



Neighborhood Parks Council
2010 Board of Supervisors Candidate Questionnaire

District 6- Debra Walker

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

Parks and open space are key to our quality of life. They allow us to relax, exercise, connect with friends, bring families together, and connect us with nature in the middle of an urban environment. It is important to keep our parks clean, safe, maintained and staffed in order to contribute meaningfully to our quality of life.

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

I use all of the District's Parks, but you will most often find me at Franklin Park. I go there for picnics, to meet friends, to watch soccer games and to just enjoy time outside in the sun. I also very much enjoy participating in the park clean-up days. Franklin is a great family park – there are soccer fields for youth sports, a dedicated toddler area and plenty of space for families to enjoy themselves. I am excited for the planned improvements to the park, including more attractive entry ways that will help attract more residents to this special area as well as a dedicated dog run area.

When not at Franklin Park you will also find me at Manalo Drake Park, especially for large events, and I often bike and picnic at Mission Creek Park.

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

I think that the greatest need District 6 has is creating more parks in general. We have far too little open space for residents to enjoy. To assist in the effort to reserve more open space, I am supporting the community in our efforts to build a toddler park in Mission Bay. I am also supporting the efforts to construct a dog park in the South beach area. This is possible because of a partnership between a developer and the community. One of my largest areas of expertise is land use. District 6 is ground zero for development in this city and I am committed to ensuring that any development provides real community benefits like more parks and open space.

I also am supportive of creating more parks by transforming alleys like The Tenderloin National Forest. It is a really wonderful example of taking derelict areas and energizing them into areas that residents can congregate and enjoy.

I am also concerned with securing enough staffing to manage, maintain and support our parks. Making sure that the parks are clean and safe is a priority and I will work to make sure we have enough staff and funding to adequately care for our parks.

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. Adequate Funding – Clearly funding is a major issue. We need enough money to maintain our parks, update areas, keep our parks clean, and to maintain and expand programs that support our youth like sports recreation and afterschool programs. If elected supervisor, I will make recreation and park funding a priority for our budget. This is partly why I am supporting the revenue measures on the ballot this November, so that we can move away from a cuts-only budget and find new sources of revenue to support our vital programming.

2. Safety – Keeping our parks safe is essential to allowing families and residents to be able to use them. Drug dealing, lack of adequate lighting, and safe pathways are just a few examples of the many problems some of our parks face. While much of this can be addressed with increased funding, I would also like to work with police to create a better dialogue with park enthusiasts and residents to find workable solutions to these problems.

3. Creating more parks – As described above, I believe that we need to work to secure more open space, especially in District 6. I want to work with the community and through the board of supervisors to ensure that when development is green-lighted that we secure open space and more recreation areas.

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?

I am incredibly thankful to our community park volunteers. Especially in these tough budget times, they have become a critical force in maintaining our parks and keeping them operational. While my goal is to secure enough public funding for our parks so that they city can properly maintain them, I recognize the key roles volunteers are playing right now. I have personally worked with many of these individuals in my role of volunteer participating in local park cleanups. I have seen firsthand the good that has been done when we received partnership funding at some of District 6 parks. The Neighborhood Parks Council has been really helpful in providing funds to create and rebuild parks and open space, especially in neighborhoods where assets are limited. I look forward to continuing to work with these volunteers and interested groups if I am elected supervisor, and I am committed to using them as a resource as we shape our policy priorities for our parks.

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?

I think this is a wonderful tool for park users. Using residents who use the parks as an asset in identifying problems helps us avoid costly repairs that occur because of insufficient maintenance. If elected, I will encourage residents to use this system.

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?

In the Tenderloin and South of Market, I am forwarding a proposal to recapture some of the minor alleys to replicate community efforts like the Tenderloin National Forest. Alleyway open spaces in dense parts of town are a great way to support walking and bike-riding through our neighborhoods and effective use of streets and sidewalks. But as a general matter, I would support requiring new developments do more to support creating new parks and open spaces around their building site. New buildings, both commercial and residential, increase the need for recreation space, and they should help pay for it.

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?

Taking care of our infrastructure is about commitment, plain and simple. Whether it's our streets, our public building, or our parks and open spaces, facilities degrade over time and require investment to keep them useable. The city's 10-year capital plan is a good framework for keeping track of our needs, but parks haven't been prioritized in that effort. As supervisor, I wouldn't vote to approve the annual 10-year plan that didn't have at parks as a top priority. In District 6 particularly, we are seeing a growth in families that will require an expansion in parks as well as a reinvestment in our existing recreation resources. The costs of repairs to systems like irrigation will only increase if we don't address them now, and our parks are too important to bump down the list another year longer. I will also commit to asking NPC and other parks advocates for input in reviewing the capital plan's priorities prior to approving it.

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 absolutely support a citywide open space requirement to help better plan for our growing open-space and recreational needs. Existing requirements vary from district to district, and new developments frequently meet them by providing rooftop gardens or landscaped spaces on a ground floor. We must do a better job of pooling the open-space capital from multiple developments to invest in real parks that actually serve neighbourhoods rather than the window dressing that buildings currently create to meet weak requirements. We should also think creatively about the sort of recreational and open spaces we produce – I will encourage the production of performance oriented spaces that can foster a love for the arts as they offer recreational opportunity.