

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 corner stone 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 a vbelle@sfnpc.org by Wednesday, September 7, 2011 by 5pm.

1. 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? *Parks are essential to my quality of life in San Francisco. For several years I lived on Page Street and walked in Golden Gate Park every single day. I still visit Golden Gate Park frequently. As a dog owner who didn’t own a car for 25 years, taking long walks is one of my greatest pleasures. So I often go over the hill from my home in Upper Market to Golden Gate Park. I visit the Rhododendron Dell during its beautiful blooming season, the Dahlia Garden next to the Conservatory in its season. I have picnics in the parks, have gone to weddings in the park, and concerts and performances in the Bandshell. Often, I come upon festivals and gatherings that I know nothing about. Once, I happened upon the picnic of the Mongolian community of the Bay Area, and got to witness Mongolian wrestling! On any weekend day, I can set off to GGP and be sure of being surprised and entertained. I also made a short narrative film in the Park, using the beautiful environment to tell the story of a lesbian couple celebrating their 25th anniversary. In my own neighborhood, I often walk to Upper Douglass Park, to Noe Courts, and to Dolores Park. Often in the past, the other dog owners I meet in a park have become a community of friends. Of course, I go see*

the performance of the San Francisco Mime Troupe in Dolores Park. The parks are breathing space, a way to connect with nature, a chance to happen upon outdoor events I know nothing about. Today, there is a music festival at tiny Noe Courts! I'll be there. Without the park, there would be no festival. Parks are essential for the enjoyment of life in San Francisco.

2. 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? *A) The most important issue facing the Recreation and Parks Department right now is the deliberate effort to turn the agency into a self-funded enterprise agency. I oppose this as such a transformation will of necessity lead to the commercialization of park space. B) The proponents of this transformation say that Rec and Park needs to do this in order to operate in the black. I repeat what I have said over and over again on this campaign, ordinary people in this country have been nickel and dimed for decades. San Francisco is one of the richest cities in the nation, in one of the richest states in the nations (with the sixth largest economy in the world), in the richest nation in the world. And we say we don't have the money for daily recreation and parks operations and maintenance? I don't believe it. We have the money if only we would agree that we need to legislate the ability to levy progressive income on ourselves here at home. C) Governance. We need to distribute the appointments to the Recreation and Parks Commission between the mayor and the Board of Supervisors in order to ensure that this commission is not a rubber stamp commission, beholden to the will and whim of the mayor.*
3. 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 respect these groups tremendously. Women organized in Chicago during the Progressive Era to keep the lakeshore as a park land for the general public, and San Francisco has some worthy successors. San Franciscans and others in the Bay Area organized to create the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and save the Marin Headlands from the bulldozers of developers. Two decades ago, some of those same people were also able to save Parcel 4 in the Richmond District – the last bit of land where Playland at the Beach had once been. This small plot has been more or less restored to its natural state. Community parks groups organize to raise money, and steward our parks by planting native plants, clearing weeds, and in general advocating on behalf of the green space that we all need to remain sane as human beings. Most importantly, their members USE our parks and recreation centers. I am committed to working with these groups.*
4. 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? *A) I have been studying the proposal by the Wild Equity Institute – which is supported by the Sierra Club – to turn over the management of (but not the title to) Sharp Park in Pacifica to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and to allow the GGNRA to convert that money-losing golf course into a park. Two endangered species – the California red-legged frog and the San Francisco Garter snake – live in this park. Supervisor John Avalos has introduced legislation to do this. If we don't do this, the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department is going to be on the hook for something like*

\$30 million in infrastructure needs to shore up the seawall at Sharp Park. B) Mitigation on the general fund? It will not need to be mitigated once we change the law at the state level so that we can levy a local income tax.

5. RPD requires nearly \$2 billion in capital funding to repair and renovate our parks. Will you commit to supporting the upcoming GO park bond? *No. I oppose bonds, as in the long run they end up being more expensive than simple direct property or income taxes. Also, by the time the bond runs out (but not before San Franciscans would be finished paying off the interest in the bond), we would have to issue another one for a further round of investments. We need to create a movement to change state law so that we can tax ourselves. And we need to create a local municipal bank, modeled on the state-owned Bank of North Dakota.*
6. 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? *Tax the rich. I know that at the moment we cannot levy local income taxes, and that we need to pass other taxes that we can at the local level with a two-thirds majority. But that's simply wrong. Cities all over the state are strapped for funds. On my first day in office, I would start to call other mayors and start a movement to change tax policy at the state level so that municipalities can pass the taxes that they need in order to provide the necessary services. We have no other choice. There can be no more cutting.*
7. 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? *Have you been in the women's room at Dolores Park lately? Talk about deferred maintenance – all the while Dolores Park itself has been targeted for commercialization, with an influx of food trucks whose operators presumably pay fees to park INSIDE the park, all the while keep their generators going. We need to create a municipal bank, and we need to tax the rich.*
8. 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? *For one thing, I say we should have a moratorium on the construction of more market-rate housing until we have figured out how we are going to build housing for low-income and middle income people. Along with this I would seek a moratorium on building more housing in SoMa. This dense neighborhood has very little green space – and developers are trying to get away with counting the square footage in balconies towards the required green space. As I write, the Planning Department is considering a dense development where the Concourse Building is currently located. That site is bounded by three freeways and has NO nearby parks. (In fact, a glance at the RPD parks map indicates that there are only TWO parks in SoMa.) It should not be permitted. In addition, I note that the Sunset, which is geographically perhaps the largest neighborhood in the City, only has one recreation center. That does not seem like enough.*
9. 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? *I would convene a working group to study the issues and make recommendations. Ideally, those responsible for the pollution will be held responsible for the clean up. At the same time, it is possible to study other stretches of land and bodies of water that have been substantially cleaned up and to learn from their clean ups.*

10. 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 will direct the budget analyst to conduct an audit of the department. I will make decisions about how to improve the clarity of the budget based on the results of the audit and any recommendations.*

11. 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? *The position of Mayor has enormous symbolic power. If elected, I plan to attend community meetings such as the ones that concern the parks – just as a citizen, to listen and be part of the dialog. By doing this, I believe I will get a better understanding of what the citizens of San Francisco actually care about and want to do, and I will, by my presence, validating the importance of this dialog and encouraging more people to get involved.*