

Residents for Quality Neighborhoods

Newsletter

October 2010

RQN CANDIDATES' FORUM

The Candidate's Forum was held Sunday, September 26, 2010, for those seeking the offices of mayor and city council member. Of the ten candidates invited, three mayoral candidates attended (Paul Brown, Don Hedrick and Jan Marx) and five council candidates attended (Andrew Carter, Dan Carpenter, Andrea Miller, Arnold Ruiz and Kathy Smith).

Several questions were asked of each candidate. Unfortunately, all of the questions and answers cannot be reproduced for you here. However, they are available at the RQN website: rqnslo.org

Listed below are the questions to which the candidates could answer yes or no, and a sample of other questions asked.

1. Do you support the use of parking meters on Sundays?

BROWN: Yes

HEDRICK: No

MARX: No

CARTER: Yes

CARPENTER: Yes

MILLER: No

RUIZ: No

SMITH: Yes

2. As mayor, or vice mayor acting as mayor, will you ask everyone who gives public testimony to give the city or unincorporated area where they actually reside?

BROWN: Yes

HEDRICK: Yes

MARX: Yes

CARTER: Yes

CARPENTER: Yes

MILLER: Si

RUIZ: Yes

SMITH: Yes

3. The City says funds are not available to hire personnel to help enforce noise and neighborhood enhancement ordinances, despite that being a Measure Y assurance.

a. Would you support reallocating funds to address the quality of life issues in neighborhoods?

b. During the budget process, would you advocate for funds to support neighborhoods?

MARX: a) The short answer is yes. And the budget process is going to be starting up in January and I definitely support reallocating funds to address neighborhood quality. I fought really hard for those two patrol officers and got voted down but I'll do it again—I think it's really important. b) Yeah, definitely. I think that we also need to look at alternatives. The whole issue of neighborhood services specialists, which are not actually police officers, but are affiliated with the police department and who can do a lot of the enforcement type of activity, I think that we really need to take a look at that. Do we actually need a police officer to accomplish a lot of our goals? I think some things could be accomplished without a sworn officer.

CARPENTER: I definitely would be in favor of reallocating funds. I continue to feel that neighborhood wellness is our top priority. And certainly during the budget goal setting process, when that begins, I would advocate for funds to go to that area, there is no question, so yes to both.

CARTER: Yes, spending for neighborhood quality has always been a key issue of mine and I remain disappointed that one of the things that was promised in the Measure Y campaign was the neighborhood patrol and we weren't able to provide it. Basically, people look to government for public health, safety, and welfare and neighborhood quality is key and tied into that public welfare. I think one of the things that we're going to be needing to do because we are going to be facing budget cuts, is really, I think, Council is going to need to sort of take a zero based approach and really take a hard look at what we're doing and what we really don't have the funds to do. But certainly in that process, neighborhood quality will remain key to me.

MILLER: For this question, I kind of want to answer, of course, yes, you would want to allocate funds towards it but then you have to look at the time the budget is, right now what are we then taking away from, because money isn't out

there growing on trees like we all wish it would be. So, for this one, I would have to say that it would be community safety as a whole, not just specifically for the neighborhoods. We all live in our homes, obviously, but we also walk down the street downtown, we also get gas at the local gas station, we also maybe walk on the path next to the creek, so I think it's overall city quality that we have to look at and that's where I would put the funds towards—not just specifically the neighborhoods, the city as a whole.

SMITH: If any of you want to pick up my brochure on the table there, you'll see that under the SLO quality of life, the first thing that I have listed is diverse neighborhood preservation. I've always felt that a city is no more than a compilation of all the various neighborhoods and each of them is different. We have historical neighborhoods, we have some that are basically retired people, we have some that have an inter-mix of many different kinds of people. And as a city, we're really proud of that. It's something that makes us different from other kinds of cities. I think we also need to look at our budget and say how important is this to us. I've often felt that you can look at a person's checkbook to see what their values are. And if we value neighborhoods in our city, we need to put it at the top of our checkbook. Come to our budget meetings and help us do that.

RUIZ: The taking funds from one place to another, we're talking about a "slush" fund and I'm for that. But the main idea would be to help the community's neighborhoods/precincts be self supporting. If they can't do that, then we would help them but I think this is where we really need to focus-- is letting people take care of themselves, take care of their neighborhoods and then take care of their towns. And this is the way we will be able to take care of our state like we used to do.

BROWN: Well, I don't think I'm alone in the room who's frustrated with the fact that on one hand we get told there's not money for neighborhood services but then we see the money getting spent on a new city manager, we see the money get spent on parts of downtown, and we see the money get spent on two officers who are being put on administrative leave while they're being investigated. When I see that type of money being spent and then the city comes around and tells me they can't make something a priority which they said was a priority, that doesn't sit well with me.

HEDRICK: I'd like to say that we need to lead by example a lot and become more personally involved with our neighborhood, not just expecting somebody else to do it. If you send somebody else to do it, they're going to want to be paid for it. In this budget crisis area, I think we need to stand up for our own communities. In my own community, I've been the neighborhood watch for way over a decade and I'm out there with a bucket and a pick stick tidying up the neighborhood. That's the kind of action is what really turns problems around is somebody getting personally involved with it and sharing the troubles of our neighborhood. I'm in an industrial zone doing that but the same process in our communities, our residential areas, could benefit from that whole process--personal involvement and commitment and communicating with your neighborhood.

4. In August 2008, the City Council reaffirmed that the primary purpose of the General Plan update process (as well as the General Plan) should be to get input from and represent the wishes of San Luis Obispo city residents, while still allowing for some representation of other stakeholders. In updates brought before Council in 2010, this did not occur. Residents were brought in during the last phase of the update.

a. What can you do to ensure that city residents are actively engaged during the initial stage of any General Plan update?

b. Would you be willing to postpone review of a proposed General Plan update to allow for city-wide resident participation?

MILLER: Actually, this is a great question for me to answer because I have my Masters in City Planning. So, I spend many hours at Cal Poly reviewing general plans, talking about the planning process, the different elements, and the public review process. So I feel that the city not only has to, but they are also legally required, to open up public comments for different ordinances or elements or plans that do come across their board. So, in response to the first part of the question is which was to ensure that they are brought in at the very beginning, I do believe that the city does a pretty decent job of trying to post on the Tribune, New Times when certain meetings are going on to try and get that public input. I know even as a person who watches the city channel, who reads the newspaper, sometimes I don't catch everything. Like where I'm like, oh I don't go to that first meeting, but I catch it the third meeting in and then I'm a little upset because I want to get that voice, so they do open that up.

SMITH: I think what I would do is that I would first require that the planning staff and the planning commission give us their written work plan as to how they are going to do the process and actually put us all on their mailing list so that we're seeing exactly what they say the stakeholders are seeing so that we know that they're doing a thorough job of notifying people. So often when these plans come before council, people are saying that they were not notified and we need to be assured that that is happening. So if we're on the list, we'll know that that is happening. I also think the other thing the council members can do is actually attend some of these sessions. See what's going on and find out if people are being totally open with the constituents. It's our job to see that our city is run with total input from our citizens and I think we need to do that.

RUIZ: I'm going to sound like a broken record but precinct captains again would solve these problems. First the precinct captains would be like we, right here, and we should, now with computers, we could really communicate well with the whole community through the precinct captain which would be people like yourself with authority to take care of business in your community. In this way, I can see where the town could grasp a problem more cleverly, more insightfully, and that's what I propose—like a broken record—precincts.

BROWN: First of all, I'm proud to say that as part of the Council in 2008, we reaffirmed that residency be part of this process. I'm sorry that in 2010 there are residents and stakeholders who feel they weren't brought in until the tail end. I think that we need to continue to use the water bills to notify people of upcoming changes and upcoming meetings that are occurring, as well as the notices that appear in the newspapers. But in addition to that, we need to identify and notify those stakeholder groups of residents and other stakeholders in the area that are connected to these issues and make sure that not only are they notified but, like Kathy said, when you show up at these meetings you see who's there and you recognize that there are certain groups that are not there, pick up the phone and call them and make sure that they are being notified or maybe someone wasn't getting the mail, but now get them plugged back into the process so everyone, so that way no one feels left out.

HEDRICK: I have some experience starting six years ago when I participated in the decision-making process in my city concerning housing development in my commercial building. I pulled teeth to get things posted in the street properly and repeatedly they'd screw up the postings. Other things, the meetings were modified days before the meeting—they would cancel or postpone an item, several times, postpone an item three times it's a dead issue. So they silenced me in the planning commission, my first meeting I ever went to. The next year I was treated with them silencing my written input. That's not a way to run business in our city.

MARX: I think that part of the problem that we're facing is that staff identifies stakeholders and they reach out to stakeholders, like with the recent historic preservation ordinance. They reached out to the Downtown Association and to the Chamber of Commerce and they did not reach out to the five historic districts, or the people living in the five historic districts which would have made sense. So I think that there's a difference between notifying someone for a public hearing and doing that preliminary outreach before the first draft of whatever it is you're writing is actually being done. And I wasn't on the Council in 2008 but I do affirm the strategy of reaching out to residents and I would like to see the neighborhoods have more power through the establishment of a Mayor's Task Force on Neighborhoods, and neighborhood coordinators in every neighborhood.

CARPENTER: I think I would agree pretty much that adequate notice definitely needs to go out to everyone and certainly the special interest stakeholders. I think, too, taking it a little further, I think part of the onus falls on us, as residents, to stay connected and do our research. I don't think we can just sit back and expect everything to come to us, too.

CARTER: I sort of want to expand a little bit on perhaps the direction that Jan was going. There is a difference between notification and information. And so, specifically, since the question to me was sort of focusing in on the historic preservation ordinance that we're currently considering. Staff sent out, believe it or not, 750 postcards to everyone who owns a master list or contributing list property as well as residents in the historic area. But as I understand it, it was a very generic postcard that the Cultural Heritage Commission is going to be looking at a historic preservation ordinance. So, yes, folks were notified but they really weren't informed or given sort of a true heads up as to what might be being considered. So, I think that's really where the key aspect that we need to do a better job in the city, particularly with staff. I think we do a good job of notification but we certainly don't always do a good job of providing real information.