

# Redwood City Neighbors United

## 2013 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

**Candidate Name: Jeff Gee, Vice Mayor**

1. Redwood City has plans to grow significantly over the next few years, and the way in which that growth is directed will shape our city for years to come. The 2010 Redwood City General Plan envisions a revitalized downtown area with housing located near our existing transit hubs and entertainment and retail venues, while conserving our open space areas and protecting the community's quality of life.

Do you agree with our community's vision for building housing in the urban core and not in designated open space areas? If not, how would you describe where you see our city's growth progressing?

Throughout my many years of civic engagement, I have been involved in recommending or approving a number of housing developments throughout Redwood City. As a member of the Architectural Review Committee (ARC), I was asked by my ARC colleagues to help with the final design of the Habitat for Humanity's project on Rollins Road. Other projects approved by the ARC included the Franklin Street Apartments, and Villa Montgomery. Housing developments approved while I was on the Planning Commission included the Preserve at Redwood Shores, and Pacific Place.

The excitement in Redwood City is for higher density housing in our downtown and along El Camino Real – in close proximity to CalTrain and transit. This does not mean that this is the only location for housing. Not everyone will want to live downtown or along El Camino Real. We need to provide a mix of housing types to appeal to a diverse community.



333 Main Street, 132 units



201 Marshall, 116 units

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In our General Plan update, we also added a new type of housing – live/work spaces along the Veterans Blvd. corridor. The vision is that along with an “incubator” overlay, we are able to incent the development of small start-up spaces, and combine it with live/work spaces so that innovation and invention can occur in Redwood City.



145 Monroe – 305 units

As a policy maker, I believe strongly that new development should be focused on infill parcels. We need to protect our remaining open spaces. Additionally, as a proponent of mass transit, I support the electrification of CalTrain and improvement of regional mass transit systems to get people out of their cars and improve air and water quality.

2. According to Redwood City’s General Plan EIR, key traffic corridors, including Highway 101, Woodside Road and Whipple Avenue, are already at or near capacity and do not have excess capacity to absorb a significant influx of new cars from development on the salt ponds. Recent plans for improving traffic flow through the Highway 101/Woodside Road interchange did not incorporate any development on the salt ponds. If a development is allowed, the limited traffic relief for current commuters and Seaport industries from these improvements could be short-lived, or traffic through the interchange could end up worse than current conditions.

If elected, would you approve a development project on the salt ponds that significantly increases traffic impacts on current Redwood City commuters and nearby industries? Please explain your answer.

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Any project proponent, anywhere in Redwood City, would need to mitigate any traffic impacts identified during the environmental analysis. The burden would have to be on the project proponent to demonstrate that they can mitigate any new, substantive traffic impacts on our community, and/or pay for the upgrade of required infrastructure (e.g., transit, rail, shuttle, expanded interchanges or roadways) such that the traffic/congestion would remain the same, or could be made better.

3. Sustainability and protection of our land, air and water are becoming increasingly important. By concentrating growth in the core of our city, we conserve energy, reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, and maintain our open spaces for the benefit of wildlife, the enjoyment of hikers and other recreational users, and for restoration of Bay tidal marsh. Scientific studies have shown that marshlands can provide valuable protection for residents and businesses from flooding and sea level rise, and provide effective mitigation for global warming by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere.

Moving forward, what are your views on the best way to protect Redwood City's natural resources and mitigate for climate change?

At our April 22, 2013 meeting, the City Council of Redwood City unanimously adopted the City's Climate Action Plan, which includes 15 key measures to help the City meet the state-recommended target reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The City's Climate Action Plan is online at [www.redwoodcity.org/ClimateActionPlan.pdf](http://www.redwoodcity.org/ClimateActionPlan.pdf)

Implementation of many of the measures has already begun as a result of state mandates, adopted General Plan policies and programs, and previous City Council direction. Now, with the official adoption of the Redwood City Climate Action Plan, the City formalizes its commitment to California's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, and establishes a clear roadmap for the City's activities in meeting climate protection goals by 2020, and beyond. The Plan includes actions in the areas of renewable energy, smart growth development, residential, commercial, and City energy efficiency programs, solid waste diversion, water conservation, parking management policies, and others.

The City will be carrying out the measures in its Climate Action Plan toward complying with state regulations, which encourage local governments to reduce emissions in their jurisdictions to 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. According to Redwood City's GHG inventories and forecast, by the end of 2020 an annual reduction of nearly 62,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions would need to be accomplished throughout the community in order to achieve the state recommended target reductions. The measures contained in the City's Plan are actually expected to exceed that goal by 2020, with a total annual reduction of an estimated 63,500 metric tons.

In addition, I have voted for balanced budgets every year while on the city council. Each year, I have attempted to prevent drastic cuts to essential city services, such as parks and recreation programs, and provide adequate funding to ensure our parks are open and maintained to keep

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our residents active and healthy. Redwood City also has a “park-in-lieu” fee, which will generate funding for new park and open space acquisition. I also support our efforts to provide responsible access to Bair Island. Additionally, I support Redwood City’s two tree preservation ordinances, one for city owned trees and the other for privately owned trees, as a way to protect our mature tree population and the important role they play in quality of life and the environment.

4. In 2009, the City Council voted to accept the initial Saltworks development application and begin a lengthy environmental review process even though the project had no clear plan in place for supplying water for the projected residents. Water supply options the developer proposed included a complicated Kern County agricultural water transfer with an expiration date. A desalination plant located on the Redwood Shores Peninsula also surfaced as a potential option.

In the future, should the City Council accept and review a project application for a development that has no clear plan in place for water, or a water supply plan that could increase future costs to Redwood City ratepayers? Please explain your answer.

In addition to our Green Building Ordinance’s focus on water conservation measures, I have been leading the effort to increase the use of our recycled water system and expand the system to other parts of Redwood City - beyond the Redwood Shores neighborhood and the Port of Redwood city. I served on the City’s Recycled Water Task Force, have championed dual-plumbing for projects, and as president of my homeowner’s association, we were an early adopter of recycled water for landscape irrigation.

The goal of the Recycled Water task Force was to develop a plan to bring Redwood City below its Hetch Hetchy allotment by the year 2020. Through conservation and use of recycled water, Redwood City achieved its goal eight years sooner! Redwood City is now below its Hetch Hetchy water allotment.

With the Master Plan for the Recycled Water System in place, I am continuing my advocacy for dual-plumbing of both commercial and mixed-use projects for toilet flushing and landscape irrigation. To strengthen this advocacy, I have been able to raise the visibility of this issue with staff, the Planning Commission and include this as an item of consideration in the Redwood City-San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce project endorsement process.

By law, any major development must demonstrate that there is a reliable source of potable water for that specific development project. I am a firm believer in the Council’s four priorities: **financial sustainability, public safety, public infrastructure** and **statutory compliance**. Any project proponent must be able to demonstrate that there is sufficient and reliable water source for their project.

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5. According to the Pacific Institute, San Mateo County already has more property at risk of inundation from sea level rise (estimated to be worth \$24 billion) than any other county in California, and it will cost taxpayers significant amounts of money in coming years just to protect already developed infrastructure. To address the regional adverse impacts of climate change, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) recommends that:

*“...undeveloped areas that are both vulnerable to future flooding and currently sustain significant habitats or species, or possess conditions that make the areas especially suitable for ecosystem enhancement, should be given special consideration for preservation and habitat enhancement and should be encouraged to be used for those purposes.” (Bay Plan Climate Change Policy #4)*

Cargill’s Redwood City salt ponds are a good example of an undeveloped area (no existing infrastructure) vulnerable to future flooding, and requiring construction of new levees for flood protection. In the 1999 report, *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals*, regional scientists determined that these salt ponds are especially suitable for ecosystem enhancement, where managed ponds and restored tidal marsh could increase valuable wetlands for waterfowl and expanded habitat for nearby endangered species.

Do you agree with BCDC’s policy discouraging building in undeveloped areas vulnerable to future flooding and suitable for ecosystem enhancement? Please explain why or why not.

I am not a fan of a “one size fits all” approach to the environmental and infrastructure needs of our communities. In the future, the salt pond areas in Redwood City will need some investment in infrastructure – at minimum - new levees to address sea level rise. The question then becomes, who will be financially responsible for the construction and on-going maintenance of these new levees to protect our current infrastructure (e.g., highway 101). While some will argue that tax payers should pay for this as part of the “greater good”, I am as concerned about the nexus point where taxpayers finally say “no” to increases in taxes. The environment, transportation, schools, government operations, and more, are all fighting for the same tax payer dollar and I am concerned that in the future, there may be winners and losers in this fight.

In addition, I have been championing the effort to resolve the annual winter flooding issues that plague our businesses and residential neighborhoods east of Broadway. Every winter, when there is a high tide and a wet rain, these neighborhoods will be inundated with 3-4 feet of standing water. Most of this flood water (over 80%) comes from the communities of Menlo Park, Atherton and unincorporated San Mateo County. Redwood City is leading a regional effort, and working with the Conservancy and the Refuge, to fix years of flooding through the use of salt ponds S1 and S2 as retention areas for the Atherton Channel, prior to the release of the water into the bay. Consultant studies have been underway and the Conservancy has included this “project” in its Environmental Impact Study (EIS) along with the restoration of salt ponds in the Don Edwards Refuge. It is hoped that the EIS will be completed later this year, and that permitting and construction can begin in the next 2-3 years. I would be extremely frustrated if a “one size fits all” policy would not allow this innovative and collaborative solution to a decades old problem in our community.

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6. All of the Redwood City Cargill salt ponds are designated as “Open Space” in the General Plan and are zoned “Tidal Plain”. In addition to salt making, parks, public recreation and restoration to tidal marsh are all permitted uses. Commercial/residential development is currently not allowed.

If you were elected to the City Council, would you approve a change in the City's current General Plan and zoning to allow development on the salt ponds? Please explain your answer.

I would consider supporting minimal development of 10% or less in close proximity to the Highway 101 adjacent portion of the property, if and only if, the development included model TDM programs and net zero energy and water consumption. The Preserve in Redwood City is a great example of a partnership with the community and the Bay. Approximately 12% of the land was developed into housing, a public park and a site for a much-needed school, and the remainder of the land was restored to tidal wetlands at no expense to the taxpayer. If minimal development were to occur close to Highway 101, include new levees to protect infrastructure from sea-level rise, resolve the flooding issue that plagues our east of Broadway communities, and restores the remainder of the land to tidal wetlands at no taxpayer expense, I owe it to the Redwood City community and the region to be open to reviewing such a proposal.