing" the homeless in shelters. Bucks' position has many supporters, including the AHC, who voted unanimously to oppose the proposed plan for the Abrams Building. Subsequently, the AHC sent a letter to Tommy Thompson of Health and Human Services requesting that the current proposal for a homeless shelter be denied. (The proposal is currently under review by HUD, the agency in charge of disposing of surplus property, and an answer should be given soon.)

The basis of the AHC's opposition comes from the strategic planning work that the Commission began last summer, which included interviews with practitioners, specifically in the area of homeless services. 40% of the funds the AHC grants must go to serve those city residents who are at 20% of median income or less, which translates into homeless services. One of the questions most often asked of the prac-

Continued on page 10

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ODDS AND ENDS

\$99,000, compared to the \$183,500 median price for a home built since 1990.

> **Ranks are Meaningless:** As the list-making mania continues unabated, we must report that AXE Deodorant Bodyspray teamed with the city study experts at Sperling's BestPlaces to find out "America's Best and Worst Cities for the Dating Game." St. Louis ranked 69th out of the 80 largest metro areas that they "studied," beating out cross state Kansas City which finished dead last.

> **Spending Money Like Beer:** Anheuser-Busch must have thought they got their money's worth in their five year, fifty million dollar deal with Dale Earnhardt Jr. They recently added a contract extension rumored to be for another three years at an undisclosed amount.

> **Aging Stock:** According to recently released Census Bureau statistics, about 8 percent of the nation's 106 million homes in 2001 were at least 84 years old. The median price for these older homes is just

> **Grant Giving:** Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a non-profit clean-up and service group based in Lemay, has been awarded a Problem Solving Grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. Targeted for the mid-county area, the \$100,000 grant will pay for major community clean-ups, demonstration sites along the deteriorated River des Peres area running through mid-county, and an environmental education program.

> **Name Dropping:** In the 64th State District race, Rachel Storch has continued an impressive collection of supporting names, for those on the liberal side of the political spectrum. A March 24th fundraiser for Storch lists a who's who of women civic and political supporters, including FOCUS's ex Carolyn Losos, former Senator Jean Carnahan, education advocate Susan Uchitelle, and environmental activist Peggy Hermes, among others. The list could come as one of the benefits for Storch's involvement in the Sue Shear Institute for

Women in Public Life at the University of Missouri St. Louis, which runs training programs for women interested in elected office. More on Women Power: State Senator Maida Coleman and State Representative Rita Days have started a Black Women's Caucus in state legislature.

> **Bowing Out:** Rumor-mill says that Mark Able will withdraw from the state treasurer's race and will find himself the beneficiary of a gubernatorial appointment or a Jefferson County office.

> **Empty Streets:** Word on the corner says that the Mansion House apartment high-rise downtown is struggling with low occupancy rates hovering around 50%. Complaints stream in that people are getting stuck in elevators and in an effort to save

money, the building shut off heat (leaving residents 'in the cold'). Rumor has it that the building's owners, from New York, plan to fly to St. Louis at least twice a month in an effort to help improve the situation. Last year they only visited one time in the whole year.

> **Flip-flop:** Shaw neighbors are organizing to combat speculators who "flip" property cheaply acquired to make quick sales and handsome profit with little or no investment. Building on the successes of neighbors in one close-knit quadrant of blocks, the Shaw Neighborhood Improvement Association (SNIA)'s Board of Directors voted to support a Comprehensive Neighborhood Planning Initiative at its March 15th meeting--and earmarked \$10,000 in their

2004 budget to demonstrate to potential backers the weight of their resolve. The plan was presented by Shaw residents in-the-know on housing and justice issues: Shannon Ware, with Remax; Gerry Connolly, formerly of Beyond Housing; and Martin Rafanan, NCCJ Executive Director.

Kudos to presenters who touted a unique brand of historic preservation—for people: they repeatedly named as a core value the protection of their "inclusive, diverse, mixed income neighborhood."

> **One to Watch:** Jared Novelly, son of Apex Oil's Tony Novelly, has filed to run for State Representative for District 73. Novelly is the only Republican to file so far. The incumbent is Democrat Margaret Donnelly.

HELTER SHELTER cont.

Continued from page 9

tioners during this process was, "what are the best practices in the field?" The majority of answers stated a preference for transitional services—services working to move homeless individuals and families into permanent, quality housing. One provider, from an organization serving homeless pregnant women, stated, "we do not believe it is unrealistic to tell our clients you could one day be a homeowner." As a consequence of these interviews, the AHC will lend high-priority support to those services that focus on returning their clients to employment and permanent housing.

The Abrams Building issue is reminiscent of the battle residents of Old North St. Louis fought two years ago against the Salvation Army's proposed 500 bed facility at the northern tip of their neighborhood, just north of downtown. Opposition to the facility was not simply based on NIMBYism; Old North, in fact, houses a number of homeless services, including Haven of Grace and Stepping Into the Light.

In addition, residents worked with representatives from the local service agency Places for People to identify the right place for a new facility serving homeless individuals. The protest came from the magnitude of the service: 500 homeless in a community population of 1,500, a 1 to 3 ratio. The Salvation Army failed to consult with the neighborhood on plans or location, and, in the end, because the community weighed in so heavily against the plan, the City's Land Reutilization Authority (LRA) would not release the land for the development.

On the national level, the National Alliance to End Homelessness advocates for a range of public policies that emphasize supportive services over shelters. Examples of these include emergency funds for rents and mortgages, connecting people to jobs, and providing more affordable housing. All of these practices are doable in St. Louis and should be part of the plan to end homelessness. <END>

Rachelle L'Ecuyer is the Vice-Chair of the Affordable Housing Commission of the City of St. Louis and serves as the Strategic Planning Committee Chair.



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> "Beyond Clark" at the Black World History Museum. Story of the black man who accompanied Lewis and Clark on their voyage of exploration and the events that have inspired his ongoing memory. 241-7057 for hours and information.

> Also at the Black World History Museum, a historical painting series by artist and historian Ulrick Jean Pierre titled "Haitian Revolution 1804-2004." Up until December, 2004.

> "Revealing the West" at the St. Louis Mercantile Library at the UM St. Louis. Prints, documents and other empheria from the period of Lewis and Clark's exploration, including rare looks at the Expedition's Journals. St. Louis Mercantile Library is located in the TJ Library of UM St. Louis' Main Campus. Contact 516-7240 for hours and information.

> "Lewis and Clark: Imagining the Expedition from St. Louis," at the Gateway Arch downtown. The exhibit details the preparations of Lewis and Clark for their expedition in 1803-1804, and includes a number of rare letters detailing preparation and execution of the trip and computer simulated views of St. Louis at the time of the exhibition.

> March 25: Metropolitan Issues Forum on Public Education, featuring Anthony Alvarado, former chancellor of instruction for San Diego public schools and chief architect of a controversial redesign of that city's curriculum, as he shares his experience with reforming public education. Panel Dialogue takes place at 2 pm at UM St. Louis in the Public Policy Research Center Conference Room, 427 SSB Building. Reception and discussion at 6 pm at the Missouri History Museum, Lee Auditorium. Call 516-

5273 for more information.

> March 31, 4:30: Advance St. Louis Stakeholder meeting to discuss the roles, responsibilities and structure of the City of St. Louis Board of Aldermen. The meeting will include presentation from a representative group of aldermen to to present information and discuss with stakeholders the impact of potential changes to the Board. For attendance by members of the public, RSVP by telephone or email to Wendy Spilker (phone:314-342-4089; email: wendyspilker@hotmail.com).

> April 7, 5:30 pm: The St. Louis Planning Commission meets to hear public comment on the Lafayette Park Master Plan Presentation. City Hall, 1200 Market Street in Room 208. Contact 622-3400 for more information.

> April 12 and 13: Creating Livable Communities Symposium 2004, sponsored by the Public Policy Research Center of UM St. Louis. The symposium promotes the sharing of information, expertise, and tools for research on a broad range of issues that impact the

St. Louis region. Contact 516-5273 for registration information and program of events.

> Apr. 22-23: the 5th Annual St. Louis Earth Day Symposium will be held at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Titled "Dialogue for Development: Investing in Sustainable Communities," the program offers new tools and strategies to enable profitable development, a clean environment, and the long term livability of healthy, dynamic communities. For program information, go to www.stlouisearthday.org/symposium.html.

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