

# 2011 Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire

The Neighborhood Parks Council (NPC) works closely with our elected and appointed officials to ensure parks and open space are a priority at City Hall. Electing a “Park Friendly” Mayor who values neighborhood parks, open spaces and recreation facilities for all San Franciscans and understands the challenges facing our park system is essential for our city . With the help of our dedicated community volunteers San Francisco’s parks are the cornerstone of every neighborhood but it is with the support of our new Mayor that our parks can continue to thrive.

Please complete each question to the best of your ability in order for NPC to assess your “Park Friendly” rating. Everyone loves parks, Our coalition strives to understand your specific ideas about supporting parks, in addition to your overall level of appreciation for them. All responses will be posted on our website for the public to view. Thank You.

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Please return electronically to Victoria Bell, Deputy Director at [vbell@sfnpc.org](mailto:vbell@sfnpc.org) by Wednesday, September 7, 2011 by 5pm.

**I. Tell us about your personal parks use or experience. In what ways do you feel San Francisco's parks contribute to your quality of life?**

I have a 11-year old daughter, and we spend a lot of time at the parks and school grounds with open space. I visit the parks regularly once or twice a week.

Just like most of us, I can remember some of the best times of my childhood, as well as in my adult life, where the only thing I really needed was to be with my friends or loved ones at a local park. I grew up in Sacramento, and the main park was within walking distance from our home. That's the thing about parks: everyone at every age can appreciate a well-kept, clean, and safe park. Folks who go to parks can expect to enjoy both physical as well as mental health benefits; and speaking for myself, going to a local park to take a walk, get some fresh air, or just being alone with my thoughts has proven to be an effective stress reliever.

**II. From your observations, what are the 3 most important issues facing recreation and parks in San Francisco? Specifically how will you begin to address these issues if you are elected? There are numerous ongoing and important issues relating to the administration of San Francisco's parks.**

In my view, the most important issues facing recreation and parks in San Francisco are 1. budget shortfalls, 2. lack of oversight, and 3. insufficient staffing.

1. Budget: All too often, the budget set aside for maintenance and development of our parks inevitably winds up being used for some vague corollary purpose such as "street cleaning" or "environmental clean-up." I will ensure that the most run-down parks receive the funding necessary to make it safe and inviting.

2. Lack of oversight: As a Mayor who personally recognizes the value that parks have to our communities and neighborhoods, I will ensure that our park administration receives the specific and continuous attention from City Hall that has been long overdue.

3. Staffing: I will work with Park and Recreation administrators to address concerns of any understaffed parks. It is imperative that our parks are sufficiently staffed with employees whether they are rangers, cleaning and maintenance personnel, or refreshment vendors. I have openly stated that public parks must remain free to the general public and as Mayor I will work to keep our parks sufficiently staffed, funded, safe, and free. I was very concerned by the recent termination of recreation directors.

**III. 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 recognize and applaud the thousands community park volunteers who sacrifice their time and giving of themselves in the fight to make our City parks some of the most highly visited in the world. Community park volunteer groups have “stepped up” and taken on the burden to maintain, develop, and renovate San Francisco’s parks when the City said it could not or would not. Due to their efforts, voters successfully passed the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond which has funded the maintenance, renovation, and development of San Francisco’s parks. As Mayor, I would be proud to work alongside the volunteer community park groups, and would invite them to City Hall to share their concerns and visions for the future of our parks.

**IV. There is a substantial budget gap for the City’s ongoing parks and recreation programs, estimated at over \$30 million a year. What will your administration do to reduce or eliminate this serious annual shortfall? And how will you mitigate the impact on the General Fund?**

Most, if not all, of our city departments, agencies, and programs expect to realize a shortfall in their share of the city’s budget. Having said that, one of my top priorities was to remedy this problem.

One of the reasons I became involved in pension reform is that I saw the parks and recreation budget shrinking each year, as well as the budgets of other city departments and services, while the pension costs have shot up by about \$100 million more each year. Within four years, pension costs are expected to rise from \$457 million to \$829 million a year.

I worked to place Prop D on this November, and gathered 50,000 signatures to place it on the ballot. Prop D requires all city employees to contribute towards their pension costs and provides a graduated, progressive scale, exempting lower paid employees and requiring higher paid employees to contribute more. According to the City Controller. Proposition D, if approved, will save citizens over \$1.7 billion over the next ten years. This is money that can be reinvested in parks and recreation. As Mayor, I would also encourage communication across the main parks groups to for innovative solutions including private fundraising so long as the space remains open to all.

**V. RPD requires nearly \$2billion in capital funding to repair and renovate our parks. Will you commit to supporting the upcoming GO park bond?**

While I am in general agreement of ensuring that our parks receive adequate and proper funding, and this includes support for the voter-approved general obligation bond, I will work closely with RPD administrators to ensure that park projects are managed properly and completed in a timely fashion. San Francisco’s history of management has been less than optimal. Park project have been viewed with a scant eye both from proponents and its opponents. I understand that RPD is not fully to blame as a substantial majority of prior project failures and delays have been due in large part

to regulatory problems such as the inability to acquire city permits or awaiting results from environmental studies. However, as Mayor, I would be committed to working with the necessary departments and agencies to complete park projects efficiently and with proper oversight to ensure the proper management and use of the general obligation funds.

**VI. How will you work to ensure both capital and operating funding becomes more sustainable for RPD while ensuring parks are accessible, safe and enjoyable for all?**

My pension reform plans with the passage of Prop D on this November's ballot will free up sufficient funds for financially starved programs like RPD. As Mayor, I would ensure that we focus our efforts on reducing homelessness and enhancing public safety. I would also work with the police department, the probation department and other criminal justice agencies to receive the very best training and access to technology to do their jobs effectively. I would require outcome-based measures for all departments, and would use best practices to prevent and solve crimes. I will work to prevent violence in our communities by forging a working relationship between police and community-based organizations to provide effective interventions for individuals involved in gangs and violence to prevent retaliation and violence before it happens.

**VII. 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?**

While financial efficiency is always a concern, I would not compromise safety mechanisms such as a public park's irrigation system by implementing a questionable substitute in lieu of a dependable high quality system. With San Francisco's often unpredictable climate, humidity, and other weather variances, these concerns should not be deferred, and the City administrators who are experts in this field will be heard on these matters - particularly in light of budget allocation considerations.

**VIII. NPC's Green Envy study, a landmark white paper first published in 2003 and updated in 2007, advocates for equitable open space for all residents in all neighborhoods of San Francisco. What, specifically, would your administration do in the next four years to ensure that every neighborhood can have green space for play, exercise, and respite from urban life?**

San Francisco's shared resources must be available to all San Franciscans. I would ensure that the equity balance of locations of recreational facilities and programs is fairly distributed throughout the City. Over the next four years, I would work with the Neighborhood Parks Council to identify parks in greatest disrepair and allocate funding to those first both for maintenance and for programs. In addition, I would encourage marketing efforts across social media platforms and word-of-mouth by volunteers which

proves to be the most effective way to get citizens into the parks and it is the most economical.

**IX. The Blue Greenway project promises to transform our eastern shoreline and serve a number of communities desperately in need of open space and access to the water. But the southeastern waterfront has many pollution issues, developing it is expensive, and there is a significant funding gap in the Blue Greenway plans. What will you do, in the next four years, to advance the Blue Greenway and bring it closer to reality?**

Whenever I consider the Blue Greenway project, I am amazed at how far the project has come. From the inception of an idea for a 13 mile waterfront and recreation area outlining the bay in San Francisco to how close the NPC and its supporters have come in turning that dream into a reality. I understand that even with all of the project's financial supporters, there indeed lies a significant funding gap as well as other regulatory concerns preventing the project's completion. As Mayor, I would work with the NPC and other Blue Greenway project supporters to inform the public about their efforts to develop and create the Blue Greenway for all of us to enjoy. When considering a plan to both generate sufficient funds and adhering to local regulatory requirements, a collaborative effort is necessary amongst City officials, NGOs, and other community supporters, and this must be the mind set in going forward with a project on a scale as large, and consequential to so many, as the Blue Greenway. I would be open, and look forward, to further discussion about how we may realistically complete this project together.

**X. Numerous neighborhoods in the City are exploring ways to better support their local parks, including voluntarily taxing themselves for new and increased services (Park Improvement Districts, etc.). It is nearly impossible to develop these districts without clearly understanding what the Recreation and Parks Department currently spends on each facility. The Department does not maintain this type of budgeting, and it is therefore difficult to understand what the needs of each park are.**

**What will you do in your administration to support improved clarity of the Recreation and Parks Department's fiscal management given its extremely diverse facilities?**

I have always stood for, and continue to believe in, fiscal responsibility. This requires constant oversight, accountable fiscal management, and transparency in the distribution of public funds. I have brought my own department's budget in on target for eight out of the nine years. In order to develop and maintain particular parks, accurate reporting of each individual park is necessary as a prerequisite to the efficient allocation of funds. There is no sense in over-funding a park sufficiently staffed and facilitated only to leave another park in need under-funded. The research and reporting of the individual parks

are necessary for sound budgeting purposes and I will require this extra, but necessary, step in my administration.

**XI. Community outreach and a transparent public process is a critical component to our civic work in San Francisco, such as when we look at leasing facilities, adding amenities and even creating a new public park. How will you support the public dialog about parks across every City agency that manages land?**

Transparency in the public process is indeed critical to all who care enough to spend their time and efforts seeking to make our city a better place to live, work, and to raise a family. As Mayor, I will have no qualms with requiring those who work for you, the people of San Francisco, to come to the table and engage in productive dialog for the purpose of making things happen. My administration will be a proactive one, always seeking to address the needs and concerns of all interest groups. I believe what has been missing in past administrations has been the lack of interdepartmental communications between necessarily related departments. This leads to undue delays and sometimes altogether prevents any further action. These type of “red tape” problems can be expected, though not justified, by the bureaucratic nature of our municipal government. This part of the public process must change so that the people of San Francisco, those who have the desire, drive, and dedication to get things done, will have that opportunity, and have it now.