

Candidates present platforms

by **Jordan Muller**
ASST. NEWS EDITOR

The six remaining candidates in the 2017 Syracuse mayoral race gathered Tuesday night to discuss their platforms at a public forum on Syracuse's North Side.

About 80 people packed the basement of Westminster Presbyterian Church to hear the candidates' positions on topics including city rezoning, police services, the Syracuse-Onondaga County merger proposal and housing.

Juanita Perez Williams, Joe Nicoletti and Marty Masterpole are the three remaining Democratic candidates.

Ben Walsh is the Upstate Jobs Party candidate, Howie Hawkins is the Green Party candidate and Laura Lavine is both the Republican and Independence Party candidate.

Here are some takeaways from the forum:

Laura Lavine

Lavine, a former LaFayette School District superintendent, said she would seek mayoral control over the Syracuse City School District.

Under her plan, Lavine would select the city's school board with the advice and consent of the Syracuse Common Council. Currently, there are seven school board members. Every two years, three or four school board members go up for election.

Lavine said the school board cannot do consistent work if board members are up for election every two years.

"Mayoral control sends the message to the city that schools are of paramount importance and that I as mayor will ultimately be accountable to the community," Lavine said.

Lavine also said she does not support the proposed city-county merger that would combine the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County governments.

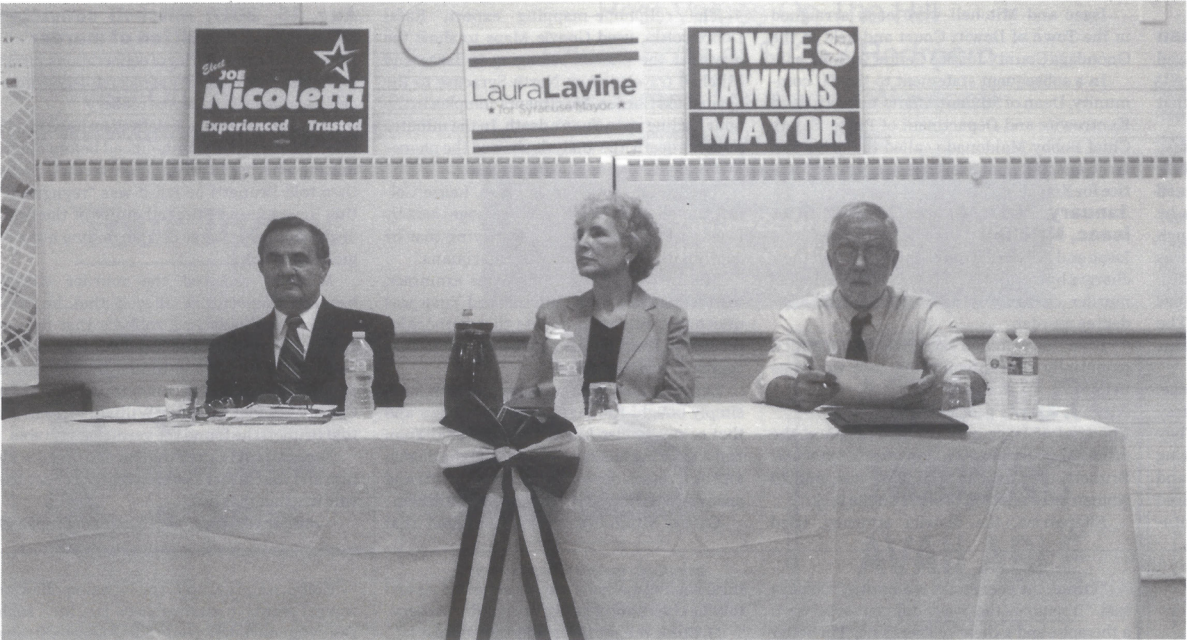
Juanita Perez Williams

The Democratic candidate spent most of her allotted time describing her plans to tackle issues related to vacant housing.

"We need to focus on the 1,800 blighted houses on the South Side of the city that sit and contribute to horrendous things in communities," Perez Williams said. Houses left vacant in the city are an "eyesore" that cause crime and lower property values, she said.

Perez Williams said her administration would focus on code enforcement and property owners would held accountable for properties that are not maintained.

Perez Williams also said she



Facing off

(FROM LEFT) **JOE NICOLETTI, LAURA LAVINE AND HOWIE HAWKINS** joined other Syracuse mayoral candidates Juanita Perez Williams, Marty Masterpole and Ben Walsh to talk about their platforms during a public forum Tuesday night. At the forum, candidates discussed police staffing, the city-county merger proposal and the Greater Syracuse Land Bank. **PAUL SCHLESINGER** ASST. PHOTO EDITOR

FROM PAGE 1 **MAYORAL FORUM**

would not support city-county consolidation.

Joe Nicoletti

Nicoletti said the SPD will need to fill the vacancies in staffing. He would rather see the police department expand to "reflect the diversity" of the Syracuse community than pay officers for overtime, he said.

On the city-county merger, Nicoletti said he is opposed to the plan.

Nicoletti would support help from the county on revitalizing parks and streets but said that the city should retain ultimate control.

Ben Walsh

Walsh, an independent, said he supports increased police hiring to fill vacancies in the police department. Putting more police officers into the city will help build relationships with the community, he said.

In addition to increasing police numbers,

Walsh said he supports installing security cameras in city neighborhoods to help reduce crime.

"We need to put more cameras where they are needed and where they are wanted," Walsh said.

Walsh also said he would propose creating a "quality of life commission" that would engage the community, department heads and elected officials to focus on topics such as beautification and litter in the city.

Marty Masterpole

Like many of the other candidates, Masterpole supported filling SPD vacancies. Filling vacancies, Masterpole said, would give the police chief the ability to run a good department.

Masterpole also said he supported the Greater Syracuse Land Bank.

During the forum, candidates were allowed to yield time to answer audience questions if they wanted. Masterpole was the first candidate to take questions from the audience. One attendee asked Masterpole about his relation-

ship with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the New York Legislature.

Masterpole said his relationship with Cuomo and the Legislature is "neutral." But as mayor, he said he wants to have a good relationship with the governor.

Howie Hawkins

Hawkins said a community hiring hall — where people could come and sign up for employment — would help increase employment in the city.

Hawkins said the SPD has failed to diversify and that a new police chief should be selected from outside the city.

A police chief from outside the city would help the police force become more diverse and manage overtime issues, Hawkins said.

To reduce crime, he said the city should invest in reducing poverty.

Hawkins also said he is opposed to the city-county merger proposal.

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FROM PAGE 3 **DONATION**

The couple has a history of philanthropic work in central New York. Between the two, they have worked with civic organizations and operated a foundation to help cancer patients.

"For the student scholars, our wish is that they take advantage of the education they are receiving, and when they are successful will do the same to help other students," Kathy Mezzalingua said in the release.

Dan Mezzalingua earned an undergraduate degree from SU and Kathy a master's degree in education. Their education was a motivating factor, according to the release.

"We were very blessed in terms of what had occurred for us, and we wanted to make sure other people had opportunities through meaningful help," Dan Mezzalingua said.

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