

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

**Watching the Westside as the City's Black Population Declines**

By Deyrin Deleon Barri-  
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When community activist Franklin McCallie asked

who would make sure residents in the Westside don't get displaced, Chattanooga Housing Authority Board Member Edna Varner said it's up to concerned people to hold Chattanooga Housing Authority officials accountable for promises made about future housing for Westside residents.

"The answer is WE have to hold people accountable for the commitments that have been made," said Varner. "Nobody living in the Westside is going to be displaced from the Westside."

She spoke to about 30 residents this month at a zoom meeting that included former City Councilman Moses Freeman, Retired Educator Eva Jo Johnson and the Rev. Ann Pierre, president of the local NAACP.

The online discussion followed Dr. Ken Chilton's presentation, "Black Flight: The Impact of Mar-

ket-Based Urban Renewal in Chattanooga." where he explained that an increasing number of blacks have been leaving Chattanooga and Hamilton County. He said unlike white flight, which is when people choose to relocate, he believes many people in the city's black community are being forced out of their homes because of increasing taxes, housing cost and urban renewal.

Hamilton County saw a drop of 3,472 African Americans between 2010 - 2020, a decrease of 5 percent. Chattanooga saw a decrease of 5,872 black residents during the same period, a loss of almost 10 percent, he said.

"It's not a reshuffling," said Chilton. "This is not an aberration; this is not because of COVID."

He said the declining black population has been promoted by policies and local government.

The declining population has also led to a decline in the number of black homeowners in the city which could negatively impact opportunities for black wealth in Chattanooga, he said.

It was the first discussion in the Unity Group's 52nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Week Celebration that ended Monday.

Varner said the housing author-

ity's commitment to not displace residents is in writing at <https://www.westsideevolves.com/faq>. She said people should get a copy of that commitment and hold the housing authority accountable.

About 2,000 people live in the Westside. She said none of them will be displaced as the community evolves.

Unity Group chairman Erick Atkins explained that a decreasing black population could lead to fewer voting precincts and a reduction of resources that could be helpful to the community.

"Black communities are going away at warp speed," said Atkins. "It's going to have consequences on policy making. It's going to have consequences on voting, probably more than any other area. This is what they're going to use to close precincts."

Other online activities to honor Dr. King included the Hamilton County Voters Coalition's discussion about changes in the voting process, Chattanoogaans in Action for Love, Equality and Benevolence' conversation on Criminal Justice issues, Community Activist Bro. Kevin Muhammad's discussion on "Making Our Communities Decent & Safe Places to Live," and Pastor Charlotte S.N.N. Williams'

talk titled, "Riots are the Voices of the Unheard."

The week also included the Community Control Now Coalition's discussion on "Continuing the Movement for Community Control," and the Chattanooga NAACP's conversation titled "COVID-19 is Not Dead."

Activities ended Monday with Unity Group organizers replacing the traditional MLK Day parade with a "Beloved Community Gathering" in Miller Park where people could socially distance and practice COVID-19 precautions.

Atkins said he wants people to consider the world Dr. King envisioned and to work toward it becoming reality.

"We hope that people were exposed to some of the things we believe that Dr. King would have been fighting for if he were here today. That's why we discussed the state of our communities, that's why we discussed voting rights, health disparities and some of the changes needed in law enforcement reform," said Atkins. "Our program was to help bring about the society that Dr. King dreamed about so many years ago. It has not become a reality yet."

**Controversy Continues on Why So Many Blacks are Leaving Chattanooga**

By Camm Ashford

Dr. Ken Chilton, associate professor of public administration at Tennessee State University, is the latest pundit to weigh in on why so many Blacks are leaving Chattanooga.

"Why it's happening, we don't necessarily know," Dr. Chilton, the former director of the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies, explained.

"Where the people are going, we're not 100% sure. We do know that African Americans in and around downtown neighborhoods have been either displaced to suburban locations or are choosing to vote with their feet and move elsewhere for better opportunities, lower costs of living or whatever."

The loss of Black residents in Chattanooga has implications for political representation, funding for local needs, and interpersonal cultural networks, Dr. Chilton noted.

Dr. Chilton's remarks were made last Sunday during a presentation which launched a week of virtual events for this year's MLK Week, sponsored by the Unity Group.

The results of the 2020 census, released in August 2021, showed the population of people identifying themselves as only Black or African American in both Chattanooga and Hamilton County declined from 2010 to 2020. The Black population in Hamilton County in 2020 was down by 3,504 people from 2010. In Chattanooga, it dropped by 5,817.

Census data shows that since 2010, more than 950 African Americans left Avondale, 770 in Glenwood and 714 from the area between the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and East Main Street. Other areas that had a decrease in Black residents were Fort Cheatham, East Lake, Bushtown, Highland Park and Ridgside, among others.

A 2019 report by Dr. Chilton, "Negro Removal in Chattanooga: The Impact of Market-Based Displacement on Communities of Color," tracks neighborhoods that have seen



TOP LEFT: Marie Mott, local community activist. TOP RIGHT: District 9 City Councilman Anthony Byrd. BOTTOM RIGHT: Dr. Ken Chilton, associate professor of public administration at Tennessee State University.

heavy declines in Black residents.

The report's conclusion calls for more low-income resident participation in planning decisions, and the use of community benefits agreements (CBAs) as a way to ensure more equitable growth.

At a recent city council meeting, local community activist Marie Mott chided Chattanooga leaders for not doing enough to keep Black residents in the city.

"You don't have nearly 8,000 people disappear from the southside of East Chattanooga without development that comes out of the regional planning agency and the city council," Mott said.

But District 9 City Councilman Anthony Byrd said it's important that people analyze all the data before coming to conclusions.

"How many people didn't fill out the census," he asked. "Then after asking how many people didn't fill out the census? How many people actually moved?"

Councilman Byrd says he's seen for himself Black families moving into his district, and



prospering.

"I've put three Black families in homes in Avondale that have home ownership," he noted. "I see other families moving into East Chattanooga. So I see it working."

**Low-cost Dental Center to Open in Chattanooga**

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.— Revive Dental, a non-profit clinic dedicated to caring for uninsured and underserved patients, is opening a low-cost community dental center in Chattanooga. The first clinic opened in Birmingham in 2011 and has cared for over 35,000 patients. The founders are pleased to bring this type of care to Chattanooga.

"We are thrilled to be opening our clinic in a few short weeks," said Dr. Leigh Kuyrkendall, local dentist and president of the Revive Dental Board of Directors. "So many people have been working to make this program a reality, and

we are ready to help patients in our community get the care they need. We come across people every day who are struggling with tooth pain, or who lack the confidence to smile, and we want to help with that."

Revive Dental is a non-profit community clinic dedicated to serving patients with limited access to traditional dental care. The clinic is staffed by local dentists who volunteer to serve others. While services are not free, prices are kept as low as possible, typically 1/3 to 1/2 of typical dental fees. As an example, patients can walk-in for an extraction of a painful tooth for about \$65. For patients without dental

insurance, this can be a difference maker in their ability to access oral health care.

Located in the heart of the Ridgedale neighborhood at 1212 Dodds Avenue, the clinic has six well-equipped dental operatories, and they provide a wide range of dental services, including cleanings, fillings, extractions, and tooth replacement with dentures. The clinic was made possible through strategic partnerships with area donors, including Maclellan Foundation, McKenzie Foundation, and Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga.

"Many local nonprofits have

cited a need for low-cost dental care in Chattanooga, so we are excited to see this clinic come to our community. I know it will be a valuable resource," said Tyler Haar, Program Officer for The Maclellan Foundation.

Revive Dental will host an open house and ribbon cutting on Wednesday, February 23 from noon - 2 pm. Members of the Chattanooga community are invited and encouraged to attend. Patients interested in accessing dental services at Revive Dental are encouraged to visit [ReviveDental.org](http://ReviveDental.org) or call (423) 206-9641. Walk-ins are also welcome.