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District 7 City Council candidates share views on array of topics

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 19, 2011 01:54 PM

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The two District 7 City Council candidates addressed residents at Tuesday night's forum hosted by RoxVote at Hibernian Hall in Roxbury.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The two candidates competing to win Boston's District 7 City Council seat fielded questions last night on jobs, development, affordable housing, education, violence and unifying a diverse district that includes parts of four notably different city neighborhoods.

More than 75 area residents listened to challenger Sheneal Parker and incumbent candidate Tito Jackson speak at Hibernian Hall in Roxbury -- three weeks before votes will be cast -- at a forum organized by the non-partisan RoxVOTE Coalition, a collaborative group that aims to increase voter participation.

Voters selected those [two candidates](#) from a field of four during a [preliminary two weeks ago](#) in which Jackson captured 76 percent, and Parker received 11 percent, of the vote.

"I've considered myself a leader since I was young" said Parker, a community activist, Boston school teacher, business owner and single mother of a 15-year-old.

"I learned important lessons about life when I helped to take care of my siblings when my mother passed away when I was 16 ... When my son was 2, his father was murdered on the streets of Boston. Instead of taking on that 'why me, oh my, what am I going to do' attitude, I channeled my anger into serving my community," she said, listing several agencies she's volunteered for.

Jackson said he's been able to connect more than 100 people with jobs and has

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made improvements on economic development in his brief time in office thus far.

“It’s not enough, we’re going to continue to do more, but I’d like to continue to do more as your next City Councilor,” he said.

He noted that he and his fellow councilors recently raised the high school drop-out rate from 16 to 18, “so we can further raise expectations for our young people as well as our teachers and our school system.” Jackson cited how he backed a recent public safety measure to require selling of certain knives to be regulated by the city.

He stood in the room where he was sworn in as the district’s councilor six months ago after he received 82 percent of votes in a March special election to win the D7 seat held for more than a decade by Chuck Turner, who was removed from office after he was convicted of accepting a \$1,000 bribe and lying to federal agents.

On education, Parker said she supports bringing back neighborhood schools in part to avoid the sometimes costly, inefficient bus rides some students must make between home and school.

Jackson countered that neighborhood schools would not work, at least not presently, for District 7 because it has a high number of schools designated by the state in recent years as underperforming. Instead he said he supports extending the school day and expanding science, technology and math learning.

Both candidates said they’d advocate for a more critical assessment of teachers and increased parental involvement.

The candidates were asked if they feel there is enough affordable housing in the district.

“As I walk through the district, I talk to different residents and they say that there is too many subsidized housing in the area,” Parker said, adding that she’d like to see more limited equity housing cooperatives, “because you have that sense of ownership like a homeowner ... Residents need to be able to have control of where they stay, how much money they pay for their rent and living in subsidized housing community you do have control over that.”

Meanwhile, Jackson answered that: “In Roxbury we have 65 percent affordable or subsidized housing. And so the real issue here is not that there’s too much, it’s that we need a better mix,” of affordable and market rate housing.

They also each addressed questions about what can be done to reduce violent crimes.

“We have to do better,” Jackson said. “We have to get many of these young men jobs. We have give them the I think mental health support that they need. Because what we’re dealing with today is different than what we dealt with in ’89 and ’90. They’re not making money; they’re broke and they’re still killing. So I think there’s a lot we can do relative to the programmatic side of things and also giving them relevant skills in coming out of jail.”

“It’s ridiculous. I am so tired of it ... There has to be something put in place. What’s going on right now is not working,” Parker said, applauding efforts like [last weekend’s gathering](#) of clergy, public officials and other leaders in the black community in a call to action to stem a surge of gun crimes in Boston. “I just cannot come up here and say ‘oh, what we need to do is work together.’ Because it’s not working, we need to look beyond that.”

Vying to represent a uniquely diverse swath of Boston that contains Roxbury and parts of the Fenway, South End, and Dorchester, Parker said she’d focus on using meetings to unite residents from the city’s differing sections

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Jackson said he and his staff have been going to dozens of meetings in the various neighborhoods on a weekly basis to stay connected to each area. He added that he'd like to bring a representative from each of those associations together for a separate meeting, along with arranging a "signature event for District 7," to help bridge the district's four neighborhoods.

With [hundreds of millions of public dollars in planned development](#) for the Dudley Square area alone, both candidates vowed to advocate for transparency and community input as project decisions are debated and made and said they would help oversee the plans fit the district's needs – namely that projects help employ residents.

The two candidates each also urged residents to become involved in the city's ongoing redistricting process as well as ongoing transportation studies and project planning. They each said they would advocate for youth jobs, promotion of healthy eating and exercise and more services for senior residents.

"There's a lot of work to be done. As I speak to parents who have families who are forced to do more with less and as I talk to business owners who are struggling to survive, there is a need to boost the quality of education and I am that person that can do that job," Parker said in part during her one-minute closing statement.

"I'm running on a lifetime of leadership experience from public safety to quality education to affordable housing on the number of different boards I've served with and I bring not only life experience but practical hands on experience to the council," she continued. "I take your concerns seriously. You can count on me to do that. I will return your phone call I will answer to you when you need me and make sure I'm available as I am now."

In his closing statement, Jackson said, in part: "I've been doing a job and I think I've been doing a very good job thus far. We have connected people with jobs like I said we would, worked on the issue of education and passed legislation to raise the dropout age from age 16 to 18. I've worked on the issue of violence in our community passing legislation to deal with knives in our community and also working at the state level on this issue."

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Today, Wed., Oct. 19, is the last day Boston residents can register to vote in next month's election. For more information, visit www.cityofboston.gov/elections.

On Nov. 8, district voters will head to the polls again to choose between Jackson and Parker to determine which candidate will be elected to the two-year term council seat. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on municipal Election Day.

Two candidates for at-large City Council seats, Will Dorcena and Michael Flaherty, were on hand at Tuesday's forum to meet with potential voters.

RoxVOTE announced it will host a forum with all seven at-large City Council candidates on Nov. 1 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Hibernian Hall in Roxbury.

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To see a questionnaire from Boston.com that each of the two District 7 candidates completed, [click here](#). To see a questionnaire from RoxVote that each of the two District 7 candidates completed, [click here](#).

To see a questionnaire completed by the at-large candidates, [click here](#).

To see video shot by Boston Neighborhood Network News of Tuesday's D7 forum, [click here](#). To read coverage of the forum by Boston University's independent newspaper, The Daily Free Press, [click here](#).

Co-sponsors of the RoxVOTE Coalition and its forum include: Boston Workers Alliance; Cornu Management Company, Inc.; Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative; Franklin Park Coalition; Historic Moreland Street Neighborhood Association; Madison Park Development Corporation; Maloney Properties; Massachusetts Senior Action Council; MassVOTE Civic Engagement Initiative; Mothers for Justice & Equality; NAACP: Boston Branch; National Black College Alliance's Greatest MINDS; Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation; Orchard Gardens Resident Association; Think Politics; Wards 4, 9, 11, and 12 Democratic Committees.

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