

Forum: Does Vernon have a racism problem?

Three candidates for city commission, Molly Baldwin, Darien Williams and Don Smith, participated in a public forum in March at Wilbarger Auditorium where they answered six tough questions provided by the public.

The moderator, Daniel Walker, asked the questions.

"My final question for you, recent conversations have been going on about community unity and we had a question submitted to us about renaming the street for Martin Luther King and we had some questions about, is there, does Vernon have a racism problem? And if you think they do, then how would you propose building unity?"

Smith: Well, I would like to say that I am not biased to any race. I would like to say that but I know that deep down inside I probably am. There are probably times that I would, you know, judge somebody. But I try to be, when I'm looking at somebody, I try not to look at what color they are. What I try to do, I try to look at their heart and their attitude. If they've got the right heart and attitude and they can work with me, I'm all for it. I'll go with it but even somebody my own color, if they don't have that attitude that I can work with and that heart that I can work with, I'm not gonna. I've always thought that I wasn't (biased), I've always told people this, if a person is willing to give me just 10 percent of themselves, I can work with them, just 10 percent and I don't know how much of that 10 percent they give but I've always thought that I can talk to people, I can love people, and I can be friendly with people. God loves me and I love them.

Williams: There is definitely a racial issue in Vernon. There's a racial issue in every town, there's a racial issue in this nation and that's something that nobody can, you know, beat around the bush with, that is a fact. What are we gonna do about it, is the question. First of all, has to come from us, the citizens in first. We have to have, we got to have a want to, to give each and every one of us, no matter what their color is a chance, a chance to see what, that person stands for, what kind of qualities, and what, what kind of things they believe in. Once you get to know someone, then you make your decision on whether you want to involve yourself around him or not. With situations like the empty lot downtown, that could be something that could definitely help the moral of the city. Different times of the year, we can put different murals at that empty lot. Different

people can come and learn about different cultures. That's something that would be great for this town because I know a lot of people don't know about the African American culture if you're not black, you're not Mexican you're not going to know a lot about the Hispanic culture until you involve yourself around it. As far as naming this street, MLK street, well MLK is a very important person to everyone, and everyone knows that and everyone knows his background and what he did for America.

I definitely understand where business owners, property owners, some citizens are coming from as far as renaming it. The tradition that they had on that street, but it comes down to what we were just talking about -- getting to know your citizens and understanding what's going on. An entire community is asking for Martin Luther King to be represented on a street and in my opinion, I feel like with the petition signed and the majority of people giving it the okay, I think that that should happen. But as a city official we do have to work with those business owners to come up with a plan as far as trying to compensate on some of the expenses. I do think it should be changed but I do think we should keep the ones who are opposed in consideration and work with them and that transition.

Baldwin: Unity is the responsibility of individuals and can't be mandated by any emphasis. Coming from the north, I have a different relationship with African American children and families and it was a little bit of a shock coming down to Texas and observing things. Nobody told me anything but I could overhear and observe. The one thing that I didn't know what to do with is at the Santa Rosa Round Up Parade when every, all the floats and horses went by, and we got up to leave and there at the end was a whole group of African American families and children. Now the children were enjoying themselves but it was self-segregated and I, it just blew me away because I still don't know how to deal with that except to invite some families that I know, please sit next to us but that has to be done in an individual basis. So I'm coming from some place a little different. I haven't lived what you have lived down here. I always try to teach my 3rd graders that, you know, that with Martin Luther King, color doesn't matter. I'd like to thank the Black churches and organizations because they focus on the family and God and that's to your credit and that's what you need

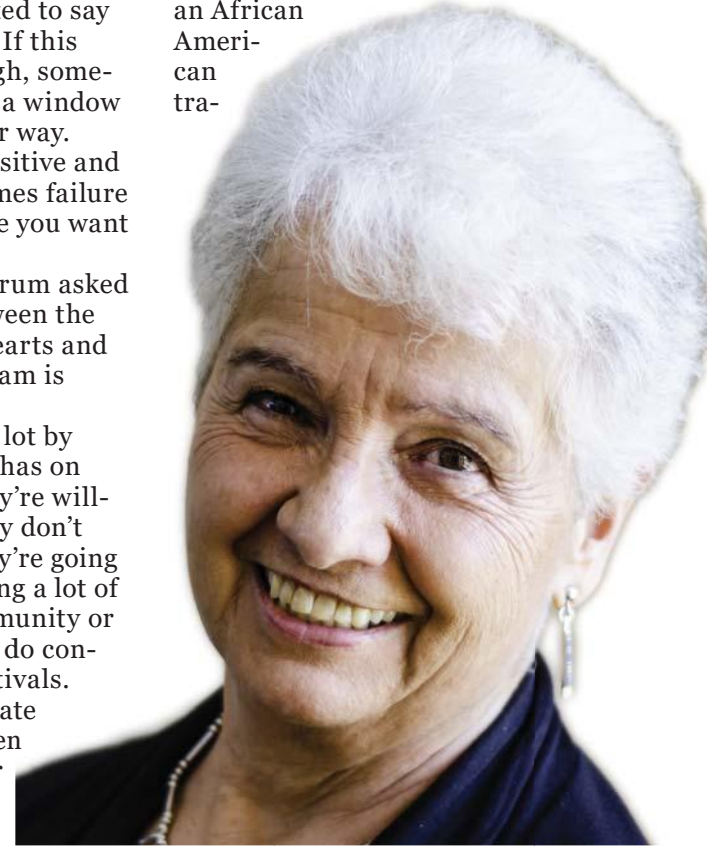
to keep on doing because that'll keep you together, all people together. What a lovely tribute and nice to see and I'm glad to see people of color at the city government meetings and thank you for being here tonight. Now, the residents of Maiden Street need to determine their own renaming. There a hundred-six address there, some of them are empty lots. My suggestion being, is send out letters to everybody on that street. If you don't get a response back from an empty lot, then their vote doesn't count. The people who are on that street get the majority of votes and that should tell you your story. Now, I happen to like basketball and I've always liked Michael Jordan. There's a short little book that I would read to my kids and I just want to quote something from it, I wanted to say to you, keep your options open. If this Maiden Street doesn't go through, something else will come, you know, a window closes, a door opens or the other way. Michael Jordan says, "Think positive and find fuel in any failure. Sometimes failure actually gets you closer to where you want to be."

The fifth question from the forum asked what to do about the space between the C&N Flower Shop and Three Hearts and also whether Main Street Program is something that's viable.

Williams: As far as the empty lot by Three Hearts, I believe the city has on standby 75,000 dollars that they're willing to put into that new lot. They don't know which or what project they're going to put there yet. I've been hearing a lot of chatter about some sort of community or town event venue where we can do concerts, where we can do food festivals. Something that's going to generate some energy downtown, I've seen a lot of cities, especially smaller towns, they do it. They do it a lot, they gather around the courthouse and that's where the empty lot is so definitely maybe a new concert venue or something along those lines. I think that's a good thing, more community events, more involvement with each other I think will be definitely something that will benefit the city. As far as the empty buildings and kind of ran down infrastructure downtown on Main Street, that is right where I'm going to be running for officer, and so we do need to look into that. We do need to work with our business and our marketing teams to try to get the word out about the venues, about those open stores, about the great people that are willing to shop there. And that's also going to create more jobs that we all need, more money into this town. The more people and the more people that have money, the more things that they can do, then the more revenue that we bring to this city.

Baldwin: I believe that Tourism Department, the Main Street Program could be the innovators of these programs. However, I do have some concerns and suggestions. I think we should leave that space open so that there's a variety of activities that can operate. Quanah has a corner situation with a building supported by beams and they hold dances and celebrations there so the more open that we can leave it, the better. I think before you pour the concrete, there are some concerns about the stabilization of the dirt underneath. That has to be taken care of. And you have

to make sure, we don't want any water leaks into the basements of the adjoining businesses on either side. So structurally, you'll have to attend to that before you begin to think who's going to dance on top of the concrete. You have to remember that Three Hearts does have a band program every Thursday night. We don't want to support any activity that would take away from supporting local businesses so maybe that can be worked out together. I have an idea about murals, I've always loved murals, professional murals, perhaps there could be a competition with a fee, and the price would be the fee... for people to come in and paint murals within that space in Vernon. We have a Cowboy tradition, we have a Native American tradition, we have an African American tra-



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 ...

Molly Baldwin
 City Commission Candidate

dition, and we have a Hispanic tradition. Why can't the murals tell the story and the history of Vernon? So I think that would be a great way to just decorate the insides. A local resident spoke to me about investors investing into some of the buildings... make downtown apartments and I had never thought about that. I know it happens in other cities but I don't know how stable the buildings are but maybe that's something to look into. Just to bring people downtown to live.

Smith: (Darien and Molly) both have great ideas and I'm all for it too. I think anything that brings tourism into Vernon, and brings us more money that we can use, I think that's the way to go. If you consider just having a business-- come in and set up, it takes about 5 years for a business to work properly and what are you doing in those 5 years, you're not, you're not really making money. The Tourism Department is important. They've got the Summer's Last Blast, Santa Rosa Rodeo, ... we've got a college rodeo, we've got the shoot-out. You know it makes sense to bring people in and the more we can draw attention to Vernon from other areas, I think we're going in the right direction because we're going to build Vernon up even if we have to get the tourists in here to do it, right? But I, that's a positive thing, and I look forward to Tourism and Main Street Board going further in the right direction.

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Sample Ballot 12000010110002

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Para Comisionado, Puesto 1
 Don Smith
 Justin Marsh
 Molly Baldwin

Comissioner Place 2
Para Comisionado, Puesto 2
 Pam Gosline
 Darien Williams

Mayor
Alcalde
 Doug Jeffrey

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