

# St. Paul NAACP sponsors Ward 1 candidates forum



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Political

candidates nationwide are gearing up to do battle against each other, with the hopes of generating the most votes that grant them the privilege of serving their constituents. There are some candidates that choose to engage in a mud-slinging unruly style of campaigning and debating of the issues. Although the general public has become accustomed to this negative part of our modern political culture, most political pundits make it a point to highlight how boring, yet refreshing it is to witness a civilized political forum or debate.

As was the case on Wednesday, October 26, when the St. Paul Branch of the NAACP hosted the Ward 1 candidates' forum at the Hallie Q. Brown/Martin Luther King Center, from 6-8 pm, between Melvin W. Carter, III, a first-term incumbent who is DFL and Labor endorsed, and his challengers Johnny Howard and Anthony J. Fernandez.

Howard is endorsed by the Green Party and is a longtime Frogtown community organizer/activist well known in St. Paul for helping to found the Thomas-Dale Block Club 20 years ago and for protesting street crimes, brothels and crack houses in the Frogtown neighborhood. Fernandez, a real estate agent and a member of the City of St. Paul Planning Commission, is running as an independent.

About 60 community members attended and filled all of the chairs in a small classroom. The candidates were given two minutes for their opening and closing statements and one minute to answer moderator questions or give rebuttals to another candidate's answer. The audience was reserved and was not given any opportunity to ask the candidates questions at the microphone. However, six of the 12 questions directed to the candidates by the moderator came from the audience, submitted on index cards.

The mood in the room was calm and composed. The audience was instructed not to clap or make any comments until the very end of the forum. The event was moderated by attorney Jeffrey D. Martin, assistant director of career and professional development for William Mitchell College of Law and president of the St. Paul NAACP. Even the candidates seemed tame and extra polite to each other, with a lot of smiling and laughter.

There was no dirty laundry mentioned; no yelling and no screaming at each other. It was like watching candidates who were instructed to debate under regulations equivalent to the Marquess of Queensberry Rules of boxing.

The candidates were asked the standard questions regarding housing, education, economic development, public safety, jobs and transportation. Moderator Martin mentioned that Ward 1 has the highest foreclosure rates in the city of St. Paul. Martin then asked each candidate — beginning with Councilmember Carter — how they would address the foreclosure crisis in District 7 (Frogtown and Capitol Heights) and District 8 (Summit-University). Here is a sampling of how the candidate's responded to questions.

Carter: We've done a number of things. I already authored an ordinance that requires landlords going into foreclosure to provide advance notification to their tenants. We are in the process of building two initiatives that I can tell you about briefly. One is an affordable housing trust fund to make sure we can work with our residents in pre-foreclosure to work with the banks and buy those properties. Rearrange it so that those folks can stay in their houses and reset their mortgages. Our mortgage foreclosure prevention efforts have been nationally recognized.

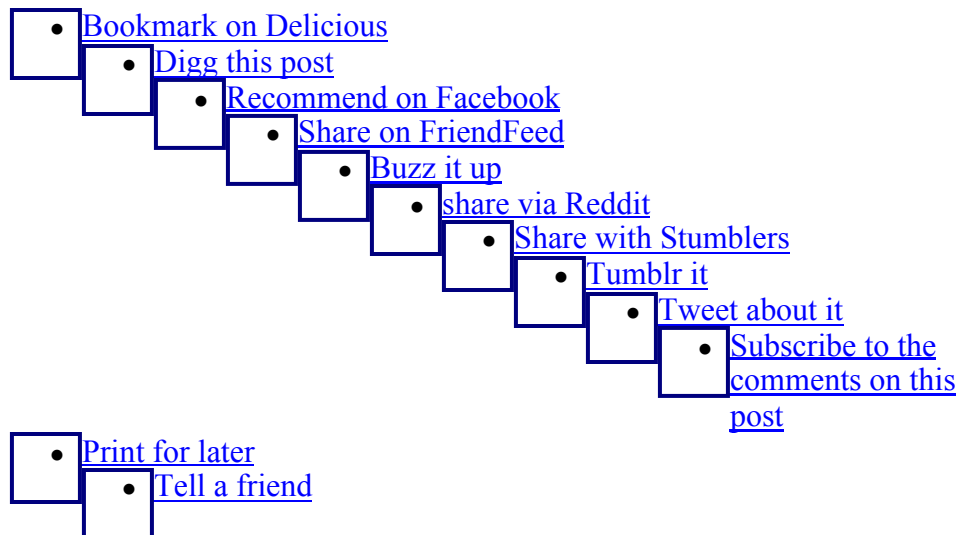
Fernandez: I'm a real estate agent. What I see with a lot of this is, I want to see more people stay in their houses. Not just the people that are in foreclosure, but those going through foreclosure as well. We need to find a way to create some money so we could have specific opportunities for people who don't have negative equity in their homes. That would be something that I would push heavily for.

Howard: The Philadelphia Foreclosure Diversion Program is not a modification program; it's a mediation program. It's where they're demanding that the banks work with the homeowner to lower their interest rate and the monthly payments. It's working in 12 different states, and that's what I'm going to push to look at for St. Paul to help people to stay in their homes.

Carter says that the Philadelphia plan is not working in places like Florida according to his research, and Howard disagreed. Carter continued by offering a plan that takes the City of St. Paul's operating money of a little over \$200 million out and only move it into banks that agree to help with lending, job creation, loan modification and economic development. "We will only invest in banks that invest in St. Paul," said Carter.

*For more information about each candidate, the following are their websites and contact information: Johnny Howard, [www.johnnyhoward.org](http://www.johnnyhoward.org), email [jhoward721@comcast.net](mailto:jhoward721@comcast.net) or call 651-894-3216; Melvin W. Carter III, incumbent, [www.melvincarter.com](http://www.melvincarter.com), email [melvin@melvencarter.com](mailto:melvin@melvencarter.com) or call 651-489-3567; Anthony J. Fernandez, [www.anthonijfernandez.com](http://www.anthonijfernandez.com), email [ajf@anthonijfernandez.com](mailto:ajf@anthonijfernandez.com) or call 612-978-4461.*

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