

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 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?

Green open spaces are essential as they enhance the quality of life in San Francisco’s and showcase this city’s beauty. Studies have shown that people who participate in even a moderate amount of outdoor recreation experience lower levels of stress, enhanced moods, improved cardiovascular and respiratory health and general improvements in rest and wellness. The Bay Area is fortunate to have hundreds of parks for our families to enjoy – and, personally, I am tremendously fortunate to have lived and raised my family just blocks from Golden Gate Park. Because of my enjoyment of the parks in San Francisco, I have fought to protect them throughout my career – and for this work I am honored to have received a 100% rating from the Parks and Recreation Society. As a state legislator, I passed legislation to protect our parks by increasing fines for damage

caused by illegal activities so that we can continue to appreciate what our parks offer for generations to come. I coauthored legislation recognizing the importance of local recreation and parks agencies in the effort to reduce negative health trends – like obesity and diabetes – among Californians. Protecting our open space, parks and recreation areas is an investment in the health of generations of Californians and, as Mayor, I will continue to advocate for the parks and open spaces that enrich San Francisco’s neighborhoods and positively contribute to our general health.

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?

Park Privatization

The Recreation and Parks Department’s focus on revenue generation over the past two budget years is fundamentally out of line with its core mission – increasing access for all to parks, open spaces, and recreational activities. I strongly oppose what seems like a concerted effort to privatize the city’s parks and to limit access to only those who can afford it. I have spoken out against charging entrance fees at the Arboretum and I will continue the fight to protect public access to parks as Mayor.

I believe that parks are public assets, and that providing universal access to parks and recreational services is a fundamental responsibility of the city. Establishing the precedent that elements of the department must be financially self-sustaining will ultimately decimate non- or low-revenue generating services like recreation programming and park maintenance in favor of revenue-generating uses like concessions and development. The general fund should support the Recreation and Parks Department and I am committed to finding additional revenue within the general fund to keep our parks accessible for all.

Equity in Green Spaces

We must ensure that community benefits are realized from parks throughout the city. Distribution of green spaces throughout the city is far from equitable. As Mayor, I will commit to making sure that developers keep their promises to build green spaces in the ongoing redevelopment of the Hunters Point shipyard and other future development projects throughout the city. Additionally, I will support plans to build new parks in traditionally underserved neighborhoods and ensure that we properly maintain our existing parks so that every child in the city has a safe, clean and green place to play.

Funding

Under-funding of Parks and Recreation is threatening the core mission of the Department – providing green spaces to all of our City’s residents. Basic maintenance and renovation efforts have been delayed. As Mayor I will commit to adequately funding our parks with sustainable, stable revenues.

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?

Volunteer groups are invaluable assets to our parks and provide a variety of opportunities for involvement including: gardening and ecological restoration, leading nature walks, coaching soccer, providing outreach for students and seniors and supporting special events. These groups, like the one coordinated by the Recreation and Parks Department and the Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum, work tirelessly to make San Francisco's parks greener and more vibrant. Throughout San Francisco, community gardens have emerged highlighting the importance of accessibility to open spaces and fostering community relationships in our green spaces. The energy and expertise shared by volunteers enhance San Francisco's parks and allow our parks to be exceptional, in spite of the limited resources available. However, we cannot use our talented volunteers as an excuse to continue under-funding our parks – volunteers cannot be expected to do the work of park maintenance and administration. As Mayor, I will be an advocate for volunteerism – and work to protect our green spaces from funding cuts.

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?

These are difficult economic times for the city and we will have to do more with less. The city must reduce administrative expenses and duplication of services where possible without compromising our safety net and benefits, like our parks and recreation programs. We must reach consensus on a meaningful, but fair pension reform proposal. As we move forward, we need to work to identify new sources of stable, sustainable revenue so that we can continue to meet our commitments to our parks. I strongly support additional revenue at the state level and also at the local level, including a tax on higher income individuals and the extension of expiring tax measures. In Sacramento, I sponsored workshops for local agencies and organizations seeking parks grants for parks improvements and acquisitions. As Mayor, I will continue to advocate for our parks ensuring adequate revenue within the general fund for our parks and recreation and working to locate grant funding.

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

Our parks are important public assets and we must maintain them. I support efforts to place the 2012 GO Park Bond on the ballot. With the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond, San Francisco embarked on what was promised to be a long-term, strategic, and fiscally responsible capital plan for its parks. The Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond provided a path to eliminating our maintenance backlog and ensuring that our parks system had necessary funding for capital improvements. Despite safeguards for fiscal management and accountability, projects are behind schedule and incomplete. We need to make sure that our park facilities continue to have the funding they need –

involving community stakeholders in spending decisions and increasing transparency and accountability. Requesting additional capital funding for improving our parks through the 2012 GO Park Bond must be community driven, upheld to stringent standards of transparency and accountability, and demonstrate utmost fiscal responsibility.

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?

I am committed to fully funding our parks through general fund dollars and will pursue a combination of making current spending more efficient while developing stable and sustainable new revenues to ensure that the general fund is enough to fully fund all of our obligations.

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?

As Mayor, I will look to new sources of stable sustainable revenue so that we aren't forced to choose between capital improvements and basic park maintenance. I will continue to support apprenticeship programs, publicly funded job programs and volunteers to augment our parks staff. Additionally, by reducing excessive administrative costs, working to root out duplicative services, streamlining operations and working to find efficiencies, we can do more with present funding levels.

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?

Every neighborhood should have access to quality green public spaces. Inequalities identified in the Green Envy study can and must be addressed in our future planning decisions. The Hunters Point Shipyard Redevelopment has the potential to create more than 300 acres of greenspace and parks in the Bayview. We must ensure that community benefits are realized from this land – land that is no longer hazardous and the community believes to be adequately cleaned-up. Wherever possible, my administration will make sure that all new developments provide green space as part of the benefits agreement negotiated with developers. In addition, I will direct agencies – like the Municipal Transportation Agency, the Public Utilities Commission, and the Planning Department – to identify surplus land owned by the city and collaborate with community-based planning efforts to convert publicly owned land for community uses.

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?

The Blue Greenway is an important and ambitious project – as Mayor, I will work with neighborhood groups, community stakeholders and the non-profit community to see it become a reality. I applaud NPC’s pursuit of Federal grant money to initiate a community based planning process, as it reflects collaborative community engagement.

The Blue Greenway project is an important step towards equity in our green spaces in many neighborhoods, in addition to including the environmental clean-up of the Southeastern waterfront. Cleaning up our brownfield sites is of vital importance to our Southeastern neighborhoods and it must be done with the full involvement of all of the communities affected by the clean-up. As Mayor, I will seek sustainable revenue for sources for this project and I will aggressively work with the appropriate agencies to pursue grant funding at the State and Federal levels and, where appropriate, private funding.

- 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?**

San Francisco residents deserve to know how their money is spent – and our city government must have the tools at its disposal to properly plan for expenditures and assess costs. Any San Franciscan should be able to easily access plain-language budget information for all city departments to see where their taxes are being spent. I am a staunch proponent of open government and have authored over a dozen bills to increase accountability and transparency in government. As Mayor, I will champion increased transparency in budgeting for city agencies, including the Recreation and Parks Department.

- 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?**

Throughout my career I have consistently advocated for open, transparent government, and as Mayor I will make increased transparency across all agencies, including Recreation and Parks, a top priority. My vision includes the engagement of all communities, including the underserved and underrepresented. On the Board of Supervisors, I was the first to bring budget talks into the community to increase public

participation in the process. I will continue that as mayor, and I will expand this effort by using opportunities afforded to us by technology. Regardless of whether by traditional or new methods, the principle for how the mayor's office engages with citizens holds true: government must be open, transparent and accessible in order to have informed, diverse and engaged community input.

Engagement starts with openness, which is why my 21-point plan for open government includes measures like putting all reports and documents online, expanding sunshine ordinance training to all city employees rather than just the higher-ups, and broadcast all meetings and hearings on tv and the web.

Expanding access is key to truly representing all San Franciscans. While I will continue to employ traditional methods of outreach and communication coupled with transparency and accountability, we must increase access to government through technology. As Mayor, within 6 months I will have a report assessing how to best bring government to the people in the digital age. This report will include a Digital Strategic Plan and will be implemented by a dedicated unit in the Mayor's office, and will address the Digital Divide. As we modernize the way interact, we have to make sure we not further disenfranchise vital communities. There is still a lower rate of computer ownership and skills among the underserved in San Francisco and my administration would address this. It will be a priority to create spaces in schools, libraries and other community spaces that serve to address the Digital Divide and more.

Technology affords us incredible new opportunities to increase access, engagement and input. To that end, as Mayor, I will harness the power of social networking. This can easily be targeted, customized and disseminated among and between residents and government to increase participation, feedback and input in their government. I envision these social networks to essentially be ongoing online neighborhood town hall meetings – to have a continuous, real time participatory conversation about budgeting, public safety, transportation, schools etc.

I believe strongly that engagement is dependent on access and it is up to our leaders to uphold this democratic principle. My work over the years has proven I am a committed advocate for access and participation in government. As Mayor, I will continue this commitment.