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## As Sept. 27 vote nears, District Two council candidates appeal to voters

Posted by Patrick Rosso

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(Patrick Rosso/Boston.com/2011)

Candidates getting ready to address the audience at the Quincy School in Chinatown.

By Patrick Rosso, Town Correspondent

Candidates vying for a seat on the City Council had one last chance Thursday night to tell residents of District Two why they should be representing them.

At the Quincy School in Chinatown, challengers Suzanne Lee and Bob Ferrara presented their reasons why they are the best candidate to represent the district, which makes up the South End, Chinatown, South Boston, Bay Village and a small portion of Dorchester. The seat is currently held by Bill Linehan.

While Lee, a longtime educator and community activist, and Ferrara, a self-employed South Boston native, focused on what they could bring to the council, incumbent Linehan highlighted his accomplishments. The preliminary election is Tuesday, Sept. 27.

"The reason I am running is because I am your district city councilor at this time," Linehan said. "It's an honor to work with you and I'd like to continue."

Ferrara cast himself as an outsider and as someone who is dedicated to constituents and to making changes on the council.

"I ran for this position four years ago and I was unsuccessful. We've had the incumbent in the position for four years and the bottom line is I feel I can do a better job," Ferrara said.

Lee focused on her record as an educator and community activist and said she would translate those skills to the world of City Council politics.

"It will take hard work, it will take new ideas, and most of all it will take a dedicated leader that will hear all voices," Lee said. "Those are the skills I have used to turn around underperforming schools and build successful organizations in our community."

The event was sponsored by MassVote along with the Asian America Civic Association and the Asian America Resource Workshop.

Differences in the candidates emerged on a question regarding Secure Communities, the federal government's immigration program that works with local law enforcement officials to try to restrict illegal immigrant activity. Boston is still the only Massachusetts community participating.

The question posed by an audience member asked candidates and the incumbent:

"In several communities in Boston with high rates of immigrant populations, advocacy groups are reporting that local residents are fearful of law enforcement for fear of deportation. What are your views on Secure Communities

enforcement?”

“I do support the law,” Ferrara said. “I completely understand how the immigrant community can be afraid of law enforcement and deportation, but right now it’s a very big topic and we have an illegal immigrant problem.”

Lee, on the other hand, said: “I would not support a law that would make immigrants feel that they don’t belong here.”

She added that “it makes people not want to work with the police, not want to report crimes and that doesn’t make our community safer.”

Although Linehan did not give a direct yes or no answer to the question he said that the law needs to be reviewed.

“Secure Communities is something that we in the city of Boston are revisiting. ... Recently I met with four separate organizations in my office and they told me about some of the problems immigrants are facing based on law enforcement’s aggressive activity in their neighborhood. We need to see that that changes.

“We need to see that folks who are abiding the laws in the neighborhood aren’t throwing in a jail with a bunch of criminals,” Linehan said.

Candidates also addressed a question regarding high-rise development in Chinatown.

Linehan said he supported “quality development” in the urban neighborhood.

“How high it is relevant for Chinatown on the amount of mitigation it can provide to create schools and affordable housing,” he said. “If a developer wants four more floors and is going to build us a library, than I say do it.”

Ferrara also supported the idea of high rises, as long as the community gets a say.

“I’d be for making sure the developers participated in making concessions to the neighborhood,” he said. “The reality is when you sit people down people in a room and you’re not fighting with people you can get anything accomplished, and I’m willing to work with anyone.”

But Lee said the neighborhood is feeling immense pressure from developers.

“It’s really a sad day when we have to ask the community to decide, ‘Do you want higher buildings in exchange for benefits.’ It a sad day when we have to resort to that... So it’s forcing our community to choose either having really high buildings or you get nothing. That’s a terrible choice.”

In his closing remarks, Ferrara sought to reinforce his identity as an outsider. and someone who is not in the Mayor’s pocket.

“The big thing is he [Councilor Linehan] is not his own man. The big reason I am running is because we need an independent voice... we have a very strong mayor and a very weak city council and what you have going on is not acceptable anymore.”

Lee, a retired Boston Public Schools teacher and principal, stressed that she is uniquely able to unite different groups in the city.

“We need to have quality schools, and we can get there by bringing everybody together, particularly cultural institutions and universities...to really focus on supporting the whole child and what families need,” she said. “One of the reasons my schools have been so successful is because I always involve everyone in making the decisions. I’m proactive to involve everyone to make the plan before we implement them and that’s what I want to bringing to the city council.”

Linehan, on the council since 2007, stressed that he has the understanding and experience the district needs.

“You have a city councilor, one who works for you now. You have one who is of the entire district and you have one that comes to this neighborhood on a regular basis and participates in many activities and many events,” he said. “I look forward to serving you for two more years,” said Linehan.

Lee, Ferrara, and Linehan will be facing off Sept. 27 in the preliminary election. After the preliminary, the two winners will face off again in the Nov. 8 municipal election.

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