



Neighborhood Parks Council  
**2010 Board of Supervisors Candidate Questionnaire**

**District 2- Abraham Simmons**

**1. In what ways do you feel parks contribute to San Franciscans' quality of life?**

Parks create (1) wonderful places for our families, (2) places for visitors to rest, admire, relax and enjoy, (3) places for residents to relax, (4) oxygen (both literal and spiritual, (5) spaces for people to congregate so people can be involved in activities that otherwise either would not occur or would be difficult to organize, (5) extraordinary opportunities to beautify our City. As shown in responses to further questions below, our parks do more than provide space for respite; they are opportunities for growing and making more cohesive our communities.

**2. What park in your district do you use most and tell us what you like most about it.**

Mountain Lake. We raised my 3 children in the playground, there is a place to walk, jog, bring the dog, hike with friends. It is maintained in large part by local folks. There is a cultural aspect to how the park collects local residents and workers and how the park changes throughout the day. The Friends of Mountain Lake even quickly developed into a neighborhood watch group when a violent robber attacked one of our residents. The park has become an integral part of our community.

**3. Which park in your district appears to need the most help and what do you propose to do about it?**

As Chair of the Citizens General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee (CGOBOC), I have a particularly "city-wide" view. It is difficult to think of the City in terms of my district versus the rest of the City. But to answer the question District 2 can start with Russian Hill. It needs an upgrade. Could be more functional and it is not. Because of my work with the GOBOC overseeing the expenditure of the G.O bonds that is going toward rebuilding our parks, I am acutely aware that San Francisco needs to focus on making Rec and Park more efficient. Moving forward, however, the next thing to do for Russian Hill in particular is to organize the residents of Bay Street to (1) help take care of it, (2) demand Rec and Park take better care of it and (3) present organized input into what that particular community wants in terms of landscaping and structures. Then we must raise the funds and make it happen. Lessons can be learned from seeing how this happened in Presidio Heights.

**4. From your observations, what are the 3 most important issues facing recreation and parks in San Francisco?**

How will you begin to address these issues if you are elected? (1) funding, (2) efficiency of Rec. and Park and (3) the threat of succumbing to pay-as-you-visit parks.

(1) The key to funding is developing the several good ideas around how to fund parks in lean times—except for getting people to pay for visits. (2) There is no cure for efficiency problems other than good oversight. It is not a glamorous job, but supervisors must exercise oversight over departments by going over budgets, asking questions, rewarding success, not failure and having forums to receive ideas for best practices and new ideas. We are not doing enough of this. (3) We should pay careful attention and resist efforts to have residents pay for using the facilities through hidden fees.

**5. What is your view of the role of volunteer community park groups? What commitment do you make to working with these groups to improve our public open spaces?**

These groups have made many parks what they are. As Chair of the CGOBOC, I rely heavily on these groups to inform me regarding fundamental issues from how well our government is doing to what functions the parks could be performing but are not.

**6. ParkScan.org is a website that enables park users to report maintenance concerns to the Recreation and Park Department. If elected, how would you promote this tool?**

This should be more prominently posted on City websites as well as at park facilities and occasionally on Muni vehicles.

**7. NPC's Green Envy study identified many neighborhoods that lack playgrounds and neighborhood parks. How would you address these park and open space deficiencies?**

One neighborhood at a time. It must remain a priority as providing parks is one of the essential functions of government.

**8 . Deferred maintenance of things like irrigation systems continue to plague the park system. With little funding available to fix these types of problems, what would you propose to improve park maintenance?**

I disagree with the premise. We should make our money work harder through better oversight. It is one of my pet peeves that we assume maintenance will not get done and will be deferred so that bonds will be raised instead. This is a very inefficient way to make sure the grass is growing and the facilities are working. Parks

are essential. They must be adequately funded and we should expect that maintenance will not be deferred.

**9. San Francisco currently has no citywide open space requirement for new development. In areas such as the Eastern Neighborhoods, which are already deficient in open space and could see a tripling in residential density in the near future, this oversight could create unlivable communities severely deficient in parks. Would you support a citywide open space requirement for all new residential development so that every neighborhood can have green space for play, exercise, and respite from urban life?**

I would support guidelines. I am wary of a one-size-fits-all rule. I would never reject the idea without seeing the rule written so that I could review it carefully; but I generally am not in favor of this sort of regulation. I would be in favor of withholding support for projects that do not adequately create appropriate livable space in San Francisco and park space would be part of what informs my decision as to appropriateness.