



17th Ward Update

By Tina Pihl, 17th Ward Alderwoman

ALMOST A YEAR AS ALDER

My first year as 17th Ward alderwoman has been nothing short of exhausting, exciting and nearly indescribable. Thankfully, I said “nearly,” so here’s my account of my experience as almost a year of being an alderwoman. It is like running a start-up — fast-paced, minimal resources, learning by doing and envisioning long-term impact. I am creating a 17th Ward office to be innovative in its approach to equitable development, public safety, infrastructure improvements and community engagement. Through it all, my guiding principles of Accountability, Community and Equity have kept me grounded.

As an alderwoman, I am here to serve you. My door is always open and I’m a phone call away. If you see me out and about in the neighborhood, please stop and say “hi.”

Here is my role in your district: I’m responsible for constituent services, infrastructure maintenance (streets, trees, trash dumpsters), community engagement and legislation. I serve on the following committees:

- Streets, Traffic & Refuse
- Parks & Environmental Matters
- Conventions, Tourism, Arts & Humanities
- Intergovernmental Affairs

During my initial weeks in office, I created a first-of-its-kind program, the Equitable Development Contribution for the City of St. Louis. It compels developers to invest in affordable housing, kick-started with \$1.8 million dollars from the developer of the City Foundry STL. The funds help maintain affordable housing in STL and mitigate displacement of residents

from their neighborhood, as St. Louis neighborhoods revitalize. St. Louis is thinking differently about what is possible in terms of development in the strong midtown real estate corridor. This is the first of hopefully many new steps in creating the St. Louis we all deserve.

Everyone in St. Louis knows the inequities in this city, one of the most notorious examples being the Delmar Divide, which is moving toward a Page divide. To help bridge the divide and equitably distribute resources, I decided that \$900,000 of the Equitable Development Contribution will be awarded to the 17th Ward and the other \$900,000 to residents on the north side of Delmar.

Another policy priority in this year has been public safety. Recently, our ward experienced a tragedy when seven residents in one building died from drug overdoses in about 48 hours. Substance use is a pressing concern in our community. I will continue to approach it as both a public health and community safety issue. One step to address this is with a project that I am spearheading with a ward resident. It is the creation of a resident-composed 17th Ward Public Safety



Tina Pihl confers with a feline resident in her office.



Aldermen Tina Pihl (third from left) and Heather Navarro (third from right) help cut the ribbon at the opening of the Oakland Avenue Playground in November.

Committee. My goal is to have residents become civically empowered, build relationships with their neighbors to better look out for one another and gain insights about the experiences of first responders work. Contact 17th Ward resident Darius Young at dariusyc@gmail.com to get involved.

One of the greatest joys of this first year in office has been working with constituents. I have seen your investment in this ward and this city. The constituents have worked with have an incredible amount of passion and dedication. Throughout the year, I have been attending the seven neighborhood associations’ regularly scheduled meetings, and I am holding monthly “Office Hours” at local eateries across the ward. These office hours are drop-in opportunities for residents to get their voices heard one-on-one. Constituent concerns have ranged from speeding, trash, loud construction and barking dogs to equitable development and public safety.

I have also worked in partnership with constituents, Director of Streets Betherny Williams, and the Street Department to approve the re-striping at the intersection of Forest Parkway and Kingshighway Boulevard and to com-

mission a safety and congestion study for that area along Washington University Medical campus and BJC. The love for our ward that I see every day has been one of the greatest gifts from this job.

Another way I’ve connected with our ward has been through attending numerous community events: Urban Land Institute Women’s Summit, the opening of Claim Academy on Lindell, the Oakland Avenue Playground, the Botanical Heights Neighborhood Garden Walk and Rally & Walk for Domestic Violence Awareness.

I have only ever known the work of an alderperson in the context of the pandemic with Zoom board

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Tina Pihl (left) with outgoing 28th Ward Alderwoman Heather Navarro at the 2021 Urban Land Institute Women’s Summit in the World’s Fair Pavilion in Forest Park.

MAY THE 4TH BE WITH YOU

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Familiar Faces of the Central West End

BY KATE WALTER

I walk the streets of the Central West End multiple times a day. Having a large dog and living in an apartment demands that of me ... a demand that I welcome. It's my chance to delight in the stateliness of the CWE, as well as the many characters that either reside or work here in our community.

Two such characters are longtime employees of Koplars Communications, Nathan and Doyle, who both wish to keep their last names private. If you've spent any time on Maryland Plaza, you've seen them planting flowers, putting up holiday decorations or simply making it a safe, clean space to enjoy. I was lucky enough to have them sit down with me so that we all could learn more about them.

NATHAN

This quiet, dedicated man has worked for Koplars Communications since 1994. That's 27 years of repairing, replacing and solving issues associated with some very old buildings. One has to be a creative problem solver to fill that role and Nathan is that guy. I asked him what his primary responsibilities were and his quick comeback was "everything that is broke" with a sly smile and twinkle in his eye.

He shared the time the ancient sewer system couldn't handle one of St. Louis' notorious, spring downpours that flooded many of Maryland Plaza's basements. It was his job to pull together a crew, don head-to-toe gear and clean it all up. He made me aware that putting dish soap in the Maryland Plaza fountain, as one graduating class



Doyle (left) and Nathan, take a break from their work keeping Maryland Plaza spiffy.

of a local high school did as their senior prank, is harder to "clean," he said with a wink, than one might imagine. His job is a never-ending list of emergencies and surprises.

Nathan is the boss-man. The thinker. The solver of all problems. He loves coming to work in the morning wondering what he can achieve that day. He admits that the days can be long, but "I love what I do. I take the uncertainty of each day in stride and leave on most days with a feeling of accomplishment."

Frances Thompson, who has worked for the Koplars for 20 years, described Nathan as "a gem. Smart and resourceful. A salt of the earth kind of guy you feel lucky to know

and have on your side. He's a master at juggling everything life throws his way. His passion for a job well done is exemplified in everything he touches. He is a CWE institution."

DOYLE

And then there is Doyle. He's worked for Koplars Communications since 1984. He would work mornings at the Majestic Café on the corner of Euclid and Laclede avenues and the afternoons on Maryland Plaza. Doyle has a booming voice and a wonderful sense of humor. He might greet you with a side-eyed scowl, but he quickly beams a smile that brightens your day.

Doyle is the follow-through guy to Nathan's problem solving. As Doyle said, "Many people think Nathan and I are like an old married couple, we've worked together so long." I can attest to this comment, as I've heard them squabble back and forth about how something should be done and when to do it. That adds to their charm and gives others faith in their team.

Doyle's best memories are of those that added personality to the CWE. Baton Bob, the naked cowboy or just an elderly woman he would tease on her afternoon walks. His favorite memory though is that of the Jan. 30, 1982 snowstorm. Eighteen inches of snow shut down the city, but Doyle was driving a 1964 Buick Electra 225 ... better known as The Boat. Word quickly spread that the The Boat, with Doyle at its helm, was able to plow through the city streets getting people to work or the grocery store. That's Doyle ... always teasing, always helpful and exceedingly grateful to the Koplars family for always being so kind to him.

Sam Koplars said it best: "I am so fortunate to have Nathan and Doyle on our team. Besides the fact that you know you can depend upon them no matter the issue, they are two of the most big-hearted, sincere gentlemen you will ever meet. I've had the pleasure of knowing both of them almost my entire life, and any Koplars will tell you they are a part of the family."

I highly recommend you take the opportunity to visit Maryland Plaza and if you are lucky enough to run into Nathan or Doyle, say hello and thank you. You will make their day and enrich your life.

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Tina Pihl speaks at Claim Academy's opening on Lindell Boulevard, accompanied by Ola Ayeni, founder and chief idea officer of Claim Academy.

meetings and 17th Ward meetings. It's certainly been challenging being socially distanced. Despite that, I am thankful for the support from you, neighborhood leaders, and residents who have helped me contribute. It has made the distance

feel like nothing.

I am looking forward to another exciting year in office making this city all it can be! Please reach out to me at (314) 301-9868 or pihLt@StLouis-MO.gov and keep updated via www.TinaSweetTPihl.com.

NAVARRO from page 6

Proposition R and a bond measure. I encourage voters to read up on Prop R because it contains several important changes. The special election on the 19th has already exposed some of the confusion from Prop D, and Prop R appears to prevent the Board of Aldermen from fixing the issues. There are also proposed changes to the redistricting process, and voters should understand how a process with randomly selected citizens works compared to other alternatives, such as one designed by an independent demographer.

There will be a lot riding on the elections in April and we need everyone to be informed and engaged.

Ward reduction presents some wonderful opportunities for our

city and it also means that residents will need to step up and be more organized at the neighborhood level. When serving a ward with twice as many people and that may cover twice as much geography, aldermen cannot be engaged as they have been on the block by block level. They will need to rely on neighborhood leaders for input on new development projects, safety concerns and other emerging issues.

While I may be working on a regional level now, I know the most direct action starts in our very own neighborhoods. It has been an honor to serve the 28th since 2017 and I look forward to working with the City in my new role and seeing the changes ahead for the ward and the board of aldermen.