

Miller, White well-suited to join council incumbents

Today The Star Editorial Board offers recommendations in City-County Council districts 17-25:

District 17

Mary Moriarty Adams was infuriated early this year when state legislators "got bogged down in social issues" and could not reach a vote on a mass transit plan for Central Indiana.

Practical matters have been the trademark of the Eastside Democrat's six terms on the City-County Council. She's placed sidewalks, streets, troubled housing -- and a crying need for bus service -- above both ideology and sports palaces, and earned bipartisan respect for her consistency.

Republican Gary Whitmore is her opponent, as he was in 2007. The lifelong Eastsider shares the incumbent's concerns about infrastructure and crime. His disadvantage is in the nuts and bolts, particularly when it comes to paying for added services.

The economically stressed area needs a councilor with proven ability to deliver the help. Mary Adams is the one.

District 18

Vernon Brown says a hike in the county option income tax cost his party its City-County Council majority and the mayor's office in 2007.

But it was the right thing, a necessity for public safety, the Democrat insists; and he believes the public will accept such sacrifice if the purpose is made clear.

As the two-term representative of a Far-Eastside district in dire need of services, Brown holds to no taboo about taxes. But he's sought alternatives just as boldly. He has incurred the ire of the police union, for example, by advocating an increase in the now-nominal fee for use of city cars and other equipment by employers of moonlighting police.

How it's spent matters as much as how it's raised, Brown contends. If the city can pour \$12 million into a pedestrian mall along Georgia Street, he says, people in his district should not have to "wait in a ditch for IndyGo."

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Those constituents have not had to worry about Brown's priorities. Republican Michael Heady is a longtime Eastsider with keen concerns about crime and blight, but the battle-tested incumbent should continue to lead the fight.

District 19

Democrat Dane Mahern, who is completing a second term in representing this Near-Southside district, showed promise when first elected eight years ago that he would emerge as one of the stronger, more leaders on the council. Instead, Mahern has become one of its more partisan members.

Now, the potential for strong leadership rests with Republican challenger Jeff Miller, a product manager at a software firm who has been highly active in the community. Miller has served as president of the Fletcher Place Neighborhood Association. Since 2006, he's also been a board member of the Southeast Neighborhood Development organization. In that role, he's worked on master plan development, neighborhood beautification and infrastructure repair, all issues of special importance in older neighborhoods on the Southside.

Miller has worked hard to understand the complex challenges facing his district and he has shown a willingness to look beyond party labels. He's ready to move to a higher position of leadership.

District 20

Republican Susie Day, who is completing a

second term on the council, knows her district on a deep level. But she's also worked to gain a firm understanding of issues facing the broader community such as transit, public safety and the need to upgrade streets, sidewalks and bridges.

Day's opponent, Democrat Frank Mascari, is a small business owner who has strong ties to Beech Grove. Unfortunately, in an interview with the Editorial Board, Mascari displayed little interest in issues beyond Beech Grove's borders.

Council members need to serve their districts effectively but also have to be able to dig into countywide concerns. Day has done both. She should be given four more years to serve the district and the county.

District 21

Voters in this district have two strong, capable candidates from which to choose -- Republican incumbent Ben Hunter and Democratic challenger Todd Woodmansee.

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Woodmansee, an attorney and small business owner, would be a very capable member of the council. And as a former deputy attorney general and deputy prosecutor in the Domestic Violence Unit, he also would offer expertise on important matters of public policy.

However, Hunter, a former Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department officer who is now the police chief for Butler University, is one of the more impressive members of the council. He's worked hard to help leaders of the various public safety agencies in the county to communicate and cooperate more effectively.

He's also willing to challenge the status quo, including making the case that IMPD and the Sheriff's Department continue to duplicate too many services.

Hunter says that if elected, this would be his last term on the council. He's earned four more years in which to continue to make a lasting difference.

District 22

The race to replace retiring four-term Republican Bob Cockrum pits two veterans of government service to the Southwestside district.

Democrat Doug White, a member and former president of the Wayne Township Board, offers the more detailed agenda for dealing with crime, mass transit, jobs and other concerns. He wants to take on some big sources of dissatisfaction: city hall, for what he sees as lack of dialogue with

neighborhoods; and Indianapolis International Airport, for land holdings some of which he thinks should be on his struggling district's tax rolls.

Republican Jason Holliday is former Decatur Township assessor and served as a township administrator for Decatur. He would bring municipal savvy to the council seat, but his program for action is sketchy compared to White's. Put another way, White is more of a departure from the popular but laid-back Cockrum, and the district and city need that.

In a contest between two competent candidates, the nod goes to White.

District 23

Incumbent Republican Jeff Cardwell had a daunting task four years ago -- take over a seat long held by former council president Phil Borst.

Cardwell is understandably not yet on

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Borst's level of service, but he has completed a solid four years of representing this Southside district.

Cardwell serves as chairman of the council's Economic Development Committee, a job he is especially well suited for because of his many years of operating a successful business in the city.

Cardwell was a strong advocate for selling the water and sewer works to Citizens Energy, arguing that the deal would not only provide \$425 million for infrastructure repairs but also help local businesses by providing stable services.

Neither Democrat Scott Coxey nor Libertarian Kent Raquet has been able to make the case that he would make a better representative than the incumbent.

Caldwell has earned another four years on the council.

District 24

Two incumbents are pitted against each other in this Southside district, Libertarian Ed Coleman and Republican Jack Sandlin.

Coleman, a Republican at the time, was elected as an at-large member of the council four years ago. But he soon jumped parties and became the only Libertarian member of the council. That move has served to marginalize Coleman's influence, even as someone who was elected to serve the entire county.

Coleman would have even less ability to get

things done if elected to represent a single district. That's because he has not shown the ability to forge alliances or work effectively with other members of the council.

Coleman also is prone to sweeping statements that strain credibility. In an interview with the Editorial Board, for instance, Coleman claimed that he was working on a plan to cut \$250 million from the city and county budgets. But he was unable to provide specifics.

The district's current representative, Jack Sandlin, filled a seat vacated by Mike Speedy, who was elected to the Indiana General Assembly last year.

Sandlin is a former longtime police officer as well as a two-term Perry Township trustee. Questions of nepotism were raised during Sandlin's stint in the trustee office. And voters should weigh that aspect of Sandlin's past on Election Day.

But in the present, Sandlin is likely to be a

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more effective representative on the council than Coleman because of his willingness to listen to and work with others.

District 25

Republican Aaron Freeman was selected last year to fill the seat vacated by Lincoln Plowman, a former council member and Indianapolis police officer who was under federal investigation at the time. Plowman has since been convicted on bribery and extortion charges.


Freeman, an attorney and former deputy prosecutor, has the experience and skill to develop into a first-rate leader on the council. He's focused primarily for now on ensuring that this Southeast side district receives the road and sidewalk improvements that it has long needed.

Democrat Mario Garza, a firefighter, is running for public office out of a sincere desire to further serve the community, but he displayed only a shallow understanding of major issues facing the city such as transit, budgeting and economic development.

Libertarian Kevin Vail also is on the ballot.

Although still a newcomer to the council, Freeman has shown he has the leadership skills and depth of knowledge needed for him to serve the district well over the next four years.

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