

trict is just simply wrong...Hopefully common sense will prevail. I don't believe that the majority of the members of this Common Council would be that reckless and do something like that."

Several committeemen stood up and, in turn, voiced similar sentiments. The word "right" was tossed around liberally.

Each of three candidates was allowed to introduce himself and field questions. The first, Michael LoCurto, is an aide to Assemblyman Sam Hoyt and has lived in the Delaware District his entire life. He attended PS 66, City Honors High School and the University at Buffalo, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Media Studies and a master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. "This community and this city have given me a lot," LoCurto said, "and I want to give back." He stressed his work with Sam Hoyt and his urban planning background. LoCurto said he helped establish the city's Anti-Flipping Task Force and has plans for intelligent development on Main Street and Hertel, Delaware and Elmwood Avenues. "We don't need any more big-box development in Buffalo. We need intelligent, developmental decision-making. I will bring that to the Common Council."

Pedro Velez Lopez introduced himself as a 16-year veteran of local Democratic politics. Then, understanding that LoCurto was the heavy favorite, he pointed out that the Common Council does have a right and a responsibility to fill the vacant Council seat, a point that wasn't well received. "I would like this to be an open and fair process for all of us who are running who want to represent the Delaware District." Velez Lopez was born in Puerto Rico, moved to Buffalo when he was five and has lived in the Delaware District for more than 10 years. He's a licensed real estate agent and is currently earning a degree in Economics and Urban Studies. He wants to focus on housing issues, primarily targeting ways to increase property values.

Sam Marie, the final candidate to speak, is a political newcomer. A 22-year veteran of the Buffalo Police Department, as well as a Vietnam veteran and former Army Reserve drill sergeant, Marie said he's "leaning towards a law enforcement agenda." He'd particularly like to focus on quality-of-life issues, landlord licensing and high taxes. Marie has lived in the Delaware District for 28 years, graduated from PS 77 and Burgard Vocational, and has an AS in Business Management from Byrant & Stratton.

Rosemarie LoTempio, who works part-time in Councilmember Joe Golombek's office, wasn't present for the committee hearing, but is apparently still interested in the seat. She's been meeting separately with members of the Common Council for the past couple of weeks.

Council President Dave Franczyk and Councilmember Kearns also showed up at the meeting, and both addressed the audience in regard to the Council's plan for replacing Coppola. Franczyk said that the Council will take into account the decision of the Democratic committeemen. "We're not bound by law to take into consideration what the committeemen want, but they are the foot soldiers of the party process, they are obviously closer to the process and they have a lot of weight in recommending someone to the body." The audience didn't seem to buy it, though, and there was a lot of grumbling, head-shaking and sighing around the room.

Kearns tried to explain that he wasn't trying to undermine the Democratic committeemen. "All I wanted to do," said Kearns, "is bring to light a couple of inefficiencies and open up the process to outsiders. That's all it is, opening it up. And I think we accomplished that here tonight." He also pledged to vote with the committeemen.

This Monday, in a meeting held at the North Buffalo Community Center on Sanders Road, the Erie County Democratic Committee cast a nearly unanimous vote in support of LoCurto, who seems likely to succeed Coppola. Since then, four of the five Council members necessary to reach a decision have pledged their support to LoCurto, including Kearns, Franczyk, Dominic Bonifacio and Antoine Thompson. Pending a five-person majority—at publication time there were no developments—the Common Council will call a special meeting to announce the new Delaware District Councilmember. According to Bonifacio, that should happen later this week. "We have to fill the seat," Bonifacio says. "It's been vacant almost a month, and we can't leave a district seat open that long."

Though the end result will probably be the same—Mike LoCurto will be appointed to the Delaware District Council seat—the recent rift over whose right it is to name a successor did succeed in opening up the process to the politically unconnected. And that can only be a good thing.

—peter koch

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Our quagmire in Iraq turns three



PHOTO: ROSE MATTHEY

Several hundred protesters gathered Saturday in Lafayette Square to mark the third anniversary of the American invasion of Iraq. For nearly two hours, students, veterans, activists and everyday people endured windchills of 10 degrees Fahrenheit, while calling for an end to the war and the return of US troops. There were signs of all shapes and messages. People banged tambourines and drums, and yelled into bullhorns. American, Palestinian and Peace flags cracked in the gusts. It was beautiful bedlam in the name of peace. Thirty wooden crosses were set across the base of the monument in the square, each one representing a WNYer killed in Iraq or Afghanistan. Their names were read off, as well as a short bio and his or her cause of death. The message of the day, which was sung loud and clear by all present was, "All we are saying is give peace a chance." Hopefully someone was listening.

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