

Down but not out!

These City Council candidates voiced new and progressive ideas. And Worcester Voters rejected them! Guess what? They ain't going away.

A peek at their future plans.

By Brain Goslow

With almost 80 percent of eligible voters having taken a pass on participating in the recent Worcester City Council election, it's time to take a look at why the turnout was so low - and what can be done to turn things around. For starters, more attention could be paid to potential candidates on a regular basis, not just in the months prior to voting day. And while we should applaud those who've earned new council seats, it's equally as important to ensure that the voices of those who didn't win election continue to be heard. InCity Times spoke with five of those candidates about what they'll be doing in the months ahead and their thoughts on the election.

DENNIS IRISH

Irish says he hoped the city would act on some of the recommendations of the Homeless Commission Task Force on which he sits before he leaves office.

Community Wellness Coalition and Pathways to Progress, two organizations which took on similar studies with little progress. The new organization recognizes a lack of civic engagement led to some of that failure. They hope to make a "vital contribution" to the region through the convening of citizen forums that encompass a wide representation of diverse groups and individuals and the compilation of reports that will

weren't the ministers, the priests and the rabbis preaching to their congregationalists on Saturdays and Sundays that whether you're a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim we all have an obligation to take care of the disadvantaged?"

Another disappointment for Irish was the city's inability to adopt any kind of needle exchange program. "I'm supportive of this harm and risk reduction program that includes needle exchange that was defeated by the Worcester City Council and never went anywhere in the six years I was on the council because quite clearly the majority of the council didn't want to deal with it," he says. "If you're not going to adopt harm and risk reduction, then we're going to see the legalization of the sale of needles and syringes and that doesn't lead to encouraging people to get into recovery. Needle exchange is the lesser of two evils but it would be one

taking credit, the NIMBY's taking credit and frankly, I think they're wrong," Irish says.

Worcester residents should expect to keep seeing and hearing the name Dennis Irish in the local media. "I am going to do everything I can to retain as high a profile as I can even though I'm no longer in office," he says. "I intend to continue to work on the issues I worked on as a councilor and that I frankly worked on before I was a councilor. People have asked me if I intend to run again in two years. I'm not sure what I'll be doing in two weeks, let alone two years," Irish says. "I'm going to remain engaged [in the community] and watch the actions of the council. If in a year's time I feel that I could make a contribution, I'd would run again. If they're doing fine without me, I don't need to be engaged in politics."

LYNNE SIMONDS

way of life and make them available for the widest possible use in serving its people. "They're using healthy community in a very broad sense," Irish says. "It includes housing and access to health care services."

Irish says he hoped the city would act on some of the recommendations of the Homeless Commission Task Force on which he sits before he leaves office. "I asked the manager to bring a report back to us relative to where we stand on their implementation," he says. Even if that occurs, the report will most likely be referred to the council's housing committee, which will probably only meet one more time prior to Irish's departure. "Maybe we can state a list of priorities between now and the end of my term which would simply be to suggest that we do get a focused formal policy on the issue of homelessness," he says. "I would attempt to encourage the adoption of such policy early on in the new council."

One of the major campaign issues was the placing of social service agencies in Worcester neighborhoods. Irish says he was "very disappointed" that during the debate little was heard from the faith community. "Where was there moral outrage?" he says. "We didn't hear from them. I don't want to tar everybody with that brush. The Roman Catholic bishop of Worcester was involved with the Central Mass Housing Alliance and the Worcester Area Mission Society are very involved in social issues but by and large, there's a lot of silence. Why

going to reduce the spread of HIV, AIDS, and hepatitis."

The state senate recently tabled legislation which would have allowed the sale of needles at pharmacies to those over 18 with proper IDs. "That thing got ground to a halt - talk about bad timing - after that youngster who pulled a needle and said he was going to jab the girl at the ATM in Westborough," Irish says. "That night the kid does that and now the senate is sitting on the bill. His actions will cause people to continue to be infected with the AIDS virus. That wasn't his intention but the consequence is we don't have clean needles available to stop the spread of disease."

Irish's willingness to speak his mind on issues may have ended up his undoing as a councilor. "Every time you take a position, you alienate somebody," he says. "The greatest disappointment I have is that I'm confident that while I may disagree with those people on one issue, I'm confident that there's a lot more agreement between us than there is disagreement." While he's disappointed in having lost reelection, especially on behalf of those who've supported him, he feels there's a number of individuals and organizations incorrectly taking credit for his defeat. "[You had] Gary [Vecchio of the Shrewsbury Street Neighborhood Association, a loud advocate of the city having a PILOT, payment-in-lieu-of-taxes program] taking credit, anti-fluoridation's



Other than taking a few weeks off before evaluating her recent campaign for the councilor seat for District 4, it's business as usual for Lynne Simonds. That means staying constantly engaged with the community. She's already announced her intention to run again in 2007.

"One hundred percent, we'll just keep increasing our base," she says. "I'm happy to say I must have kept the 350 votes I got the first time [in 2003] as a write-in and then got another 500 more in a neighborhood that's hard to get the vote out. We just need to register more people. I think that a lot of people, especially the people on the Piedmont side of Pleasant Street are very very disenfranchised and when they get disenfranchised, they don't vote."

They've also got different priorities than those who live on the outskirts of the city. "It's a poor district," Simonds says. "The people here have other issues more important than voting, like putting



City Councilor at-Large Dennis Irish is already looking for new ways to serve the people of Worcester after he leaves office in January. He has already begun to turn his attention to serving as a board member of the leadership council of Common Pathways, a recently formed initiative aimed at engaging Worcester residents on quality of life issues; that position came about not due to his role as a City Councilor, but as a result of his "day job" at St. Vincent's Hospital as Vice President of Government, Community, and Regulatory Affairs for Vanguard Health Systems. Other members of the leadership council include Billy Ayala of Centro Las Americas, and Allmerica Financial Corporation/Hanover Insurance President and CEO Fred Eppinger. Their first public forum is scheduled for Wednesday, November 30 at 5:30 p.m. at the YWCA in Salem Square.

"It's a platform that will permit me to continue to be involved in issues that are of interest to me," Irish says. Common Pathways is a "Healthy Communities" initiative formed through the merger of the