People Have the Power: Tina "Sweet-T" Pihl fights for a stronger public voice for citizens

By Abby Wojcik

Tina "Sweet-T" Pihl served a term as the CWE alderwoman when it was known as Ward 17 from 2021-2023. Now, through a grassroots nonprofit she founded, Pihl is working to give residents a greater say in the decisions shaping their city.

Pihl founded Voices4All (V4All) after seeing how difficult it can be for residents to get their concerns heard by local officials, despite the best efforts to participate in the legislative process. V4All aims to increase government transparency, hold local officials accountable and help people become more informed and engaged citizens.

"I saw that their voices weren't getting heard by the city officials, and that somebody needs to organize these voices so that they can work as a collective." Pihl said. "I have hope we can come together through Voices4All."

A city planner by training, Pihl approaches civic advocacy by looking beyond individual disputes to the root causes, policies and decisions that shape communities over time. She earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Yale University and a planning degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During her time at Yale, she was among the country's top soccer goalkeepers. She later competed in women's wrestling, finishing fourth at the 2004 Olympic trials.

"What I have learned in life from being an elite athlete, is that executing the *basics* at the highest level that wins the game or makes you the most successful," Pihl said.

Pihl grew up in a transracial family where she was adopted by white parents and raised in Connecticut, along with four other adopted Black siblings. Her parents also fostered more than 40 children, an example of service that continues to shape her values.

"They let us do whatever we wanted, and didn't set any limits on us," Pihl said of her parents.

What differentiates her vision for V4All is that it doesn't focus on a single topic or issue. Instead, they aim to cultivate a more literate and engaged citizenry, to increase voter turnout and help people gain easier access to their political representatives.

One of Voices4All's most visible efforts is opposing the proposed hyperscale data center in Midtown St. Louis near the historic Armory building. Pihl is among the plaintiffs in the coalition lawsuit against the city, which claims that the Board of Adjustment and developer David Lambiaso of TerraWatt acted contrary to law by upholding the conditional use permit.



Tina Pihl — Abby Wojcik photo

"A lot of people think that the fight over the data center is over, but it's not," Pihl said.

The lawsuit argues that the Board of Adjustment did not have the legal authority to approve plans for the data center and they acted against municipal zoning and state laws in approving the permit application. It also raises concerns over the potential environmental and public health impacts, including noise, air and water pollution, and the demands it could place on the energy system.

Supporters of the data center argue that the facility will provide an economic boost through well-paying, union jobs. The original conditional use permit also required the developers to contribute $15.75 million toward infrastructure, digital access, job retraining for workers affected by artificial intelligence and environmental justice initiatives.

"The more I learn, the more I'm against them, because I see the

Continued on Page 4

Gregg Williamson *presents...*
REALTOR®

Office: 314-677-6254
Cell: 314-359-9210
gjw221@gmail.com





4421 Laclede Ave. • Laclede Place
Central West End • 5 bed/2&2 baths
$835,000
SOLD FAST!



4954 Lindell 6E
3 bed/2.5 baths
SOLD
Buyer Representation



Avalon Place
Clarksville MO
$2,100,000



Cedarcrest Manor
Clarksville MO
$1,100,000



Rackheath House
Clarksville MO
$775,000



5076 Westminster Place
Central West End
SOLD
$799,000

POWERED BY kw KELLERWILLIAMS.

www.greggwilliamson.com

Pihl *From Page 3*

health effects that this data center is going to cause on people in Ward 9 and really the whole city," Pihl stated. "One point I would like to make is that residents in Ward 9 need to be really concerned about this, and I don't see that happening."

The Armory site's ward boundaries fell in Ward 17 during Pihl's term as alderwoman. Following changes to ward boundaries, it no longer sits in Ward 9, and she worries that residents may not fully understand the potential effects of the development.

Fundraising efforts are underway to cover the legal expenses facing the coalition of neighborhood residents, labor advocates and environmental groups. A GoFundMe campaign, "Stop Data Centers in St. Louis," serves as the primary collection point for donations.

V4All is also looking for more people to get involved with their ongoing fight for a stronger, better informed community. Sign-ups to volunteer are at Voices4All.org.

Through Voices4All, Pihl wants to build and unify the collective power of St. Louis citizens by helping people understand how local government works and how to effectively engage with it. Pihl acknowledges that this work takes persistence, but her approach remains rooted in a belief that meaningful change starts when people come together and refuse to be overlooked.

For her work with Voices4All, Pihl was given The Roger Pryor Citizen Activist Award from the Missouri Coalition for the Environment at the organization's annual meeting Nov. 6.

"This is a testament to not just me, but to the volunteers and partnerships we've made with groups who have been diligently working on this data center citizen pushback as a team," Pihl said. "And also to my parent's civic duty in advocating for individuals not as advantaged as them."

Books and resources:

Building a stronger community starts with understanding how it works. Former CWE alderwoman Tina Pihl recommends these books and local events to learn more about citizenship, St. Louis' history and civic engagement.

- *Live Like a Citizen* by Eric Liu — Liu explores eight practices for strengthening democracy and civic life, encouraging readers to move beyond cynicism and take an active role in their communities.
- *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* by Walter Johnson — This history of St. Louis examines how racism, capitalism and imperialism shaped the city and the nation, tracing a legacy of exploitation alongside a history of resistance.
- Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement — A series by Washington University's Gephardt Institute offers events and programs focused on civic engagement, community participation and democratic life.
- John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics — Explore lectures, discussions and other events examining the intersections of religion, politics and public life.
- Singing Resistance St. Louis — A movement through singing that uses music to help build community, show solidarity and encourage social change.



Photo by Stefanie Graham

Tina Pihl (Left) at Voter Palooza event on October 4, 2026.

Notice of Meetings
Central West End North Special Business District
Commission meetings are held regularly
on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 a.m.
Upcoming meetings will be on
November 20 • December 18 • January 15 • February 19
Currently, meetings are conducted via Zoom
Notice of the Zoom link for each meeting may be obtained by request to:
jwhyte@cwensi.com





