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JAMAICA PLAIN, WEST ROXBURY

O'Malley discusses key West Roxbury issues at 'town hall' meeting

Posted by Matt Rocheleau March 21, 2011 11:22 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

City Councilor Matt O'Malley held a town-hall style meeting Monday evening to address residents and hear their feedback on key issues facing West Roxbury.

Winner of a November [special election](#) and [sworn-in](#) to the District 6 seat at the beginning of the year, O'Malley confirmed that he will run for the two-year-term position again this coming fall.

"I work for the people in this room. I work for you," said the 31-year-old councilor whose district consists of West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and parts of Roslindale and Mission Hill. "I love this job. I spent seven years trying to get this job, and I want to keep it."

The meeting followed a similar format to one the councilor held two weeks ago in JP and included a presentation from O'Malley on his first three months in office.

He outlined issues facing the community – including education, development, health, senior services, the environment, transportation, safety and quality of life, which he called "the bread and butter." He explained some of what he's done so far, along with some ideas and plans for the future.

Following the presentation, the councilor fielded questions, suggestions and concerns from a room in the neighborhood's library filled with around 100 residents, including O'Malley's parents and a number of local politicians and aides.

"It has been great to have Matt on the council," said At-large Councilor John R. Connolly. "He was made for this job."

Connolly and State Rep. Ed Coppinger addressed the crowd and helped answer questions specific to their respective roles in city and state matters.

The district is among those affected by a citywide school reorganization plan that includes [merges and closures](#) in order to bridge a \$63-million budget gap, O'Malley said.

The issue is one he said he and other councilors have further questions on that they plan to pressure school officials to answer.

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"Clearly, there is a lot more we have to do," he said.

After a stormy winter, snow clean-up efforts became a significant topic. Meanwhile, the announcement that a mainstay JP Latino grocery store would close, making way for a Whole Foods Market, has created "a different type of storm," he said.

He said he plans to closely monitor planning progress on what will replace the Casey Overpass in Forest Hills, push to bring a dog park to West Roxbury, continue progress on the Gateway Project and try to expand a twice-a-year household hazardous waste recycling program.

The councilor said he was encouraged by news that a West Roxbury-based manufacturer plans to add 30 jobs through a loan the company received with help from the city's high credit rating. O'Malley was also pleased to see over 400 youth attend the annual Shamrock Shootout street hockey tournament last week.

In the E-5 police district that includes West Roxbury and Roslindale, he said reported crime is down significantly so far this year. From the beginning of the year through last week, city police report total crime reports are down 32 percent from the same period last year. Police and specialists told the Globe Tuesday that the wave of heavy winter snow played a role in keeping the crime numbers down.

During the open forum portion of Monday's meeting, several residents raised issue with what they described as inefficient bussing of students to and from city schools.

"There is no tracking done of how many students get on or off a bus," Councilor Connolly said. "This is anecdotal, but to say [many of the school buses] are half-full would be generous."

A teacher from a Charlestown school said his students have had to deal with an opposing, but equally frustrating, problem of overcrowded buses.

Responding in agreement to resident complaints of chronically late buses, Connolly added, "The last time I checked, they're not teaching arts and music on those buses."

When questioned on the fate of city school buildings slated for closure, O'Malley said he doesn't want to see those properties sold.

"The good news is the City Council has to sign off on any major land deal like that," he said.

Another resident worried over proposed cuts in the state budget for adult day health programs. Coppinger announced that the Governor's Office has told him recently "those cuts have been put on hold."

On snow removal, O'Malley said, "I think the city, overall, did a nice job this year. There was a lot of snow out there," but added that the MBTA needs to be more involved in future winters. "The city deserves high marks. The MBTA deserves a 'C' at best."

Others inquired about possible closures to city library branches. The D6 councilor said he'd fight to protect the libraries.

During the gathering, O'Malley passed out business cards with his office and cell phone number and urged residents to contact him and/or attend his monthly office hours if they ever have questions or concerns. At the meeting's

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conclusion, he said he was encouraged by the meeting.

"It was great. I loved the questions; I loved the energy; I loved the people," he said. "This is my favorite part of the job – talking about important city issues and collaborating on how to solve them."

E-mail Matt Rocheleau at mjrochele@gmail.com.



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