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“Ald. Tillman uses neighborhood improvement funds for self benefit,” Mell Monroe asserts

Mell Monroe, who is running for Third Ward Alderman against Dorothy Tillman in next February’s election, today called for an investigation of how Ald. Tillman used the more than \$300,000 of the ward’s infrastructure funds to benefit herself and her grown children.

“I’m outraged that Ald. Tillman would be so selfish as to use taxpayers money to improve her family’s real estate holdings, businesses and enterprises, while much of the ward has a pressing need for street and alley resurfacing, better lighting, traffic signal upgrading and other improvements,” Monroe said

Monroe’s charges followed a front-page expose published last Wednesday by the *Lakefront Outlook*, a weekly newspaper that covers Bronzeville and other 3rd Ward neighborhoods. The newspaper reported that Alderman Tillman used \$215,123 of her 2004 allotment under the “Aldermanic Menu Program” for four 25-foot tall bronze sculptures of musicians installed at 47th Street and Martin Luther King Drive. An additional \$85,000 was spent for lighting on 46th Place and at 47th Street and King Drive.

The Lakefront Outlook also said that in 2004, Dorothy Tillman only spent \$316,123 including the sculptures of her budgeted \$1.2 million. She did not spend \$883,877 that she could have used for infrastructure improvements in the ward.

“This fact, alone, is very fishy. No one in their right mind leaves \$884,000 on the table,” Monroe said.

Monroe went beyond what was reported in the *Lakefront Outlook*. He said it appears that Ald. Tillman’s only priority was to increase the property values of buildings she owns and to improve businesses run by her daughter and employing her son.

The four sculptures serve as a billboard and gateway for the Harold Washington Cultural Center on the southeast corner of 47th and King Drive. Ald. Tillman’s daughter, Jimalita Tillman, is the executive director of the Harold Washington Cultural Center (HWCC) and is the proprietor of the Spoken Word Café located across the street in the 47th Street Marketplace.

Edward Dwight Jr., of Denver Co., is the artist who created the four sculptures. He has contributed \$2,500 to Tillman’s political campaigns.

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The HWCC was developed by Elzie Higginbottom, of East Lake Management Co., a major political supporter of Ald. Tillman and a contributor to her campaigns. Higginbottom also developed the multi-tenant building that houses the 47th Street Marketplace.

In the past five years, Higginbottom has contributed approximately \$4,500 to Tillman's campaigns.

The Alderman's son, Bemajiamen (Bemaji), was originally on the board of the HWCC. Bemaji Tillman is a musician who has had a number of bands over the years. Most recently the billing was Bemaji Tillman and the House of Twang. He has produced events and performed at the HWCC. He is the manager of the center's sound system.

Around the corner from the HWCC is Tillman's Aldermanic office and the 3rd Ward Committeeman's office, both in a building she owns at 4645 S. King Drive. She is also the Democratic Committeeman. Her daughter, Ebony Tillman, is employed in that office.

Three blocks north, at 4321 S. King Drive, is Ald. Tillman's home which she owns and where she is registered to vote. She is also listed as the owner, mortgage holder or property tax payer at 4317 and 4319 S. King Drive.

"The development of real estate and business activity at 47th Street and King Drive is obviously a Tillman family affair," Monroe said.

Monroe said that Tillman did not hold hearings or involve the community in any way before decreeing that the infrastructure money should be spent for the sculptures at 47th and King Drive. "She acts like a King or Emperor and decides by herself and for her own benefit," he added.

Lakefront Outlook reported that the Better Government Association (BGA) and the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG) criticized Tillman's purchase of the sculptures with funds from the "Aldermanic Menu Program" which is also called the "Neighborhoods Alive Program."

Travis Stein, a research analyst for NCBG told the paper that "he never heard of another alderman using the infrastructure money for a public art project." He noted that there is another city program for that purpose.

Jay E. Stewart, BGA's executive director, was quoted as saying "I am certain that there are some very valid uses for that money in the Bronzeville neighborhood. I don't think at the very top of the list are some bronze sculptures."

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