

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, NEWS

KENNEDY VS. MCGEE, TAKE 2 OF THE MAYORAL DEBATES

BY THOMAS GRILLO | October 18, 2017



Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy, left, and state Sen. Thomas M. McGee, right, during the debate for mayor. (Owen O'Rourke)

LYNN – Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy and challenger state Sen. Thomas M. McGee (D-Lynn) sparred in their second mayoral debate Wednesday.

In front of a packed crowd of Massachusetts Senior Action Council members at the Lynn Housing Authority & Neighborhood Development auditorium, the candidates highlighted their differences, but were often on the same page.

In opening remarks, McGee said he has worked with the Council to keep healthcare and prescription drugs affordable, as well as maintaining the Ride, the MBTA's door-to-door, shared-ride transit service for the disabled.

"I've continued to advocate to keep this service affordable because it's a lifeline that helps many people get to medical appointments and stores," he said.

Kennedy used her opening to list her administration's accomplishments over the the last eight years including the opening of Market Basket on Western Avenue; the city's first wind turbine; a tax work-off program for seniors; and new apartments at the Flatiron Building in Central Square.

On the future of Union Hospital, both said they serve on a panel trying to determine how urgent care services will continue after the hospital closes.

Kennedy said she fought to keep it open, but when it was clear they would close, she fought for assurance that urgent care would still be available on the campus.

McGee said his goal is to have urgent care continue and assure the public's voice is heard.

They differed on the privatization of public transportation.

McGee said he is opposed to Republican efforts to privatize transit. He said the city needs to push for more rapid transit.

Kennedy responded by saying the governor is trying to reign in the MBTA's budget deficit by privatizing some work, such as the bus mechanics.

"We can't keep running up the deficit," she said. "And why hasn't our delegation on Beacon Hill found the money to extend the Blue Line while Somerville got the Red and Green Lines extended."

On public safety, the mayor said the city has 164 police officers and 168 firefighters and was proud that none have been laid off during her two terms. She blamed the swollen school budget, which has increased by 34 percent since she took office.

"That money has to come from somewhere," Kennedy said.

The mayor held out hope of hiring as many as nine new police officers through a grant that would pay 75 percent of first year salaries.

McGee said the city should have three dozen more cops and called for an audit of the city's finances, noting City Hall faces an \$8.5 million deficit.

"We need an audit to address the challenges we face," he said.

When a senior asked if taxes from the two medical marijuana clinics that are slated to open in Lynn should go to build a new senior center, both candidates said they could not make such a promise. The city has said the pot tax could raise as much as \$600,000 annually.

“It’s premature to say where we would put those dollars,” McGee said.

Kennedy agreed, noting the city has to close its deficit.

The candidates also agreed they could not support a so-called anti-wage theft ordinance that would require the city to verify that any contractor doing business with the city had not violated fair wage laws.

“Our city is in a financial crisis and that’s the first thing we have to take care of,” McGee said.

Kennedy said the city cannot afford to hire a compliance officer, a position that would be needed to enforce such a regulation.

The election is set for Nov. 7.



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Thomas Grillo is an award-winning business reporter who has worked at Boston's major newspapers covering real estate trends such as the emergence of Assembly Square in Somerville and chronicling the growth of Boston's Seaport District. In Lynn, Thomas covers City Hall and commercial real estate development including the transformation of Lynn's waterfront into a mixed-use neighborhood. Follow him on Twitter [@BosBizThomas](https://twitter.com/BosBizThomas).

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