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JAMAICA PLAIN, ROXBURY, WEST ROXBURY

District 6 candidates focus on schools, public safety in forum

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"(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

The five District 6 City Council candidates - (from left to right) Chun-Fai Chan, Kosta Demos, (moderator Ruth Klepper - not a candidate) Jim Hennigan, Matt O'Malley and Sean Ryan - participated in a forum last night before a small crowd at Sophia Snow Place in West Roxbury.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

With less than two weeks until the field is narrowed to two, the five candidates for the District 6 City Council seat introduced their platforms, discussed how they plan to vote on the state's three ballot measures and answered audience members' questions at a forum Thursday evening.

Schools and public safety were the top issues for the five district residents running in the Oct. 19 special election – [Chun-Fai Chan](#), [Kosta Demos](#), [Jim Hennigan](#), [Matt O'Malley](#) and [Sean Ryan](#) – and all but Ryan said they plan to vote 'no' on all [three ballot measures](#). Ryan told the crowd of around 30 at Sophia Snow Place in West Roxbury last night that he will likely vote 'yes' on all three in November.

Chan, Demos, Hennigan and O'Malley all said they favor returning to neighborhood schools, but as Chan pointed out, "The way to get there is in

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conflict.”

Chan, a 25-year West Roxbury resident, Northeastern University alum and math teacher at the Clarence Edwards Middle School in [Charlestown](#), focused his pitch on advocating for better education and improved services and after-school activities for youth.

Referring to the city’s recent rash of violence involving younger generations, Chan asked aloud, “Why is there that level of disconnect? ... Because we failed as a generation. We failed to educated them.”

“It’s important that we keep advocating for our young people,” he said and later added, “We need to have parents involved and have parents held accountable.”

Demos, who grew up in the what he called “the hinge of the district,” Forrest Hills, said he has experience working in the arts, on political campaigns and advocating for affordable housing and various nonprofits. He said he hopes to bring more power and meaning to the city councilor position, which has been “reduced to an advocacy role.”

“The city’s government only has one branch – the mayor’s office that acts with virtually no accountability,” he said. “Until our city councilors have power to affect policy, you [the voters] won’t have the power to affect policy.”

To increase public safety, Demos said he would advocate for engagement at the street corner level.

Hennigan, who grew up in Jamaica Plain, owns his own insurance company in West Roxbury where he resides with his wife and four children.

He said he has been active in the local community including organizing local residents and business owners to volunteer as Salvation Army holiday bell ringers, which he said has raised over \$200,000 in the past nine years.

“This money goes directly back into our community,” Hennigan said. “Being your city councilor, I want to continue this,” type of volunteer work.

He said he would advocate for programs aimed at the 12 to 18 age range because they do not have enough structured activities to keep them away from problems like drugs, alcohol and violence.

O’Malley is a Jamaica Plain resident who grew up in Roslindale near the West Roxbury border and attended Boston Latin School. He said he has political experience and is also focusing on education and public safety as top priorities.

He said he wants to “make sure that every kid in every neighborhood has access to a two- or four-year college.”

He pledged to schedule regular, in-person meetings with community members and for the times in between, “I will only be a phone call away,” he said.

Ryan, also a Boston Latin alum, grew up in Jamaica Plain, graduated from Harvard College and now works as a music teacher in the city school system. He said his campaign platform focuses on three ‘s’: school, services and safety. Ryan said the government needs to spend money more effectively especially in this economy, law enforcement policies need further scrutiny and the school system needs to behave more like a free market where schools compete for students.

“We want as many different, independent schools as possible,” he said.

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On the first and third ballot questions, all five except Ryan said that voting 'yes' and losing the tax money from both alcohol tax and general sales tax would be too costly of a measure for the state and local government. And, though those four candidates were not all entirely satisfied with Chapter 40B, they feared voting 'yes' to repeal the law would make the process of developing affordable housing more difficult.

However, Ryan said he would vote to repeal the state's liquor tax and to roll back the state sales tax to 3 percent because he'd rather private citizens have control over spending those dollars than putting the money in the hands of "inefficient government."

"I don't see it as taking money away from the government; I see it as giving back to the people," said Ryan.

He also said his initial inclination would be to vote 'yes' on Question 2, though he said he plans to research the issue more before making a final call.






The district, which consists of Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury, and parts of Roslindale and Mission Hill, was formerly represented on City Council by John M. Tobin Jr., who [resigned after nine years](#) in July to take a job at Northeastern University.

Thursday's gathering came just over one week after the candidates squared off at a Jamaica Plain forum.

Prior to last week's forum, the five contenders filled out a voter guide questionnaire provided by activist group and forum hosts [Jamaica Plain Progressives](#) and each [candidate's responses](#) are available on the group's website.

Preliminary voting on Oct. 19 will narrow the contest to the top two vote recipients, while the election takes place on Nov. 16. Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. both dates.

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