

Theresa El-Amin: City Council Public Agenda 5-12-2020

The City Manager says, "I want to see something done in the Liberty District in my lifetime." City Manager Isaiah Hugley "wishing and hoping" is a sad commentary given that his job is getting things done. That's the job in all the cities where I know the City Manager. I receive a weekly report from Tom Bonfield, City Manager for the City of Durham. That's the level of accountability citizens of Durham enjoy. Glad Tom has kept me on his list since I left Durham in December 2010.

I trust we all agree that the Liberty Theatre is an important historic asset in the heart of the Liberty District. The Southern Anti-Racism Network (SARN) learned of the Liberty Theatre not long after we began organizing in Columbus in 2011. Dr. J Aleem Hud was on the Liberty Theatre board at the time. SARN held numerous events and celebrations there including fundraisers with Fern Cohn serving as auctioneer. We used the catering services of the Huddle House. The Liberty Theatre was exactly what we needed for a small band area, tables that could be decorated for the occasion, a kitchen and other amenities for an intimate social atmosphere.

SARN paid an hourly rate for use of the Liberty community room with access to the kitchen. I recall on a couple of occasions, the Huddle House staff were unable to use the kitchen due to plumbing problems. Barbara Decuir, Huddle House catering manager, always made it work as she shuttled between the Huddle House and the Liberty as if it was normal. As Council Member Woodson pointed out, the Liberty is a good venue for small events. I really enjoyed the jazz sets, poetry slams, conferences, plays and other productions arranged by Jonathan Samuel Eddie when he was Executive Director. I have donated and assisted with fundraising for productions at the Liberty. After Jonathan left the job, no one ever asked me for a donation. I found that odd during the time when Robert Anderson was board chair. Robert and Louise Anderson are married. I just learned a few days ago that Shae Anderson is also a family member. What a tangled web of management and board leadership circumstances I've observed over the almost ten (10) years I've been in Columbus.

The main problem is that the Liberty Theatre needs a new roof and likely other repairs caused by the leaky roof. Thinking of the Government Center problems and slumlord problems, it seems allowing buildings to be neglected is just the culture of Columbus GA. Strange.

What responsibility does Columbus Consolidated Government have in all the mess associated with the Liberty Theatre? From where I stand, the Liberty reflects the consistent underdevelopment in the Black community reflected in high poverty and low opportunity neighborhoods. Reparations are due to the Black community for decades of discrimination. The Macon-Dixon line is deliberate.

What should the remedy be? - I've been communicating with about 30 concerned Black citizens over email and by phone. After consulting with officers of the SARN board, there is tentative agreement that SARN will develop a campaign in support of the demand for Reparations from CCG to complete repairs at the Liberty and get it open for business. The campaign will be called SNARL or "Save Now and Repair the Liberty. There is a legal basis for the demand for CCG to pay Reparations to the Black community. We have begun laying the groundwork. I envision people joining the campaign offering other proposals and demands. It will be as dynamic as possible given conditions in Columbus.