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Councilwoman wins by big margin

By Eric Klamut
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Councilwoman Lois Watkins claimed victory Tuesday night in the highly anticipated runoff election in Ward 4 for Rocky Mount City Council,

Watkins received 999 votes over former three-term Councilman Tom Looney's 679 votes.

The 320-vote advantage allowed Watkins to keep her seat on council.

Watkins, 51, awaited election results surrounded by friends, family and community members at Hyman Battle Community Center.

"The voters put me here this time," she said. "In walking the ward they shared their hearts with me. They supplied the platform (with their concerns)."

Several members of the City Council, including Lamont Wiggins, Andre Knight and Reuben Blackwell, were on hand to congratulate Watkins.

Turnout for Tuesday's runoff outpaced the city's Oct. 9 elections. Many of the 1,678 votes were cast during no-excuse, one-stop voting.

In last month's election, Watkins received 565 votes to Looney's 577. A third candidate, Earl Hall, earned 88 votes in the Ward 4 race, for a total of 1,230 votes.

The narrow margin between Looney and Watkins of just 12 votes prompted the runoff, which Watkins filed for on Oct. 11.

Watkins said because she did not raise a large amount of money while campaigning, many people thought that she would not have a chance in last month's election.

"A lot of people thought I wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell," Watkins said. "Money wasn't an issue."

Watkins raised about \$13,000, while Looney raised more than \$77,000.

With the high number of votes in the runoff election, Watkins said the tally showed she garnered both the support of the white and black communities in Ward 4.

"Getting support from the black and white communities demonstrates the ability to work together," she said. "It's good that both blacks and whites recognize that I'm sincere and will fight for them. I'm real proud of the ward."

Following the unofficial election results, Looney, 72, said although he came up short in votes, he feels his campaign was a success.

"Our campaign was extremely well-organized," he said. "I felt it was run with dignity and honor. I had many excellent workers who presented themselves well."

Looney said that at the moment, he is not considering running for the seat in four years,

"I wish Ms. Watkins well," he said.

Watkins thanked Looney for a "clean and decent" campaign.

"I applaud him for all his years of service," she said.

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