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Northampton at-large council candidates spar

By CATHERINE BAUM
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NORTHAMPTON - In a forum for at-large council candidates Wednesday, Kathleen E. Silva staked out territory that sets her apart from the other two candidates: She thinks classrooms with 36 to 38 students are not too large and she was opposed to this year's Proposition 2½ override, which voters passed in June.

Silva is running against David J. Narkewicz, currently the Ward 4 councilor and Jesse M. Adams, a city lawyer, for two at-large council seats.

Though as councilors, they likely would not weigh in on class size, the councilors addressed the issue when an audience member asked Silva if she still stands by her previously stated opinion that a class size of 30 to 40 students isn't too large.

"I don't think 38 kids in the classroom is a large classroom," she said, which stirred a reaction from the 80-person crowd during an open forum Wednesday night. Some audience members gasped while others laughed.

"I think our students do a great job." Silva noted that 38 students per class isn't the best fit for everyone; She said special education and behaviorally at-risk students would perform better in smaller class sizes.

Both Narkewicz and Adams said they believe that smaller classes, with 18 to 20 students, are ideal.

"The answer is as small as possible," Adams said. "That's why it's necessary to keep all four grammar schools open. Once you close a school you never get it back."

Narkewicz said the School Committee has done a "remarkable job" to make class size a priority - an issue that's going to get "tougher and tougher" with budget constraints.

The three candidates agreed on ideas ranging from seeking community input on issues of crime, development, and traffic calming.

Silva said she is skeptical of building in locations where infrastructure is already weak and she has issues with the bidding process, though she did not elaborate why.

During her closing comments, Silva, of 119 Riverside Drive, noted that she is the only candidate who worked against the \$2 million Proposition 2½ override, and she "is not afraid to stand up" for what she believes in. She is a correctional officer for the Hampden County Jail and House of Correction in Ludlow, her hometown.

If elected, she said she would push for term limits for government officials and board members and truthfully represent constituents.

Adams, of 187 Main St., said he supports a review of the city charter.

"We have to ask tough questions: Should the mayor chair the City Council?" Adams said. "That's not a criticism of our current mayor, that's a question of our charter."

Narkewicz, of 31 South Park Terrace, said traffic calming is "critically important" to maintaining



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neighborhood safety and quality of life.

He credits Northampton for being "cutting edge" in creating the bike trail network, saying the city is becoming the "mecca" for that kind of infrastructure and a model for other communities. There is room for improvement, he said, in gathering public input on environmental sustainability issues.

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