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Tillman stands up for statues

Foe rips use of ward improvement funds for sculptures

November 30, 2006

BY **FRAN SPIELMAN** City Hall Reporter

Under fire from a political rival, Ald. Dorothy Tillman (3rd) on Wednesday angrily defended her decision to use more than \$200,000 of her annual allotment for street, alley and sidewalk improvements on four bronze statues of musicians heralding the Chicago Blues District.

Crafted by sculptor Edward Dwight, the statues of a female singer and male musicians playing the guitar, saxophone and trumpet were installed last year outside the Harold Washington Cultural Center at 47th and King Drive.

The so-called "aldermanic menu program" allocates \$1.32 million a year to each of the city's 50 wards to spend on infrastructure repairs of the alderman's choosing. Tillman chose to spend \$215,123 of her 2004 allotment on the four 25-foot statues -- even though the city has a public art program that's supposed to cover such expenses.

"It borders on being illegal or criminal. It's not an approved item," said aldermanic challenger Mell Monroe, who runs an executive search firm.

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"You're not allowed to pay your mortgage with taxpayers' money. You can't pay your car note or your personal bills. She owns the building she's in [at 4645 S. King Dr.]. Her daughter runs a business [in the 47th

Street Marketplace]. The sculptures are just a way to improve her own property values and make this the gateway to Bronzeville."

'We have culture'

Although the sculpture expense is unusual and not included in designated menu prices, Tillman said it's perfectly legitimate.

"They use menu money for those blue light [surveillance cameras], don't they? Of course we use menu money for statues. We have a right to do that," Tillman said.

"Would you rather see -- up and down King Drive and 47th Street -- blue lights instead of culture? Blue lights say, 'Don't come here. Don't have economic development. Don't grow because we have crime.' [Wouldn't you rather] say, 'We have music. We have culture?'"

As for the street, sidewalk, alley and viaduct improvements normally funded with aldermanic menu money, Tillman said she has done "quite a bit" of that -- and even more projects are in the hopper.

She categorically denied Monroe's allegation that she left \$883,877 on the table in 2004. In fact, Tillman said the money is "programmed" and awaiting work by the city Department of Transportation.

Tillman also denied that the statues were designed to increase the value of the property that she and her children own.

"Chinatown marked their community. Greektown has the columns. You have Little Italy. Our community is the only community that has never marked [its] culture," she said. "We have nothing, just flat, empty lots."

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