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Metro

Familiar foe joins Yancey on ballot

Rucker makes his 11th District 4 bid

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 07, 2011

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In his 28 years on the Boston City Council, Charles C. Yancey has often seemed like a lone wolf, taking stances that set him apart from council colleagues, the mayor, and his own constituents.

But one place Yancey almost always has company is on the ballot for District 4 elections.

For all but two of the biennial races since 1987, he has faced a challenge from J.R. Rucker, 57, a community activist and

telecommunications service technician. The perennial candidate has never come close to unseating his opponent.

Tomorrow, for the 11th time, Rucker will be back vying for the seat representing Mattapan and parts of Dorchester. It is an electoral replay, involving two Dorchester residents and Roxbury natives, built upon the power of persistence and a stubborn quest to beat the odds.

For Yancey, who has served longer, by a decade, than any other sitting councilor, that means continuing to carve out a well-known independent streak.

He was the lone councilor to vote against the mayor's most recent budget. Last year, he and ally Chuck Turner were the only two councilors to oppose the budget.

Yancey also cast the sole vote in December 2010 against expelling Turner from the council after he was convicted in a federal bribery case. "It's not clear to me he was guilty," Yancey said. He remains unsure whether the council had legal authority to remove the longtime rights activist.

"My concept of the City Council is that it has to be an independent body," Yancey said during a recent interview. "It can't be viewed as a rubber-stamp for the administration. . . . I don't



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Charles C. Yancey will be challenged for the District 4 councilor's seat for an 11th time by J.R. Rucker.



PATRICK ROOSO FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

J.R. Rucker (above left) is a community activist, seen chatting with neighbor Marksman Malvo.

take a back seat to anyone in terms of where I stand on these issues.”

Yancey tirelessly stands up for what he feels is best. But while he has won some support, his votes and quotes have at times raised questions about his effectiveness on a body whose official role is limited to serving as an intermediary between citizens and the government bureaucracy.

Council President Stephen J. Murphy called Yancey’s approach unique.

“Most people try to build a coalition,” said Murphy, a longtime councilor who is running for reelection for an at-large seat. “He’s constantly testing: ‘Are you with me or are you not.’ I would not subscribe to the style he practices. But it has served him well. He’s had some victories.”

Yancey says he advocates on a citywide scale, not just for the district he represents, which clashes, at times, with the views of his constituents.

In the mid-1980s, when the city banned handouts of cigarette samples in public places, and later when Yancey sponsored an ordinance to regulate smoking in private workplaces, “most of the people who complained about that were my constituents,” he recalled. Now, he thinks his voting core would overwhelmingly support both measures.

He said he is proud to have helped bring a new library, police station, and two new community centers to his district.

But Yancey said public safety remains his top priority. A product of Boston’s public schools with a master’s degree in public administration from Harvard University, Yancey said he wants to see higher police deployment and hundreds more youth and street workers to help combat crime and reduce student dropout rates.

The councilor continues to fight the closing of community centers and to push for a new high school in Mattapan.

Yancey has been a comfortable favorite in nearly every reelection. The closest he has come to losing was in 2003, when a Dorchester minister, Ego E. Ezedi Jr., came within 10 percentage points of the incumbent.

Now, in his 14th term, Yancey says he never expected to hold the position past his first two years. He ran unopposed in his first reelection bid.

“I complained about it pretty vocally to my family and others, because in a democracy I think people should have some choices,” he said. “I’ve wanted to eat those words over the years, because one person who is listening to me is my current opponent.”

Rucker has never garnered more than 13 percent of the district’s vote. Still, he seems undaunted as he again takes aim at Yancey.

He asserts that Yancey has not done enough to bring jobs and economic development to District 4.

“Where are the businesses going?” Rucker said in an interview at the Dorchester home that he, his wife, and their son have shared for three decades. “It’s killing us. I don’t think he’s doing enough.”

Sitting at his dining room table after work, Rucker wore his Verizon work shirt. The high school graduate has been a service technician since 1971.

Shortly after his marriage, the Army National Guard veteran took on several leadership roles at neighborhood community centers and a nonprofit development corporation that advocates for affordable housing, the chief issue he campaigns on.

“I always tell people that if everybody who’s not satisfied with him voted for me, I’d be their new city councilor,” Rucker said. “But people aren’t really gravitating to something new, to a change. They are happy, for some reason, with this very slow pace of progress in this neighborhood. It’s sad.

“The major reason I run is I believe that no politician should be unchallenged. A lot of people come up to me after the election and say, ‘I’m glad you did run, because I had a choice.’ So that makes me feel good; that keeps me going.”

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