

## Editorial

# Denver's Great Hope — Its Neighborhood Groups And Associations

Denver is sometimes called a one party town since virtually all elective offices and important city positions are controlled by members of the Democratic Party. In fact there are two parties who compete in Denver in electoral politics and they are "real estate developers" and "public sector unions." Those two groups fund and/or run nearly every city council race and almost every city council person other than members such as Charlie Brown is beholden to one or the other group and in many cases both.

At the mayoral level the two groups clash. It is no secret that Mayor Michael Hancock is viewed as controlled by real estate developers and in particular Pat Hamill, the developer of Green Valley Ranch in northeast Denver and the head of Colorado Concern, the powerful pro-business lobbying group. While Mayor Hancock is viewed by most in the city as an extremely affable empty suit, he is despised by the public sector unions including most of all the police union. Of course the unions have no one to blame but themselves as they strongly backed Hancock's opponent, Chris Romer, in the last election.

At the City Council level the picture is more muddled. The 2003 election of Marcia Johnson in the Cherry Creek Valley's 5th District is illuminating. Johnson was strongly backed by the unions while her opponent Marcus Pachner had the support and money of real estate developers. Pachner was leading until the last days of the race when the unions poured in manpower and money which resulted in Johnson edging out Pachner by 46 votes.

After the election the two sides kissed and made up. Pachner would not oppose Johnson again and developers would provide money for her future campaigns in return for Johnson supporting Pachner backed real estate projects. Johnson would cruise to re-election in 2007 while Pachner became a rich individual as the lobbyist for Denver developers. Johnson did not run for a third term as she angered so many residents by supporting Pachner projects like the despicable Lowry Vista development that elective office was no longer enjoyable. But few doubt if she had run for a third term with union and developer money and support she would have won.

Pachner has now become Mayor Hancock's favorite tool on neighborhood and community boards such as the Denver Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the Colorado Boulevard Health District Board. Pachner's endless shilling for real estate developers on these boards has angered many regular residents, but he skips to the bank laughing every day in his role as Denver's leading estate developer lobbyist.



*The face neighborhood groups are accustomed to seeing from Denver City Council members, such as Chris Nevitt, when opposing real estate developers.*

But if most elected officials in Denver are in the back pocket of real estate developers and/or labor unions, who stands up for everyday citizens? That is increasingly left to local neighborhood associations and groups. There are over 100 city recognized neighborhood associations in Denver and a myriad of individual groups like the Friends of Denver Parks and No High Rises in West Highlands.

Umbrella group for the neighborhood associations is INC (Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation) which is becoming increasingly active in the everyday fights against Denver City Hall and has joined forces with Friends of Denver Parks to fight for Denver parks and open space.

As a practical matter the neighborhood groups and associations are the only real counterweight to an increasingly corrupt City Hall. Individuals from these groups show up where the mayor speaks and hold him accountable during question and answer sessions. It is said that the mayor and Pat Hamill are fit to be tied about the publicity and support that these groups and individuals are getting, but are at a loss as what to do other than trying to infiltrate the groups with Marcus Pachner types.

Ultimately, in order for neighborhood associations and groups to be effective, they need to become involved in getting their members and supporters elected to Denver City Council. Candidates during elections pay lip service to neighborhood associations but as regular citizens have learned, the councilmembers ignore and in the case of Chris Nevitt, openly mock neighborhood groups once they have been elected. These groups also need to hold elected city council members accountable after an election and the only real way to do so is to recall them when they become little more than shells for developers and labor unions. As the residents of North Denver discovered, mentioning the "r" word sends councilmembers like Susan Rice into apopleptic rage.

If elections are simply continued to be left to unions like the SEIU and real estate developers like Pat Hamill Denver as a city will ultimately fail. Neighborhood groups and associations are perhaps Denver's last great hope and we believe everyday citizens should continue to support them whenever and wherever they can.

— Editorial Board