John Gioia, North Richmond Man

By Robert Rogers, Richmond Confidential

Most of North Richmond is unincorporated. That means the residents here don’t have a vote in city elections, and can’t lobby the City Council for grievances.

Politically, he is seen as a solid liberal. In the late 1970s, Gioia was a founding member of the Contra Costa County’s Young Democrats Club. Gioia consistently receives the endorsement of the Contra Costa County chapter of the Black American Political Action Committee, an organization studded with longtime Richmond political leaders that has opposed McLaughlin and other farther-left candidates like Councilwoman Jovanka Beckles.

Gioia has been in office since 1998, and the last 13 years have been mostly grim in North Richmond’s history. During this period, crime has spiked at times to Third World rates, money for public housing projects has dried up and the nationwide housing collapse decimated the already fragile community.

Violent crime is down in the last two years, but the homicide rate remains much higher per capita than in the city of Richmond. Gioia said that increasing sheriff’s deputy patrols in North Richmond probably played a role in reducing overall crime.

Gioia firmly believes that North Richmond will have a future of growth, particularly in housing and retail and commercial investment. He said that the he’ll push for a vote this year to rezone the largely vacant, formerly industrial lands to the north of current housing stocks, an action which would allow for developers to build homes and retail centers in the area.

“We must have that plan in place so that when the real estate market does turn around, we are prepared,” Gioia said. “But in the meantime, we have to make the community safe for the residents today, not just tomorrow.”

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