

NFB General Meeting District C Candidate Forum

September 6, 2017

Stallings Recreation Center, Bywater

Upon arrival at the meeting, attendees were asked to sign in, given the opportunity to submit written questions and provided a program. The program included the rules for the forum, such as timing for questions and answers, and identified the members of the Neighbors First for Bywater Board acting as moderators (Stephen Haedicke, assisted by Steve Jacobs).

Stephen H (Moderator) called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. He shared NFB's mission statement, reviewed the rules for the forum and thanked everyone for the standing room only turnout. He also welcomed the candidates: **Nadine Ramsey** and **Kristin Gisleson Palmer**.

A coin toss determined that Ms. Ramsey would deliver the opening statement.

Ms. Ramsey stressed that she considers Bywater part of her old neighborhood, and she was focused on providing the same opportunities to the children in Bywater that she enjoyed. She also noted that as the incumbent she has supported ecological developments, focused on crime, sustainability and funding for street repairs. Funding was also found for training in high tech computer and science jobs for youth in the area. Again, she is seeking a second term.

Ms. Palmer noted her service as the Council Member for District C between 2010 - 2014. Stating that actions speak louder than words, she noted community service since her early 20's working in adult literacy, developing a program known as Christmas in October which provided home improvements for the elderly and physically challenged. As a mother she became involved in non-profits, building playgrounds where there were none, and after the storm worked to insure green infrastructure, worked with AmeriCorp, and then ran for office when she saw that the laws that were on the books were not helping people actually get back home. Working with non-profits as well as the private sector developed her skills in working with diverse groups to get the job done.

Neighbors First for Bywater had distributed a survey to its members prior to the forum to determine which issues were a priority in obtaining input from the candidates. These issues include: Crime, STR's (Short Term Rentals), Green Space, Affordable Housing, Commercialization and Governance.

NOTE: The following is a summary, typed quickly as the forum ran, for the purpose of keeping adequate minutes of this special general meeting. It is not a verbatim report. The candidates submitted written responses to some questions

which are included at the end of these minutes and may be more accurate or complete.

Moderator: As a councilperson, what specific steps would you take to address the crime problems in New Orleans in general and in Bywater specifically.

Ms. Palmer: Stated that she is for the proposed NOPD pay raise, as long as there is a shift in the timing of the testing of officers from five years currently to two years. The testing is part of the promotion process and is part of the procedural delay in advancement. This means that retention is more difficult, which has been noted as one of the significant problems in the work force at NOPD. She also noted a need to streamline the background check process. In terms of being proactive, regular meeting between representatives, community members, and the police force city wide was given as a specific recommendation. Ms. Palmer shared that her little sister is a cop in the 5th District, and that she herself has been endorsed by the Fraternal Order of Police (Crescent City Lodge #2), as she feels that she has always been there and consistent in her support of their work.

Ms. Ramsey: Crime is her primary concern. She has continuously worked with neighborhood groups with good result and has also worked with property owners to address the problem of blighted properties that sometimes impact funding for neighbors. Wants to see a fully staffed police force, noting that we train our officers well, then are unable to retain them. Ms. Ramsey stated that boosting the morale of our officers to make them want to stay would be important, as well as working with the new mayor on developing rapport. She pointed out that she supported a recent gun buyback program and has also helped develop work force opportunities for youth as a way to reduce crime.

Moderator: STR's - As of June 2017, 66% of STR licenses were for whole home rentals; 58 of these were issued for Bywater. There is a proposal before the CPC now that would expand the number of days for whole-house rentals from the current 90. What is your position on the current regulations for STRs and would you be more restrictive or less restrictive in their regulation?

Ms. Ramsey: What we have now is a hard fought compromise. Hotels want to be protected. We worked diligently to come up with a compromise, and we tried to do what the community wanted. These rentals were happening and they were unregulated. Now we have funding for enforcement and now is not the time to push it further. We need to see what's working and what's not. We need to talk more to neighbors.

Ms. Palmer: This is about increasing affordability for neighborhoods, and taxes have gone up substantially, specifically due to whole home rentals - which is the commercialization of residential property. There is a moratorium in the French Quarter, but while good for the Quarter that has pushed the problem into other neighborhoods.

People from out of town are buying homes not to live in but to rent. The process needs to be opened back up to involve the community in a meaningful way. One whole street in Treme is now whole home rentals. We have laws for Bed and Breakfasts - one per block - that's on the books now. Every neighborhood has identified its own commercial corridors - and this is why the ordinance needs to be re-addressed. Who are we building the city for? It's not for residents. Ms. Palmer noted that she is not taking money from people who are pushing the extension of STRs.

Ms. Ramsey: I didn't take any money from these people and the fund raiser that they were holding for me - I called and cancelled.

Ms. Palmer: You took money from Airbnb International.

Moderator: **Just to be clear - you didn't take any money from the Alliance for Neighborhood Prosperity?**

Ms. Ramsey: I don't know that group.

Moderator: **Bywater is a close packed neighborhood that lacks green spaces. A few places around the neighborhood - Clouet, Royal & Mazant, the spaces along Press Street - some are HANO Properties. All are under attack in some way - Press Street is a private development - What would you do as a Council Member - what steps would you take to protect green space?**

Ms. Palmer: I fought for Clouet Garden back when they were trying to make it a parking lot - worked with the HANO Board to establish a lease of \$1 a year. I will continue to advocate for green space as it is part of the storm water management issue. I worked with Markey Park for its plans and re-development. I already have a track record in doing this. Crescent Park and how it is managed and developed was part of what I coordinated. In terms of Mazant and Royal, there does need to be affordable housing - there needs to be a mix - we need more green space - planting trees in my own neighborhood now - and would like to expand that program to other neighborhoods.

Ms. Ramsey: I sit on the board of the French Market Corporation, which manages Crescent Park - would like to open it up more - I work with developers to create zoning with a commitment to creating more green space. I am on the environmental advisement committees that support electric vehicles and green space - I will continue to work on these issues.

Moderator: **The rising cost of housing in New Orleans has been the topic of a number of articles. We are ranked #15 for the city with the most expensive rent in the United States. Before the storm this was not true. The CPC has recommended a Smart Housing Ordinance that would require large developments of 10 or more units to include at least a 10% affordable housing in a development.**

Would you support the CPC recommendations and what other ideas do you have to address this issue?

Ms. Ramsey: We are in crisis now and we have to take steps - I support the recommendations before the council. I work with developers to tax-incentivize affordable housing.

Ms. Palmer: STRs are increasing the price of housing. My background is in affordable housing. Currently there are 35 thousand vacant properties - let's get them back in to commerce. Tax credits would also help with these smaller houses, and their development would be in scale. Home ownership is important - it's equity in the community. Developers who are taking public funds in the form of tax credits should have a meaningful percentage of affordable housing—about 20% or more. The problem of public transportation also comes in here. People can't get from where they live to where they work now. We need to find good smart ways to deal with connectivity to downtown.

Moderator: I want to follow up with a question about the Riverfront Overlay. The CPC is leaning toward an automatic upzoning to 75 feet. Do you think this should be automatic, or should a development meet certain standards before the increased height is allowed?

Ms. Ramsey: I would support setting aside 20 - 25%, realistically as low as 15%.

Ms. Palmer: The Riverfront Overlay should be separately dealt with for Marigny and Bywater -the communities' relationship to the parcels is different - I don't agree with an automatic 75-foot height. There should be a 20% set-aside if they take public funds, but even that should not be a guarantee of the 75-foot height.

Moderator: Members expressed concern about the commercialization of Bywater with the possibility of a cruise-ship terminal and major condo developments that could turn into STRs. Over-commercialization came up in the survey many times. Generally it's a feeling that people who don't live here are buying up properties for STRs and restaurants that cater to tourists over residents. Do you understand our concern about being turned into the French Quarter - more for tourists than for residents?

Ms Palmer: The heightened commercialization of residential areas is due to the STRs. There is a lack of enforcement on all levels. We've had an administration that has put development of tourism over residents, with a higher level of that in Bywater. My sister here is a public school teacher, her property taxes have tripled, all to the sound of rolling suitcases. None of us saw that coming and we need to address it. Sustainable tourism, a wonderful concept, look it up - Look at Mayor Joe Riley in Charleston SC - he says - if you do everything right for the residents first everything else follows. First it needs to be good for us.

Ms. Ramsey: Our neighborhoods and residents have to come first. I recently read an article about how Barcelona is closing its doors to tourists as the wear and tear on the city is too much. It sounds like what we are going through. We have to have a leader that works with neighborhoods. I support small businesses, and have members of my family that have businesses here. I have family members that have property that backs up to these business properties as well.

Moderator: **How does community involvement play into your picture? How are you planning to involve the community?**

Ms. Ramsey: You can't be a council member and not work with community - I have someone who goes out and gets a picture for me when a problem has been identified. Or I will drive through the neighborhood to see - I am out there. I've done it in Treme, the French Quarter, Algiers. The office is the first line of defense. If we can't help you then we will direct you to where you need to go for help. I have staff that makes sure their concerns reach me - and my background as a city attorney, a mediator, a judge, means that when there is a problem we can get together, may feel some pain, and we can address it.

Ms. Palmer: One of the reasons I'm running is my community feels that they have not had access. I was awarded for the work I did with communities in 2013. I stood for the complete streets law written with the community - so that every time you redesign a street you take into account sidewalks, bicycle areas, etc... Stakeholders helped work on this legislation. They took it back to the neighborhoods so people understood what the legislation was for, to make access better for everybody. Like St. Roch Market, Crescent Park - When I left office they didn't get called back up so development happened without input. A representative government should not just listen but include you in the process.

Floor question - what can be done with RTA to better address the needs of a 24 hour work force?

Ms. Palmer: I'm an avid transportation geek - AmeriCorp Program back in the day had people who were riding their bikes around after the storm. We noticed that the neighborhoods that were more connected to downtown came back quicker. I would like to work on and see a rail system between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. We're not doing a good job of having buses, street cars, ferries cross parish lines. We don't have enough buses in Algiers, and some have an hour wait between runs. The buses are critical. The biggest reason people lose their jobs is due to being late for work. 20% of our population doesn't have access to a car. I have a track record on this and want to focus on the bio-medical corridor as well as getting to down town.

Ms. Ramsey: There is a strategic mobility plan at the RTA right now. They are wrapping up the community engagement and moving to the planning phase. I am encouraging

the use of technology apps that work in real time for people so they have options - if the 7:15 doesn't get you to work.

That concluded the questions that had been presented prior to the forum. Now the discussion was opened to the floor.

Audience member (self identified) Mr. Lewis Hansen had a request specifically for Ms. Ramsey about his denied access to the Public Library and a question about being held on false charges and needing a police report. It was determined that this would be best answered in a different venue.

Audience member to Ms. Palmer: **As a representative of the black community, why did you donate money to save the monuments movement out of campaign funds in 2011.**

Ms Palmer: In 2011 I made a \$50 donation toward the restoration of the _____ monument - which is the _____ monument that depicts a woman, as well as the Joan of Arc monument, which was in my district.

Ms. Ramsey: I support the removal of Jim Crow era monuments. We have the responsibility to show our children they are honored and loved.

Ms. Palmer: I agree with that - and I would make that donation again - I very specifically worked with the community to change the name of Congo Square back to Congo Square (from Beauregard Square in the interim) and helped get the only street in Treme named after an African American - Henriette DeLisle.

Audience member: **HANO has chosen a developer, and as we do need affordable housing they are discussing changing the zoning to create higher density. Where do you stand on this?**

Ms. Ramsey: I'm willing to look at that - the developer would have to be sure that it blends into the community - not ready to shut it down or be opposed to the height, if there is a commitment to green space. It's not just height, there are ways to adjust development so that it fits in.

Ms. Palmer: They should be held accountable to the same guidelines as everyone else in regards to zoning. This fits into the neighborhood, as it is in place.

Audience member: **The Army corp of Engineers have proposed significant changes to "Mr. Go" (Mississippi River Gulf Outlet) and St. Claude Bridge which would have a deleterious effect on many of the homes and studios in the area. What proposals do you have to address this?**

Ms. Palmer: This is like Sisyphus. I tried to stop the project years ago, working with the Holy Cross neighborhood, and I will try again.

Ms. Ramsey: My understanding is that the funding is not there for the expansion for the lock. If it does move forward we would have to address the relocation of residents, and with flooding concerns. I would work with the neighborhoods - I very strongly oppose the displacement of residents.

Audience member: **Current administration has been very disengaged with the neighborhood associations, either ignoring or shutting the door to their input - where do you stand on working with neighborhood associations and taking their input into consideration?**

Ms. Ramsey: I have an open door with development and business - to find out what the project is. I can't comment on the administration's engagement - I have worked with neighborhood groups. If I didn't agree with you it doesn't mean that I didn't listen to you. I can't speak for the administration.

Audience member to Ms. Ramsey: **You refused to work with the FMIA [Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association].**

Ms. Ramsey: I don't recall that.

Ms. Palmer: I think actions speak louder than words - I was very active - I came to every meeting I was invited to and would drop by others - as you would see.

Audience member: **Homeownership is a really important part of the community. Most of this neighborhood's tax bills have gone up 30-50% and more - what could you do - via STR's - what can you do to alleviate this tax burden?**

Ms. Palmer: Whole home rentals should be treated as commercial properties. We have to strengthen the neighborhoods. Look at all of the non-profits that are on the books and not paying taxes, some should be back on the roster for taxation.

Ms. Ramsey: I would work with the assessor to not increase the burden.

Moderator noted the time (8:00) and thanked the candidates and the audience for the evening's forum and concluded the meeting. He also encouraged everyone to get out and vote on OCTOBER 14TH.

The following are the written responses from Kristin Gisleson Palmer to questions submitted in advance by the NFB board:

Neighbors First for Bywater Forum Questionnaire

1) How will you support NOPD's 5th District to keep Bywater's residents and visitors safe?

Reducing crime requires focusing on both prevention and enforcement. Treating employment and affordable housing as a public safety issue helps prevent crime. The city must also assist NOPD with the advancement of extensive recruitment and retention policies such as supporting the pay raise with career advancement testing provided every 2 years. Having more police on the street means the ability to promote community policing. Strong community policing will allow for officers to respond to the needs of our citizens and neighborhoods. I believe everyone in New Orleans should live in a safe neighborhood with equal resources.

2) Bywater commuters regularly experience long delays due train crossings that hinder emergency vehicles and even completely block off part the neighborhood. We also have to contend with poor streets and transfers from the bus system to the St. Claude streetcar. What ways can the District C council member promote improved transportation in Bywater?

When I served on the Council, I passed an ordinance to increase fines for trains blocking the public right of way. I also ensured that a resident of Bywater sat on the Public Belt board. I understand the importance of public transportation. As chair of the transportation committee, I advocated for the new streetcar line to be built along Rampart Street instead of the original plan of placing it on Convention Center Blvd. I also passed the Complete Streets Ordinance, which required that all transportation and street improvements are planned, designed, and constructed for all users: pedestrians, disabled persons, bicyclists, and public transit. The result is safer streets, more accessible public transportation, and the proliferation of bike paths throughout the city. More work needs to be done with the public bus system and transfers. I have a strong track record in transportation issues and will continue to tirelessly advocate to increase more access to public transit.

3) Rising rents and increasing property taxes are forcing some long-time Bywater residents out of the neighborhood. What actions will you take to Bywater a more inclusive and affordable neighborhood?

I will advocate to require substantial set-asides for affordable housing, meaning at least in the 20-30% range, for any development project that utilizes public funding. I demonstrated this in office when I advocated for the Bell Artspace project, a

development that will transform the Bell School campus - abandoned since Hurricane Katrina - into a cultural center with 79 units of affordable housing.

I also believe rising rents and increased property values and taxes are aided by the proliferation of whole-house STR.

4) The high concentration of short-term rentals in Bywater diverts housing from full-time residents to tourists which decreases the number of voters. How will you help to preserve the voting base in Bywater?

A “one-size-fits-all” policy is impractical for the diverse neighborhoods of New Orleans. I’m in favor of neighborhoods self-determining the limits of STR, encouraging homestead exemption STR, and capping and regulating whole-home rentals the same as existing commercial corridors. Essentially, they should be treated as commercial endeavours and follow the zoning laws as such.

5) There are two major waterfront developments proposed for Bywater: 1) the expansion of the Industrial Canal lock by the Army Corps of Engineers and, 2) a cruise ship terminal at the Poland Ave. Wharf by the Port of New Orleans. Permitting for these projects is largely outside of the purview of the City of New Orleans. What can be done by the City of New Orleans to make these projects beneficial to Bywater residents?

We need to use the strength of the council seat to voice and address the concerns of residents who may be affected by the Industrial Canal. I have a track record of working with the Holy Cross neighborhood association to ensure that the Army Corps of Engineers would listen and address the needs of the neighborhood. I will fight to make sure that any project is reflective of what the communities on both sides of the canal want.

I’m also committed to working with neighborhood associations and the Port of New Orleans to find an alternative site for the cruise ship terminal that makes sense for everyone.

6) The Riverfront Overlay section of the new CZO included height and density bonuses for new buildings on the land side of the floodwall, but is currently under reconsideration. Do you support the height and density bonuses? What responsibilities should developers of large, new mixed use buildings in Bywater have to residents?

The Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods need to be separate entities within the overlay to ensure that each neighborhood’s unique needs are met. When I’m Councilmember, I will not meet with any developers until they have already proven that they have engaged neighborhood groups to discuss preliminary designs and have followed a neighborhood participation plan. Height and density bonuses should not be automatic, rather they should reflect the community’s planning vision.

7) The Bywater riverfront is likely to see several new intensive developments during the next City Council term. These include the redevelopment of the Naval Support base, a cruise ship terminal, the redevelopment of the HANO lot at Royal and Mazant Streets and

new multifamily and mixed use construction. These uses will be in addition to the Crescent Park, NOCCA and existing businesses. What city infrastructural investments will be needed to accommodate the increase in activity along the Bywater riverfront?

With my background in public transit advocacy, I will advocate for the CPC transportation planner to create a transportation master plan that considers additional infrastructural investments for the Bywater.

The following are the written responses from Nadine Ramsey to questions submitted in advance by the NFB board:

- 1) How will you support NOPD's 5th District to keep Bywater's residents and visitors safe?

I work closely with the commander of the 5th district to ensure he gets the cooperation he needs from the council to protect the Bywater. I have also prioritized attacking the root causes of crime, creating the Youth Services and Empowerment committee to focus on creating positive alternatives for young people and channeling them away from crime. We have to work both ends of the problem. Additionally, we have been working with the neighborhood and meeting with concerned groups to get the police to do more patrols and be more visible, and had a car placed outside Plessy.

- 2) Bywater commuters regularly experience long delays due train crossings that hinder emergency vehicles and even completely block off part the neighborhood. We also have to contend with poor streets and transfers from the bus system to the St. Claude streetcar. What ways can the District C councilmember promote improved transportation in Bywater?

Regarding train-related delays, we have met with the neighborhood association, many neighbors, and the Pubic Belt Railroad to share times, contact information, and explore the possibility of changing times when trains are in the neighborhood as well as shortening the times they block the street. Further, we have pressed them to ensure they don't block the street when changing cars. They have pledged to work with us on these problems. On the bus transfer issues, we consistently work with RTA to address these and other concerns of the neighborhood.

- 3) Rising rents and increasing property taxes are forcing some long-time Bywater residents out of the neighborhood. What actions will you take to Bywater a more inclusive and affordable neighborhood?

We are committed to studying the current enforcement of short-term rental regulations and improving them. We need to make current enforcement as strong as possible, and we need to look at additional regulations to achieve the goals of a fair, equitable, and sensible short-term rental policy. We are working to direct Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money, in ways that have not been taken advantage of in the past, towards programs that promote home ownership, use of city-owned property such as HANO scatter sites, NORA properties, etc. to create affordable housing. We need to build affordable housing in established and traditional neighborhoods so that working people have access to jobs, transportation, and other amenities. I am willing to work with the New Orleans delegation to change the law on how properties are assessed. I continue to be focused on making housing more affordable for renters as well as making first-time home ownership an easier, less daunting process.

- 4) The high concentration of short-term rentals in Bywater diverts housing from full-time residents to tourists which decreases the number of voters. How will you help to preserve the voting base in Bywater?

I have supported regulating short-term rentals and will work to ensure strong enforcement of the regulations. I also support the Housing NOLA plan and the Smart Housing Mix to improve access to affordable housing.

- 5) There are two major waterfront developments proposed for Bywater: 1) the expansion of the Industrial Canal lock by the Army Corps of Engineers and, 2) a cruise ship terminal at the Poland Ave. Wharf by the Port of New Orleans. Permitting for these projects is largely outside of the purview of the City of New Orleans. What can be done by the City of New Orleans to make these projects beneficial to Bywater residents?

I will focus on ensuring that residents aren't displaced and that we have strong environmental protections and oversight in place. Additionally, I have a strong relationship with our federal officials, especially our Congressman and state delegation, and will work closely with them to ensure these projects adhere to standards, adequate infrastructure, and traffic controls to protect quality of life.

- 6) The Riverfront Overlay section of the new CZO included height and density bonuses for new buildings on the land side of the floodwall, but is currently under reconsideration. Do you support the height and density bonuses? What responsibilities should developers of large, new mixed use buildings in Bywater have to residents?

I do support reasonable height and density bonuses, but I favor implementing laws that insist and ensure that development blends with the community and fits the existing neighborhood. I will also insist that access to the levee remains and that developments don't block the view of the river. Developers have a responsibility to improve—not diminish—the quality of life of the neighborhood. Frequently, this means building community amenities, ensuring adequate parking, and long-term affordable housing. We should also look at limitations and additional restrictions on short-term rentals for these properties.

- 7) The Bywater riverfront is likely to see several new intensive developments during the next City Council term. These include the redevelopment of the Naval Support base, a cruise ship terminal, the redevelopment of the HANO lot at Royal and Mazant Streets and new multifamily and mixed use construction. These uses will be in addition to the Crescent Park, NOCCA and existing businesses. What city infrastructural investments will be needed to accommodate the increase in activity along the Bywater riverfront?

Good infrastructure is absolutely critical to economic development. I have prioritized infrastructure during my first term and will continue to work to find creative ways to improve our streets, drainage, and other infrastructure. This said, while there are currently no plans to

move forward with the Poland Cruise Ship Terminal or the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal Lock Replacement project, streets, signage, drainage, hurricane preparedness concerns, traffic and parking impacts as well as other issues related to infrastructure would have to be considered and provided for as a part of any plans to bring new developments to the area. This would certainly include substantial neighborhood involvement to ensure that all concerns are addressed.