

Lining Up Behind County Council Candidates

By Rosalind S. Helderman
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Endorsements have begun in earnest in support of candidates running in the special election for the District 5 seat on the County Council.

Voters will go to the polls April 1 for a primary election and May 6 for a general election to replace state Sen. [David Harrington](#) (D-Prince George's), who left the council to fill the seat left open by the January death of [Sen. Gwendolyn T. Britt](#) (D-Prince George's).

Harrington has endorsed former aide [Andrea Harrison](#), as has Sen. [Nathaniel Exum](#) (D-Prince George's). (A dust-up occurred when the senators' names appeared on a flier as hosts of a fundraiser for Harrison. Senators are, by state law, not allowed to host fundraisers during the legislative session, which lasts into next month. The senators and Harrison said the flier was a mistake by her campaign, and she quickly distributed a version without their names.) Teacher and community activist [Theresa Mitchell Dudley](#) has received the backing of the Prince Georges' County Educators' Association. Edmonston Mayor [Adam Ortiz](#) has been endorsed by Progressive Cheverly and the [Sierra Club](#).

As of Tuesday, no word on which candidate other county unions would back, including the Fraternal Order of Police, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 400 and [Service Employees International Union Local](#) 1199, which represents workers in the Prince George's hospital system.

[Adrian J. Howell](#), who used to work for County Executive [Jack B. Johnson](#) (D) as liaison to the council, has not received his ex-boss's formal support. But Howell held a fundraiser this week whose hosts included top Johnson allies and employees, including Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Government Operations [David Byrd](#) and former Department of Environmental Resources director [Donna M.P. Wilson](#), according to an event invitation.

At a candidates forum hosted by Progressive Cheverly last week, the contenders echoed similar themes, saying they would make health care, education and public safety priorities.

A question directed first to Howell asked candidates to assess Johnson's tenure as executive. ("Let's see how he handles *that one*," an audience member chortled.) Howell responded generally, not mentioning Johnson by name, saying the county has issues it should address, particularly improving economic development. That set the tone for the others, until Ortiz, a frequent Johnson critic, fielded the question.

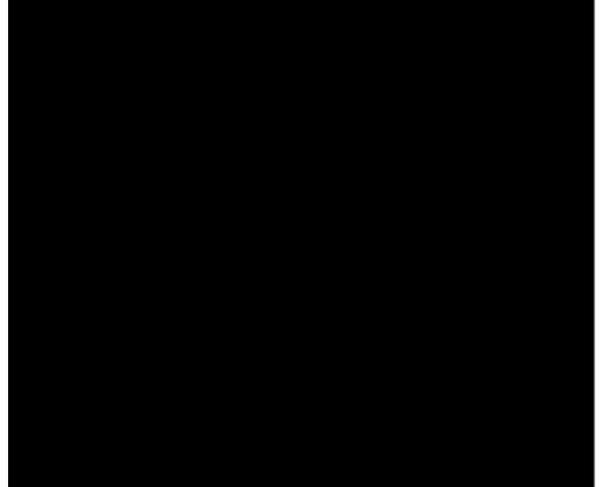
He referenced the recent involuntary manslaughter conviction of former Prince George's homeland security official [Keith A. Washington](#) as a Johnson appointee not qualified for his job. "I feel very strongly Mr. Johnson has not kept his eye on the ball," Ortiz said.

In response to other questions, Dudley reminded the audience of her vocal opposition to the building of what is now [FedEx Field](#) and said promised investments in the surrounding community have not been made. "I'm still looking for that money," she said.

In response to questions about development -- some candidates emphasized the need for mixed-use projects at Metro stations, as well as workforce housing -- Harrison stressed the knowledge she has gained from working in Harrington's office.

"Most of you know that land use in the county is very cumbersome and complicated. Working together, we do these things," she said. "We can't just be pointing fingers."

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Asked about environmental issues, Ortiz stressed his Sierra Club cred and talked about his work with community leaders fighting the building of a concrete batching plant. Howell chimed in that the concrete plant, proposed in an industrial part of the district, is "nothing but a case of environmental racism, and we cannot tolerate it in our county."

The final contender at the forum, former school board candidate *Sherry James-Strother*, a nurse, emphasized her hard work with community groups and her knowledge of public health issues. She urged the audience to ignore whose campaign signs are bigger and who collects the most money and to back her effort.

"Endorsements are fine," she said. "But it's about hard work. It's about hitting the sidewalk."

Broadwater Behind the Scenes

At last week's news conference announcing a county-state deal to stabilize the Prince George's hospital system, Johnson thanked so many people for their hard work that reporters, lobbyists and others in the back of the room were quietly joking that they had stumbled into the Academy Awards.

But he singled out one man for praise who had not previously been involved publicly with the negotiations: former state senator *Tommie Broadwater Jr.* Sure enough, Broadwater, the first African American from [Prince George's County](#) elected to the state Senate, attended the conference and stood proudly behind Gov. [Martin O'Malley](#) (D), Johnson and other legislative leaders.

"We appreciate your role in all of this. You made all of us listen to you," Johnson told Broadwater at the news conference.

What exactly was his role? That is unclear. He reportedly took part in meetings with state and legislative leaders. In his own words, Broadwater said his role was that of "just a citizen, being there, helping them make sure they advanced."

He noted that he has been a patient at the hospital twice, once with heart trouble and once because of colon problems. "I could talk to them from that standpoint," he said.

Broadwater is considered a dean of county politics, and his advice is often sought on all kinds of political topics. He has many admirers who respect his ability to bring county leaders together.

Broadwater also has detractors. They note that he owns and operates a strip club, not exactly a natural nexus with health care. And in 1983, he was convicted of food stamp fraud at a supermarket he owned in Fairmount Heights. He spent four months in a federal penitentiary and lost his Senate seat.

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