

CITIZENS POLICE REVIEW BOARD

Blacks, Whites Hold Vigil in Support of Police Review Board

By DAVID L. DILLARD
Chronicle Staff Writer

Nearly 200 people representing different races and socioeconomic statuses held a rally and silent vigil at city hall Monday night, which many feel was a dress rehearsal for the rally to be held Monday night at the Board of Aldermen meeting.

The protesters, organized by Larry Womble, a former alderman and representative of Citizens United for Justice, assembled to show community support for the Citizens Police Review Board.

"We're gathered here to inform the city that we like to see a vote to keep the Citizens Police Review Board," Womble said. "We're committed to those things that will unite us, rather than divide us."

Rana Holcomb, a spokesperson for Crossing 52 Initiative, noted the many strides the community has made to bring

different races together. She said the board's vote hurt many efforts to create harmony.

"There are issues in this community that have to be addressed and the only way is to stand together," she said. "Five people attempted to take away the review board; we're attempting to restore it. We're trying to make Winston-Salem one community, not a black community or a white community."

Several clergymen, including the Rev. Richard Groves of Wake Forest Baptist Church, encouraged people to sit on board and committees to ensure equal justice. He said the actions of boards and committees affect everyone and with positive people on them, their actions will have a positive effect on the community.

The Rev. John Mendez, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church and one of the vigil organizers, offered an olive branch to the Winston-Salem Police Department but encouraged them to treat all citizens with respect.

"We are not against the police. I think we have some of the finest police officers in the country here in Winston-Salem," he told a cheering audience. "Sometimes there are bad apples in the bunch... and we want to maintain the high standards of the police department to guarantee safety for the entire community."

Mendez said the move to abolish the review board was the "result of a narrow-minded young man" who "hasn't grown up yet." He also condemned the other board members for seeing Nordlander as an "opportunity" to push their previously established agenda.

"I still have faith in him (Nordlander) and he will grow up, but the other board members should have tried to help him," Mendez said. "Still we refuse to be left out until East Winston is lifted up. And then we can really have an All-America city."



Rev. John Mendez

Groups Seek To Oust Robert Nordlander

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Last week, the five white aldermen voted in favor of abolishing the review board, while the three black aldermen opposed.

Nordlander, a 23-year-old political novice, upset incumbent Larry Womble in the Southeast Ward last November. Womble's unexpected defeat gave white aldermen the balance of power on the board — although the board is split along lines.

Former Alderman Virginia Newell said she

decided to leave because she could foresee "divisiveness" on the board of aldermen.

"A group of five people are running Winston-Salem," she said. "We have some of the greatest people here, both black and white, but... the board is not going anywhere and that's why I left. I don't think they represent the interest of the people in the community."

The four groups decided to survey voters in the Southeast Ward to possibly recall Nordlander. After the

vote at the April 18 meeting, Nordlander said that he was keeping a campaign promise and if people don't like his decision, they should challenge him at the polls.

"If people don't like how an alderman handled a certain case, they should remove that person," he said.

Many of the community leaders said they are exploring that option. An alderman's election can be recalled if 25 percent of the voters in that ward sign a

petition.

Also they collectively decided to stop doing business with people who are "creating divisiveness" and employ selective buying tactics to show the importance of African Americans.

"We're outraged and the people feel like they have been let down," Mendez said. "But they're not just dealing with angry folks. This is righteous indignation."

Alderman Nordlander Won't Seek Police Escort

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be abolished, said he is against police brutality, but feels the board of aldermen should hear complaints about police instead of the 11-member group of "appointed citizens." "I'm not going to let officers do what they want to do," he said. "I have no problem reviewing complaints against officers, I have a problem delegating it to appointed citizens."

Bill Tatum, president of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said he held what he called a "fairly decent" meeting with Nordlander on Tuesday to show him benefits of the review board. Tatum said the police-review board could save both the NAACP and the board of alderman time by hearing police brutality cases.

"The NAACP's position is that the police-review board stay in place," he said. "We have boards already in place now that take the weight off the board of aldermen. They don't have time to hear every complaint."

Tatum said the review board serves the same purpose as the zoning board, human relations commission and other specialized boards that review cases.

Still, Nordlander contends that the Public Safety Committee and the



Robert Nordlander

police internal affairs division are better suited to hear complaints against officers.

Alderman Vivian Burke, chairperson of the Public Safety Committee disagrees.

"In cases before, they (public safety committee) have taken the view that the city manager and the chief of police should hear them," she said. "It was difficult to get what you would call a fair hearing. People feel more comfortable with the review board."

Burke, who was among organizers of the review board, hopes the aldermen will vote to keep the

review board Monday night.

"I hope as a result of all that has taken place — citizens, business people, black, white, rich and poor working together to save the review board — they will think about what is good for the community before they vote — if we're really concerned about moving this city in the right direction."

At the last board meeting, the five white aldermen voted to abolish the review board; the three black aldermen voted to keep it.

Although the vote went along racial lines, Nordlander said it was not a racial vote.

"It shows a difference of opinion on how to run the city, a difference in what the aldermen want," he said. "I'm under the assumption that when the (review) board was implemented it wasn't a racial issue, why is it considered that way now?"

Some black business owners said the aldermen's racially divided vote could hurt the city's chances of luring potential businesses to Win-

ston-Salem.

Lafayette Jones of Segmented Marketing Services Inc. said many black-oriented events such as the CIAA Tournament and the National Black Theatre Festival generate thousands of dollars to the city.

"We have probably a lot more leverage than we think," he said. "This city is trying to grow and the larger community should not let (racism) get in the way of business."

Ed McCarter of Special Occasions Gift Shop said that when many

businesses re-locate, they are concerned about how minorities fair in the school system and the local government.

"Black and white relationships is what people want to know about," McCarter said. "When you narrow it down, that's what businesses are concerned about. People are really naive to think we have grown in an environment where those two things are not paramount."

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Fred W. Nordenholz, president of the chamber, said the executive committee believes that the police-review board has not had long enough time to establish a record on which to be objectively evaluated. He said the police-review board is considered "an important element in bridging relationships between whites and African Americans."

"Abolishing it now could have an immediate negative effect on the many initiatives now under way to improve race relations," Nordenholz said.

The police-review board was conceived after several incidents between members of the black community and white police officers, including the strangulation death of Sheila Ann McKellar, who died in police custody. Independent investigations by the Winston-Salem Police Department Internal Affairs Division, the District Attorney's Office and the state Department of Justice exonerated the police officers.

In February 1993, the board of aldermen voted along racial lines creating a 4-4 tie for the review



Mayor Martha Wood

board, forcing Mayor Martha Wood to cast the deciding vote. Wood said she would "absolutely" vote for it to stay in tact if the aldermen's vote ended in a tie Monday night.

"We have a lot of hard work to do in this community," she said. "We must continue to strengthen our economic base. For that entire effort to be successful, we must all learn to get along together."

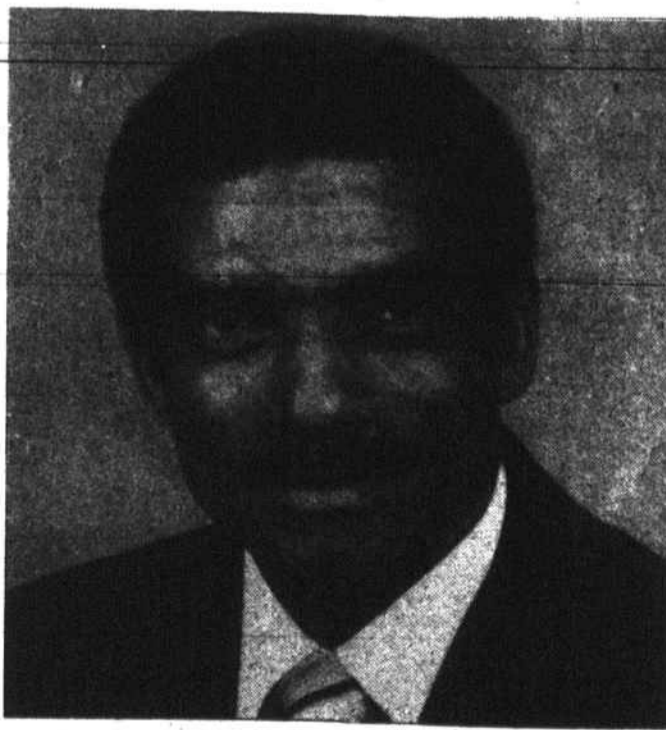
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CLARIFICATION

Jennifer Martin, a sophomore at Wake Forest University, was the coordinator of the symposium on Violence in Society held April 4. The event was sponsored by Poteat-Huffman Residence Hall.

This information was omitted from a story on this symposium in the April 7 edition. The Chronicle regrets this omission.

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