

Jennie Dotts for 7th District Interim City Council Seat

6 January 2009

Dear Neighbor:

Following today's special election, City Council will appoint a representative from our community to fill the 7th District Council seat to be vacated by Delores McQuinn. I would like to ask you to support my appointment to this interim position. Born in Richmond, I first moved to Church Hill in 1986 and returned in 1993 after an educational career in Boston and Washington. I remember the days when Church Hill was in decline, "red-lining" was common, and at-risk youth, like homeless animals, considered disposable. Nevertheless, I was drawn to Church Hill: its remarkable mix of people, beautiful architecture and enviable history. Since I've been here, I've worked to improve the quality of life for all our residents, and to protect the assets that attracted so many of us to this richly diverse, uniquely historic area.

Many know me as a preservationist, who as the first director of the Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods (A.C.O.R.N.), focused serious attention on the problem of vacant and abandoned properties in the city's oldest neighborhoods. Last year, I took my interest in preservation to a new level by starting a business—Old House Authority—which connects owners of older buildings with those hard-to-find artisans and experts who understand historic properties and know how to fix them.

During my tenure at A.C.O.R.N., we rescued over 100 buildings that would have been lost through demolition or neglect, many right here in the Church Hill, Union Hill, Fairmount and Fulton. But we did more than save buildings; we rebuilt lives as well by putting families—many first-time homebuyers-- in those houses. I escorted prospective buyers to nearly collapsed buildings and helped them envision the potential within. I organized walking tours and educational programs that helped to repopulate Union Hill and Venable Street, which at the time had the city's highest levels of vacant, abandoned and tax delinquent properties. These neighborhoods were reclaimed from drug activity and criminal violence one building at a time by those of us who believed in our power to make a difference.

While at A.C.O.R.N. I started a project called "Richmond Roots" to identify and preserve buildings built by or lived in by blacks in the hope that these buildings would help tell the stories about the unsung heroes upon whose backs and with whose ingenuity this city was built. I obtained a contract to produce a book on the subject. "Built by Blacks," now in its second reprint, is the result of that project.

My commitment to my community also includes:

- Membership on the Richmond Slave Trail Commission, where I helped spearhead the first archaeological survey of Lumpkin's Jail in Shockoe Bottom, assisted with the development of the Slave Trail through Shockoe Bottom, and helped orchestrate the installation of the Reconciliation Statue;

- Co-founding with Councilwoman McQuinn the East End Teen Center to provide training, education and opportunities for at-risk youth;
- Efforts to rescue a block of vacant and neglected buildings in Church Hill North where the Robinson Theatre has been recently renovated and where the East End Teen Center will be located in the adjacent former railway station;
- Efforts to preserve the historic Murphy Hotel, MCV West Hospital and other state-owned landmarks downtown. The new city Master Plan addresses many of our arguments about the need to coordinate City of Richmond and Commonwealth of VA planning and recognize the importance of preservation to economic development;
- Serving on the board of the Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club, where I organized activities with the Virginia Opera, Concert Ballet of VA, Virginia Museum and Science Museum;
- Co-founding Save Our Shelters (SOS), a nonprofit responsible for improvements at the Richmond Animal Shelter; focusing statewide attention on dog-fighting (a decade *before* Michael Vick's conviction); securing legislation mandating higher penalties for animal abuse and the passage of a spay/neuter ordinance in Richmond;
- Co-founding SOS's successful Pen Pals program, which has placed cats and dogs in correctional facilities throughout Virginia for care, training and rehabilitation while providing inmates with valuable skills and personal reward;
- A founding role in the Richmond Animal Welfare Foundation to raise private funds for our city shelter.

We were fortunate to have the powerful advocacy of Councilwoman McQuinn, who in her 10 years of service built many coalitions that have served us well. She was a strong ally of mine, securing support from the city for historic preservation, African American history, and animal welfare projects that I helped to advance. We need a representative who can step into the job to advocate as strongly as she did for one of the most socially and economically complex districts in the city. I can do this. Look at my record and I think you'll agree that I have the knowledge and the nerve. I would like to ask for your support for my appointment to the 7th District seat. If you do support me, it would be helpful for you contact members of City Council and the Mayor on my behalf.

I would enjoy hearing from you at 804-648-1616 or jennie@oldhouseauthority.com.

Sincerely,

Jennie Dotts

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