



Neighborhood Parks Council
2010 Board of Supervisors Candidate Questionnaire

District 6- Jim Meko

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

Our neighborhoods need public parks and open space to build a sense of community, to provide opportunities to exercise outdoors, and to help preserve the natural beauty that surrounds us in San Francisco. District 6 arguably has the least green space, recreation facilities, and open space per resident, and that lack of public spaces weakens our communities as a result.

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

Victoria Manalo Draves Park on Folsom Street at Sherman Street is the park I use the most. In fact, it is the only park in South of Market west of 4th Street. I am proud that I was there to support the parents and kids at Bessie Carmichael School in the creation of the park. I enjoy seeing neighbors using the space that was an underutilized sea of asphalt not too many years ago.

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

Boeddeker Park in the Tenderloin is closed to the public practically all the time these days. This is the only park in the Tenderloin that adults not accompanying children are allowed to use and, considering that a lot of the housing units in the Tenderloin are SROs, it is a travesty that the park is locked up. With Boeddeker Park being one of the few public parks in an area clearly deficient in parks, we should make sure it is open every single day for people to use. I will hold Recreation and Parks accountable by making sure they use monies collected from renting out our downtown park spaces, like Ferry Park for the Peter Pan theatre production, to keep Boeddeker Park and others open and well-maintained. People who live in downtown San Francisco deserve the dignity and benefits of public parks as much as anyone else, and I will fight to make sure the parks are open for them.

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?

Access, Safety and Maintenance are at the top of my list. Access and safety are intertwined in District 6. A big problem in my district is that parks, if not supervised, can be taken over by people drinking and using or selling drugs. That drives out the people that just want to sit in the sun or let their kids play. Tenderloin Station has intermittently

had a “park car”, whose officers would walk through the various parks to make sure things were okay, and, after a violent mugging at the Gene Friend Recreation Center, Southern Station’s captain was very responsive to our request for more police presence. In order to keep parks open without Rec & Park staff onsite, we should recruit volunteer “park ambassadors” with cellphones who would commit to shifts in parks that need oversight and would have a person at Rec & Park and the police station to call if bad things happen, thus freeing up Rec and Park personnel to be elsewhere unless needed. Less formally, we might talk to the SFPD about setting up something like their COP (Citizens On Patrol) program for parks that need it. As for maintenance, we should leverage the volunteers that are already doing things in the park and do more outreach to get more volunteers.

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?

They’re great. A friend of mine was involved with Friends of Boeddeker Park from its inception and Boeddeker Park blossomed with the help of volunteers. I’d like to see more volunteer community park groups and want to give them as much support as we can to help them make our parks better. I pledge to the people of District 6 is that I will go to bat for them, as I have been doing for decades, to improve our quality of life.

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?

One simple, inexpensive thing we could do is to just put a sign at the entrances to parks, saying “Is something wrong in this park? Report it at parkscan.org.”

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?

Your study pointed out SoMa and the Tenderloin as two of the most under-served neighborhoods. We definitely need more parks, but the city doesn’t have the money to keep the parks that we already have open at this point because parks, along with public health, are not protected by set asides and tend to get impacted by our budget deficits to a greater degree. I believe we need to remove set asides so that budget cuts are more equitable across city services – public health programs and our parks should not get cut to a higher degree than other programs. It seems as though our parks are getting rented out and otherwise auctioned off in downtown San Francisco in order to raise revenues for parks in other sections of the City. That’s just plain wrong. As a neighborhood advocate, I believe fees and revenues collected within a neighborhood from parking meters or other services should stay in that neighborhood. I also support Jeff Adachi’s Proposition B, Pension Reform to try to stave off further cuts in services and increases in fees for our recreational facilities and parks.

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?

We have to make sure that our scarce resources are distributed equitably. I'd be willing to explore ideas such as Park Improvement Districts, public/private partnerships, neighborhood fundraising and volunteering by qualified individuals or companies, but I worry that that would lead to park apartheid, with nice parks in rich neighborhoods and run down parks in poor ones.

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. One of the big problems with the open space requirements we have now is that the open space doesn't have to be publicly accessible, visible from the street, or even green. A lot of the open space that has been built under the current law is in the form of terraces, which aren't particularly usable and don't contribute much to the neighborhood. On the West SoMa Citizens' Planning Task Force, we want to make the rear yard "requirement" a REAL requirement and we have looked into the possibility of requiring more open space if it is not publicly accessible.