

Benjamin and Lor compete for Ward 6 seat on council

Michael Rose, Statesman Journal 7:13 p.m. PDT May 8, 2014



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Two challengers are running for the Ward 6 seat on Salem City Council in the May 20 primary. The election's winner will represent a chunk of northeast Salem.

Ward 6 candidate Daniel Benjamin, an agent with New York Life Insurance Co., said he can spearhead efforts to help the local economy.

Benjamin told the Statesman Journal's editorial board that he hoped to promote the city as "open for business," as well as focus on livability issues such as parks and recreation.

"Right now, the ward is somewhat economically depressed, and we need to get some jobs going," Benjamin said.

Benjamin is chairman of the North Lancaster Neighborhood Association, serves on the board of Habitat for Humanity and is a member of the city's budget committee. He emphasized his civic involvement and national service in the U.S. Army, from 1986 to 1989, as evidence of his fitness to fill the Ward 6 seat.

But the candidate has a blemish on his record: a 21-year-old conviction for an assault on a former girlfriend.

Benjamin was convicted of assault in the fourth degree in 1993 and was sentenced to six months of felony probation, according to records on file with the Oregon Department of Corrections. The incident occurred in Multnomah County.

The Statesman Journal's candidate questionnaire asked those running for city council if they have ever been convicted of a crime. Benjamin answered "no" in the questionnaire.

When asked to explain his answer, Benjamin said he thought his record had been expunged. He said that in December 1992 he was drinking and got into "an altercation" with a former girlfriend.

A Gresham Police Department crime report, dated Dec. 31, 1992, states that the victim was punched in the back and ribs and suffered a swollen lower lip.

"I have made some mistakes in the past," Benjamin said. "I am so different from what I was back then."



City Council candidate Xue Lor participates in a "Meet the Candidates" forum hosted by the Salem City Club Friday April, 18, 2014. (Photo11: KOBBI R. BLAIR | Statesman Journal, KOBBI R. BLAIR / Statesman Journal)

Xue Lor, the other Ward 6 candidate, said he would approach the council's business with an open mind and be an advocate for northeast neighbors.

"I am there to represent the public and make sure the public's voice is being heard," said Lor, who works for the state as a corrections officer.

The proposed redevelopment of the Oregon State Hospital North Campus is an important issue for northeast Salem, he said. The candidate said he would work to ensure that the 47-acre property, which the state intends to sell, is developed in a way that addresses neighborhood concerns.

He would like to see some green space preserved at the North Campus site, which is located in the 2500 block of Center Street NE.

City parks also need improvements, Lor said. McKay School Park, for example, needs new playground equipment to replace equipment that the city removed for safety reasons, he said.

Lor came to Salem 1986 with his family, at the age of 12, after spending five years in a refugee camp in Thailand. Salem City Council needs someone who understands first hand the aspirations and struggles of immigrants, he said.

Lor is active with a nonprofit that welcomes refugees to Oregon and volunteers in the Asian-Pacific Islander community. He is also an elder at the Faith Christian Fellowship church.

Bruce Rogers is temporarily representing Ward 6. In April, he was appointed by Salem City County to fill the vacancy left when Sheryl Thomas resigned.

Rogers, who has previously represented Ward 6, will step down in December and a new councilor will be sworn in.

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May Primary election previews

The Statesman Journal is running May Primary preview stories about contested races through Monday, May 12, to help voters when filling their ballots.

The May Primary is Tuesday, May 20. Ballots are due by 8 p.m. May 20.

To find more May Primary information, including key dates, past preview stories, election news and Statesman Journal Editorial Board endorsements, go to StatesmanJournal.com/elections.

Salem City Councilor, Ward 6

These are the candidates for Ward 6 and each candidate's total campaign contributions and current balance as of May 5, 2014.

Daniel Benjamin: Total contributions: \$11,255; Balance: \$ 1,532

Xue Lor: Total contributions: \$2,300; Balance: \$700

Sources: State records (Benjamin); Candidate (Lor)

Issues: Where the candidates stand

Third bridge across the Willamette River

Benjamin: The bridge is needed for daily commuters, as well as businesses that depend on truck traffic.

Lor: Opposes the bridge. It's not unreasonable to have some traffic congestion. Taxpayer dollars could be used for better purposes.

Plans for a seismic upgrade of Vern Miller Civic Center and new police station

Benjamin: The project has been widely discussed and several good ideas have been considered. He is open to considering alternative locations for the police station, but other areas might be logistically difficult.

Lor: A new police station is needed, but it doesn't need to be downtown. The city should pursue less expensive options.

Transparency of city government

Benjamin: The city has made good-faith efforts to keep residents informed and respond to the public's concerns on issues, such as the Vern Miller Civic Center and the proposed third bridge.

Lor: Planning process for the proposed upgrade of Vern Miller Civic Center and a new police station should have been more open. The city needs to do a better job with transparency.

Jobs and economic development

Benjamin: The city needs more family-wage jobs and should focus on growing the manufacturing sector. Willamette Valley presents opportunities for agriculture-related tourism.

Lor: The city should support small, locally owned businesses rather than trying to recruit large companies that won't commit to staying in town long term.

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