

cost is placed on the property.

Williams: why she broke from Hawkins

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

With the selections of North Ward Councilwoman Tency Eason and At Large Councilwoman Donna K. Williams to serve as the council's president and vice president, a question might be asked: has a voting bloc that may have been beholden to Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. disappeared?

During the 2010 municipal election that led to Linda Jones-Bell coming onto the council from the East Ward, it was assumed that since she and the incumbents who sought re-election had been endorsed by Hawkins, they would, in turn, act as a solid four-member bloc for his agenda. That group included Council members Edward Marable, Hassan Abdul-Rasheed and Donna K. Williams.

Along the way, however, Hawkins repeatedly was unable to get the council to approve some legislation. In what may have been the worst event for the mayor, Williams appeared to break with him and began joining in votes with the "opposition" of Eason and Councilmen Elroy Corbitt and Rayfield Morton.

With Williams having been selected the

council's vice president by her colleagues, and Marable having announced plans to seek the mayor's position in 2012, another question might be asked: what happened?

Williams said the reason for her "defection" was simple.

"It's just a breakdown in communication; the mayor refuses to communicate," said Williams. "He's not communicating what he wants to do or what his intentions are with the council before he goes ahead and presents us with items he wants us to vote on."

Overall, said Williams, the problem relates to Hawkins' management style. She said the council often has been left in a position where members were forced to oppose him both on principle and the substance of his proposals because they believed it was in the city's best interest.

One key issue which caused relations to sour, said Williams, was this year's budget process.

Williams said Hawkins and his administration's withholding of crucial information about the 2011 budget from the council hurt its members' relationship with constituents. She said the mayor left them exposed because when they were asked about city finances, they were not in

a position to provide answers.

"The mayor creates the budget and says where he wants the money to go, but we're accountable for how the money is spent," Williams said. "The straw that broke the camel's back was when he stood up at a meeting last October or November and said that the council was taking the side of the unions over the taxpayers. All the time that he was laying off people, he was simultaneously hiring people. Where were the savings for the taxpayers?"

Williams said she believed the fact that Hawkins did not tell council members about his actions made her realize she couldn't support him anymore.

"I have a responsibility to the people who elected me to do the best job that I possibly can for them and the entire city, and that does not mean being a rubber stamp for the mayor or anyone else," Williams said. "I think we have independent voters on the current council who are going to vote with their consciences and what they believe is the right thing to do. What we have on the council are seven leaders with their own ideas and agendas, but the challenge is to see if we can find common ground."