



Neighborhood Parks Council

2010 Board of Supervisors Candidate Questionnaire

District 8- Rebecca Prozan

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

San Franciscans greatly value their city parks, and as Supervisor, I will focus on preserving and improving this critical resource. Parks give us community as they are one of the few spaces that all San Franciscans enjoy. Parks preserve our open spaces for residents and visitors to enjoy. Parks allow us to escape our crowded urban environment for a more relaxing venue. Upper Noe Park serves as a shining example of how much a community park can benefit its area residents. The park provides open space for a wide range of uses such as tai chi, children's playground, a dog play area, and a first-rate recreation center. I believe that working together we can find the right balance for each park to meet the needs of our citizens and protect our natural resources.

Elected officials must act responsibly as guardians of our park system for future generations. Funds that voters have dedicated to preserving and expanding open spaces must be used for this purpose. We can no longer continue to defer maintenance and upkeep of our parks to solve the latest budget crisis. We must establish a long-term funding and maintenance plan for our greatest natural resources.

I had the honor of serving San Francisco as a Recreation and Park Commissioner from 2002-2004. I chaired the Parks and Planning Committee, where many of the park bond funds were voted upon. This experience has given me a unique vantage point to see how we can improve our Department, make it more responsive, and make our parks and recreation centers even better.

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

Corona Heights Park is my favorite park because it has so much to offer. The most striking feature is the rocky hill top where you can relax and admire the city views, including the Castro with its giant rainbow flag. The park's natural areas provide a preserve for native vegetation. Walking on hillside trails, I can almost imagine what San Francisco looked like before development. Also in the park, the Randall Museum allows kids of all ages to have fun exploring nature and science. Josephine Randall, the museum's namesake and our first Superintendant of Recreation, fought relentlessly to not only establish a citywide network of recreation programs and facilities, but secured the purchase and establishment of Corona Park itself. I admire the leadership and fortitude she demonstrated to protect and build our parks and recreational activities at a time when popular support was lacking.

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

While Mission Dolores Park is one of our crown jewels, it has also been seriously neglected by city officials, and I will continue to facilitate and promote community involvement as the best solution for restoring one of our District's greatest resources. In recent years, the Controller's Office has ranked it among the lowest in meeting basic park maintenance standards. As city officials plan for the renovation of Dolores Park, we must include the community as an integral part of planning and decision making. Serving as Mayor Brown's Liaison to District 8, I worked in partnership with neighbors and community members to determine the best uses for our limited resources, including our parks. Dolores Park has a range of activities competing for its limited space. The park provides space for recreational activities, children's' play areas, dog walking, relaxing, community events, and much more. These various uses add to the park's maintenance demands.

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. Lack of adequate funding for parks and recreation programs
2. Available resources are not allocated in an optimal way to maintain our resources
3. Management is not adequately overseeing the performance of our parks and recreation programs.

During our recent budget deficits, we have relied disproportionately on cutting Parks and Recreation funding to balance the city budget. In addition, funds designated by voters for expanding open spaces in San Francisco are being diverted to the Recreation and Park Department's operating budget. We must restore funding and resources for our parks and recreation programs and use Open Space Funds to expand our network of parks. Funding and resources must be informed by performance standards and park and recreation program needs. Under performing parks must be evaluated to determine underlying causes. Increased funding may have little effect when there is a lack of oversight and funds are not used properly. The decline of our park system points to the systematic failure of government rather than any one particular cause. As Supervisor, I will hold managers accountable for their performance and decisions on resource allocation.

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 served as a Recreation and Park Commissioner when volunteer community park groups were dissuaded from participating in cleaning and greening our parks. Through the campaign, I've been heartened to see how community park groups form the backbone of our park system. Community involvement in park planning and decisions is

vital to the success of a park. Park Groups can help steer limited resources towards the most important needs of the community. They give voice to individual residents who might otherwise have a difficult time influencing park resource allocation and management decisions. Duboce Park serves as a great example of how community park groups can successfully shape and revitalize a high-use park. During its extensive renovation, community organizations played a key role in shaping the future of the park. The park group, Friends of Duboce Park participated in the earliest stages and helped city managers to understand the needs of park users. As Supervisor, I will continue to work closely with park community groups and learn more about the needs of the community. I will ensure that these groups are included in policy decisions regarding city 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?

ParkScan is a perfect example of how web-base open government initiatives can improve access to and accountability of our City Government. It allows citizens to report problems or provide suggestions about our city parks. ParkScan not only provides the request to park managers via San Francisco's 311 Customer Service Center for correction or consideration, but also provides evaluations on the maintenance of city parks. District 8 residents tell me how they use this tool to ensure their neighborhood parks are clean and functional. I am an enthusiastic supporter of open government initiatives including ParkScan. Links to these sites via the city's various websites can help to increase awareness and usage. As Supervisor, my office will rely on these resources to assist customers.

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?

NPC's Green Envy study clearly demonstrates the need to increase open space access in certain neighborhoods, mostly concentrated on the Eastern side of the city. It is important to provide convenient access to parks to all city residents. Higher density of development contributes to the challenges facing the establishment of open spaces in our eastern neighborhoods. New developments in the planning stages need to include space and funding for public parks. We must continue to expand our open spaces along the waterfront as part of the San Francisco Bay Trail Initiative. And we must find unique opportunities to provide added open space in our most densely populated areas. The park to be built on top of the new Transbay Transit Terminal is an example of a creative way to provide new park space.

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?

Deferred maintenance of city assets is best understood as borrowing from the future of San Francisco to meet current obligations. Little good can come of this practice, especially when you end up paying more to replace infrastructure that could have been more economically maintained. I would assign RPD management to provide a thorough inventory of park physical assets that require maintenance and an explanation of the system used to determine funding and resource needs. We know anecdotally that not all parks are treated equally and NPC and city reports provide the proof. A comprehensive system for evaluating the maintenance needs of park assets must be established. Once we can clearly understand maintenance needs, we can ensure that those needs are adequately funded. In addition, park managers can be held accountable for deficiencies when funding differentials are eliminated.

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 love this idea and wholeheartedly support the establishment of a citywide requirement for new developments to provide a reasonable amount of open space. New development in the city provides a unique opportunity to preserve open space for the enjoyment of residents. Since developers would be held to a uniform standard, new development will be evaluated with this requirement as a standard cost of business, much as the cost to developers of building new public infrastructure, such as sidewalks, roads and utilities. The allocation and use of space in densely populated cities like San Francisco must be carefully considered in order to preserve the quality of life for all residents, and careful attention to open space needs is an important part of this consideration.