

# baltimoresun.com

11th District

## 9 candidates compete for Mitchell seat

### Cole leading rest of field in fundraising

By Brent Jones

Sun reporter

September 1, 2007

If the old saying, "Money is the mother's milk of politics," is true, then William Cole appears to have a big advantage in the District 11 City Council race, where nine candidates are vying for the seat to be vacated in December by Keiffer J. Mitchell Jr.

Mitchell, who has held the seat for 12 years, decided not to seek re-election because he's running in the Democratic mayoral primary election. District 11 includes Bolton Hill, Reservoir Hill, Otterbein, Federal Hill, Mount Vernon and a number of West Baltimore neighborhoods.

Cole -- thanks to hefty fundraising, major endorsements and name recognition -- has emerged as the candidate to beat, according to political observers.

Campaign financial reports filed last month show that Cole, 34, has raised nearly \$70,000 -- more than the combined total raised by the other eight candidates in the race.

Cole's name has a familiar ring to some district voters because he served as a delegate in the General Assembly from 1998 to 2002. And he has picked up endorsements from Gov. Martin O'Malley, U.S. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings and other state and local politicians.

Some of the other candidates have acknowledged that they're fighting an uphill battle against Cole.

"Bill Cole has the machine. He has big business, the establishment," said Nick Mosby, an electrical engineer and a candidate for the seat.

And Cole appears confident about his chances of winning.

"I've had a successful fundraising effort. I'm not at all ashamed of the fact that I've raised a lot of money. That shows I have support," Cole said. "If having a governor and congressman's support makes you part of the establishment, I accept that label. Particularly Cummings, for him to say that I'm most prepared to lead this district, I consider that a great honor and not a burden."

There are no Republicans running in District 11 in the Sept. 11 primary election. In addition to Cole and Mosby, the other Democratic candidates are: Fred Mason III, an architect; Adam S. Meister, an Internet entrepreneur; Brandon Thornton, a public defender, Karen Brown, a minister; Warren Zussman, business owner; and community activists Dana Owens and Rita Collins.

Cole's biggest challenge could come from Mason, who has raised more than \$25,000 for his campaign, the second-highest total among the candidates.

Mason, 35, said he is focusing his platform on education, rebuilding neighborhoods and public safety. Mason said the city should devote a majority of each year's budget increases to maintaining school buildings, use city-owned property as a path to homeownership and put more police officers on the street for foot patrols.

Mason is also seeking to be the first openly gay man elected to the council.

"That's important for me in setting an example of what can be done. That you can be who you are and be successful," Mason said "It also adds a voice to elected service that has been missing."

Mason said he lives, works and worships in the district, where he is known for his involvement with the Reservoir Hill Improvement Council Housing Committee and volunteer work with AIDS Action and Rebuilding Together.

"I've also worked in the federal government, interned with Kweisi Mfume and Paul Sarbanes, and worked with the state budget dealing with capital improvement and construction. That range is a major asset to the district," Mason said.

Mosby, 28, lives in Reservoir Hill and is a first-time office-seeker. His campaign focuses on reducing crime and rehabilitating the thousands of vacant homes in the city. He has caught the attention of political observers and other candidates, including Cole, who say he lacks name recognition, but is mounting a vigorous grass-roots campaign.

Mosby said he would like to see residents patrolling the streets and the formation of a citywide gang unit. Mosby said he will propose the creation of a program that would teach ex-offenders how to fix some of the city's dilapidated houses, which could then be sold back to the offenders.

Mosby also said he will push for quarterly audits of all city agencies. "We would see where the money is going and hold people accountable," said Mosby.

Meister, 30, has been running through the streets that make up the district and talking up his platform, which includes a focus on cleaner neighborhoods and the environment. Meister said he runs at least 5 miles a day.

Meister, who operates an Internet company that provides marketing research for software companies, started the Buy a Block program in Reservoir Hill, where a loose collective of 13 people bought houses in a concentrated area in the name of urban redevelopment.

"It was just an idea. I scribbled it down, and it's become a reality. I don't think any of the other candidates can say, 'Come to this point and see what I've done,'" Meister said.

Meister said his experience with the project, along with his organized cleanups and attendance at neighborhood meetings, has prepared him to represent the district. He said to keep the city clean, he would look to create an offenders' registry list for contractors who dump garbage in the alleys.

"It's the only way it's going to stop," he said.

Thornton, 30, is an assistant public defender who said his work with youths in the judicial system made him want to run for office.

A Reservoir Hill resident, Thornton said he would look to develop initiatives similar to the work he has done with the Back to Basics program, which teaches youths career-oriented skills. "Kids are bombarded with a lot of images, and they need direction. If you ignore them, then their problems are going to become your problems," Thornton said.

Brown serves as the executive director of Madison Avenue Family Life Center. A Presbyterian minister, Brown, 43, says she has raised \$14 million since 1992 for the center but has grown tired of seeking funds for the community from the outside.

"Now it's time to be inside of City Hall. As I look at some of the other candidates, I'm the only candidate that's been working this community," she said.

Zussman, 55, owns an advertising company, lives in Mount Vernon and said he has worked on campaigns for O'Malley, former Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke and former Gov. Parris N. Glendening.

He said the two most important issues facing the district are AIDS and crime, and that he advocates giving police officers more money.

Owens, 56, works as chaplain for the Western District Community Association.

A member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Health Education Resource Organization,

Owens lists restoration of the many historically significant buildings in the district as a key issue on his Web site.

Collins, 35, has worked with the National Council of Negro Women, the NAACP and the Harlem Blossom Neighborhood Association.

She lists education as a priority and said the city should seek funds from privately owned businesses.

As for Cole, he says education is his priority and the key to fixing all the city's problems. He said he supports an end to the city-state partnership that runs city schools.

Cole says he would find ways to bring police officers up to equal pay with surrounding jurisdictions and support regular foot patrols. Cole also said he would look to establish an office of Community Reinvestment at the Baltimore Development Corp. to work with residential communities outside of the Inner Harbor.

Cole lives in the Otterbein and represented the former 47th District in the state legislature. He is an administrator at the University of Baltimore and worked as a special assistant to Cummings.

He said he voted and actively fought against the passage of electricity deregulation in Maryland while serving as a delegate.

"I looked at there being a void of an experienced leader in this district with Keiffer leaving," Cole said. "But I'm beholden to no interest. Just look at my voting record."

[brent.jones@baltsun.com](mailto:brent.jones@baltsun.com)