

Forum for City Council candidates centers on crime - Danville Register & Bee (VA) - April 10, 2018

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Violent crime, Sunday's officer-involved fatal shooting of a young black man, and relations between the police department and the community dominated a Danville City Council candidate forum Tuesday night.

The body-camera video of the shooting that killed 25-year-old **Juan Markee Jones**, which was released by Danville Police Chief Scott Booth on Tuesday, came up during the forum at Alpha & Omega Solid Foundation Church of Worship on Kemper Road in Danville.

"I watched that video," said City Council candidate Sheila Baynes. "It moved me to the bottom of my heart. I felt for that family."

Five candidates are vying for four seats on council. Vice Mayor Alonzo Jones, Gary Miller and James Buckner are running for re-election. Baynes and former councilman Adam Tomer are also running. Mayor John Gilstrap, whose seat is also up for grabs, is not seeking re-election.

The forum was moderated by Jessica Robinson of StarNews. The second half of the three-hour forum included Danville School Board candidates.

The city has a new police chief and everyone must give him a chance, Baynes pointed out.

"We need to give him an opportunity to see if he can make change," she said. Booth replaced Philip Broadfoot, who retired at the end of 2017.

Alonzo Jones, when asked, said he did not support all of the police department's initiatives to fight crime "because we're not there yet." He had good words for the new police chief.

"He's trying to be transparent," Jones said. "He's trying to be open."

He pointed out that Booth talked to citizens in the middle of Monday's protest to try to keep people calm.

"We have a good police chief, we really do," Jones said.

Adding that "we can't do things the same old way," Jones said people in the community are hurting.

Miller said he disagreed with Jones regarding the police force.

"We have a good police force, we have a good police chief," Miller said.

Jones told Miller he never said he didn't support police officers, but reiterated that he liked some of the department's initiatives but not all of them.

It is important that community members help out the city's police officers, Miller said.

"If we don't help the police, we never get anybody apprehended," he said, adding that some murders are not solved because witnesses won't talk.

"We need to build trust," Miller said. "If we don't control the crime, economic development will go down the tubes."

Buckner also praised Booth and said he would do great things in the community.

"He believes strongly in transparency, which is something we haven't had in a long time," Buckner said.

City Council's job is to keep Danville's citizens safe, Buckner said.

"Everything that happens in this community deeply affects every one of us," he said. "My prayer is that everybody's safe, that we won't get a terrible message in the middle of the night."

Tomer said he got to know Broadfoot, the previous police chief, during his previous stint on City Council.

"I thought there was a change needed," Tomer said. "Back in 2014, change was kind of slow to move. I definitely think the city manager and the City Council are going in the right direction."

The only way to fight the violent crime problem is through trust; police need to trust the community and the community needs to trust the police, Tomer said.

"If we do not control the violent crime, the city will not flourish," he said, adding that it affects economic development, the River District, and schools.

"It's a cancer we have to root out," Tomer said.

Council members also praised Booth for getting out in the community and knocking on doors to talk to citizens.

Community engagement with the department is needed, Jones said. He and Gilstrap went to **Juan Markee Jones's** mother's house.

"It hurts my heart," Jones said of the fatal shooting.

Building relationships among citizens and with police is important, Baynes said. Citizens need to be able to go to the police chief with any concerns they may have, she said.

Police should treat community members with respect and dignity, and community members

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