

Remembering Valerie Woodard's public service

Outspoken Mecklenburg County commissioner will be missed.

Posted: Tuesday, Oct. 07, 2008

Slideshow



2/18/2002-Mug of Valerie C. Woodard, who filed with the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections Monday, Feb. 18, 2002. WENDY YANG/STAFF

More Information

- **Guest Book: Share your condolences**

Tonight, the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners plans to pay public tribute to District 3 representative Valerie Woodard, who died unexpectedly Friday. The board and this community will miss her. Even many who disagreed with her on policy and philosophy agree with that assessment.

Feisty, outspoken and unpredictable, the District 3 representative was a strong, independent, passionate voice on the county commission. As Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory rightly noted: "She was her own person."

Her constituents appreciated that, re-electing her twice by large margins. She was unopposed this year for her fourth term. When she won the seat in 2002, she became the first African American woman on the county board.

Woodard described her own approach to public service two years ago: "People call me, and I call them back. They ask me to do stuff, and I do it." But there was more to her philosophy than that. Her votes on issues sometimes diverged from views of other Democrats, and of those in her predominantly African American district.

In August, she cast the lone vote against an ordinance banning sex offenders from local parks and recreation centers. She said she was worried about possible civil rights violations. In February, she cast the lone vote against appointing Chipp Bailey Mecklenburg County Sheriff. "My concern is how this board handled this situation," she said. Her vote against Charlotte-Mecklenburg school bonds in 2005 drew her a strong reelection opponent from her own party in 2006. She had sided with Republicans on the bond vote, saying the amount was too high. The bonds failed.

Woodard was conservative on some issues and liberal on others – and she wasn't afraid to act accordingly. She pushed for the creation of the county's HIV/AIDS advisory council and for county staff to hire minority contractors. She was a national NAACP trustee, a former chair of the local Civil Service Board and a member of the N.C. Council for Women.

Woodard had a long record of civic involvement. Such public service is well worth remembering.