

Redwood City Neighbors United (RCNU)
2013 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate:

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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?

ANSWER: I absolutely agree with our community's vision, as laid out in the 2010 General Plan, to focus our housing development near our existing transit hubs and entertainment and retail venues. In fact, I would like to see future decisions made by our planning commission and city council to adhere more closely to our General Plan and the principles and priorities laid out in it. We have an award-winning General Plan, and more closely we follow it the better equipped we will be to protect the community's quality of life:

One of the main reasons that I am running for office is that I want to do my part to ensure that future development is done responsibly, focusing on our downtown and along transit corridors, near jobs, shops, and restaurants. Such a focus ensures that we minimize traffic impacts, promote sustainable transit alternatives, plan responsibly for our climate future, and ensure that our downtown businesses have the customer base they need in order to thrive.

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.

ANSWER: While I am open to hearing all development proposals that would come before me as a member of the council, I am opposed to approving any development project on the salt ponds that significantly increases traffic impacts on Redwood City residents, commuters, and businesses.

On Sept. 12, candidates for city council were informed by city staff that the current project to upgrade the 101/Woodside Road interchange will likely take another ten years to complete. Traffic issues in Redwood City, particularly at the 101/Woodside Road interchange, are already worsening due to the development boom downtown, and as RCNU has stated, current plans to improve traffic flow do not account for a potential development on the salt ponds; nor do they necessarily seem to fully address current recent impacts to traffic caused by our successful downtown revitalization and development boom.

In light of the timeline given for the improvements to the interchange, it seems imperative that if we as a city are hoping to manage these successes to avoid creating quality of life issues, we must make a serious effort to provide sustainable, long-term alternatives to the automobile. To that end it is important that we stop emphasizing development near 101 (as seen with the One Marina project, the Villas at Bair Island, the planned development for the Pete's Harbor site, and the push to develop the Cargill salt ponds). Unless the city makes a true effort to ensure that additional housing and mixed-use developments in the downtown core, we will not be able to provide our new residents with viable, sustainable ways to utilize Caltrain and Samtrans.

I am proud to say that I have a history of advocating in favor of responsible development decisions that do not adversely impact our traffic. As founder, lead organizer, and freelance communications specialist for "Occupy Saltworks," I led protest actions and a coordinated media campaign against Cargill's proposed Saltworks development in Redwood City last year. On Earth Day 2012 I led a self-organized protest of nearly forty people outside the Redwood City headquarters of DMB Associates, the developer hoping to build on the salt

ponds. While no organization endorsed our protest, in attendance were members of at least five different Bay Area Occupy groups, leaders within the Loma Prieta Sierra Club chapter, members of Redwood City Neighbors United, and three different candidates for state and local office (Joseph Rosas, Sally Lieber, and Sabrina Brennan). That same day, about half of the protesters spoke out in public comment at the City Council meeting urging the council to drop the Saltworks project. We attracted media coverage from TV helicopters, the Redwood City-Woodside Patch, the Mercury News, and the SF Public Press. (http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_20465266) Coverage was sustained with letters to the editor in the Mercury News for days after our protest action.

Thanks to direct action like this and especially the sustained, passionate advocacy from well-established groups like Save the Bay, the Sierra Club, Redwood City Neighbors United, and others, the so-called "50/50" Saltworks plan was withdrawn from discussion two weeks after Occupy Saltworks' highly successful Earth Day 2012 protest.

More: <http://blog.savesfbay.org/2012/04/wonky-wednesday-occupy-saltworks-targets-cargill-developer%E2%80%99s-offices/>

As Secretary for the non-profit corporation Save Pete's Harbor, I have advocated to stop the privatization of the submerged public lands at Smith Slough in Redwood City and to stall an unsustainable development on fill lands on the bayfront that sit in the path of sea level rise and would adversely affect traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. I wrote an op-ed for Save Pete's Harbor which was published in the Redwood City-Woodside Patch. The op-ed, which revealed key city documents that supported our argument that the city must start over with development plans in order to preserve the public trust use of the state lands at Smith Slough, played a key role in Save Pete's Harbor's victory at their appeal hearing on May 6:

<http://redwoodcity-woodside.patch.com/groups/opinion/p/paul-powers-and-redwood-city-must-start-over>
<http://www.smdailyjournal.com/articles/news/2013-05-07/petes-harbor-appeal-does-not-hold-water-redwood-city-council-sends-development-back-to-planning-commission/1770455.html>
http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_23211778

As someone who has a history of opposing developments that would adversely impact our traffic and encourage car usage, I would be highly unlikely to approve such a development on the salt ponds.

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?

ANSWER: The best way to mitigate for climate change is to ensure that we focus our development in and near the downtown core, away from areas that would be the first to be affected by sea level rise.

The United States Geological Survey's most recent estimate of sea level rise in the San Francisco Bay is 1.24 meters within the next 87 years (by 2100), and perhaps 1.5 meters by 2105:

<http://www.werc.usgs.gov/ProjectSubWebPage.aspx?SubWebPageID=2&ProjectID=238>

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-007-9376-7>

<http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/8ck5h3qn>

Just one meter of sea level rise by 2100 will cost \$21 billion to San Mateo County alone in replacing lost buildings and infrastructure. Also, assuming current populations, 99,000 people in San Mateo County will be at risk of a 100-year flood event with just one meter of sea level rise:

http://www.pacinst.org/reports/sea_level_rise/sea_level_rise_sf_bay_cec.pdf

The 2008 Uniform California Earthquake Rupture Forecast (UCERF) estimated that the probability of an magnitude-6.7 earthquake or greater within the next 30 years on the northern segment of the San Andreas fault as 21 percent (a one-in-five chance). In 2012, USGS scientists said the Hayward fault is due for another magnitude 6.8 to 7.0 earthquake, with the California Geological Survey concurring, stating they believe there is a 31 percent chance of a magnitude-6.7 earthquake or greater along the Rogers Creek-Hayward Fault in the next 30 years:

http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_21957124

With these considerations in mind, it is clear that development of any significant scale along the bayfront in Redwood City represents not only risk to traffic and quality of life concerns, but to public safety and the city's financial resources. In order to mitigate for climate change, development must be focused away from immediate sea level rise and earthquake liquefaction zones.

Mitigating for climate change also means finding innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gases (GHG). While ensuring that development stays focused on our existing public transit corridor(s) is one way to reduce GHG, wetlands restoration at the Cargill site will be one of the most effective ways to mitigate for climate change and plan responsibly for Redwood City's future.

As RCNU knows, marshlands 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. Wetlands restoration at the Cargill site will complement the successful restoration work that has already happened at the Bair Island site, and it is of crucial importance to maintaining areas in the SF Bay estuary for birds and sea life, not to mention creating a beautiful open space area for the benefit of wildlife, the enjoyment of hikers and other recreational users, and for restoration of Bay tidal marsh. Wetlands restoration at the salt ponds will not only protect our natural resources and protect the city against climate change impacts, it will also turn Redwood City into a destination city for public recreation and ecotourism.

It is also important to mention the Inner Harbor Specific Plan, which was put under public scrutiny at recent meetings. I am proud to have been one of the people at the meetings who have raised concerns about sea level rise and sustainability of development in the Inner Harbor Specific Plan area. Most people I have spoken to in the community who are concerned about the IHSP, including staff at the recently closed Malibu Grand Prix, have expressed concerns about future development in the IHSP area and are worried that concerns about sea level rise and sustainability of development may not be adequately addressed.

As an area that will be one of the first in Redwood City to be impacted by sea level rise, the IHSP area is a poor place to build residential units. In order to protect what bayfront areas we have left that remain relatively undeveloped, I strongly support the creation of park space and open space within the Inner Harbor Specific Plan area. The IHSP area is bayfront and bayfront-adjacent land and prime location for recreational space and open space. There is huge opportunity in the IHSP area to create spaces to help preserve our local biodiversity. While I am open to hearing about the promotion of floating, sustainable communities in the IHSP area such as Docktown Marina, I believe that parks and open spaces are the only, sensible, sustainable, and long-term option for the upland area within the IHSP.

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.

ANSWER: In future, any project application that does not have a clear plan in place to address water supply issues should be considered a non-starter and should not be accepted or reviewed. Doing so would be a waste of time and money for city staff, the city council, the developer, and the community.

The most important water-related issue for Redwood City is the new development and housing units we have planned for the City and whether or not we will have enough water to provide for all the new housing that the city has planned.

As RCNU knows, the proposed Saltworks development on the Cargill salt ponds would require that water be shipped in to Redwood City from out of the area, perhaps as far away as Southern California. Put simply, the scale of such a development and the need it would place on the state's water supply is absolutely untenable:

http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_18743198

It is important to note that Redwood City has already been paying for extra water since 1999 to provide for its population, and this raises a growing concern for our current development boom. While much of the housing units being developed are sorely needed, little time seems to be spent analyzing whether or not our city has the capacity to take on so many extra families, car trips, and people who will need access to basic resources like water. Unless Redwood City aggressively expands on its recycled water program and increases incentives for conservation within the community, the city will have to face ever-more serious issues related to water and carrying capacity at a time not too far into the future, and costs to Redwood City ratepayers will likely continue to increase. No project application that does not have a clear plan in place to supply water should be taken seriously.

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.

ANSWER: I absolutely agree with the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's policy of discouraging building in areas vulnerable to future flooding and suitable for ecosystem enhancement. In fact, I would like to see the BCDC be more proactive in discouraging development within the “100-foot band” (an area that starts at the water line and extends upland for 100 feet) over which it has jurisdictional authority.

Besides being counter to the smart strategy of focusing future development downtown and near existing public transit corridors, building in undeveloped areas represents a huge public safety risk and a huge financial risk to our community. Just one meter of sea level rise by 2100 will cost \$21 billion to San Mateo County alone in replacing lost buildings and infrastructure. Also, assuming current populations, 99,000 people in San Mateo County will be at risk of a 100-year flood event with just one meter of sea level rise:

http://www.pacinst.org/reports/sea_level_rise/sea_level_rise_sf_bay_cec.pdf

Based on these findings it seems clear that building on the salt ponds in Redwood City is a poor choice for smart growth, public safety, and fiscal responsibility.

Additionally, as a key Redwood City member of Californians United for a Responsible Budget, I have been advocating against the building of a new jail on

a sit so toxic that a covenant was issued on the land prohibiting residences from being built there. Thanks to our activism, land remediation was done to an extent more than what was originally planned:

<http://redwoodcity-woodside.patch.com/groups/politics-and-elections/p/redwood-city-residents-protest-toxic-jail-on-earth-day>

I recently also helped to mobilize against state senator Jerry Hill's SB 445 and SB 611, two bills which he "gutted and amended" to take away valuable state funding from much needed services in order to fund jail construction on the toxic site:

<http://www.smdailyjournal.com/articles/news/2013-08-16/county-jail-funding-effort-fails-senators-bill-to-help-san-mateo-county-sinks-in-committee/1773691.html>

<http://www.smdailyjournal.com/articles/news/2013-09-13/latest-try-at-jail-funding-fails-sen-jerry-hill-vows-to-continue-fighting/1775294.html>

Besides the toxicity of the site, the new jail is sited in an area that belongs to the Inner Harbor Specific Plan which is being worked on by the city. The inner harbor area where the new jail is to be sited is vulnerable to sea level rise and may be at risk of liquefaction in a strong earthquake. A jail on such a site is not sustainable in the long-term, and fiscally irresponsible as the county and/or the city will have to foot the bill in decades to come to protect such large government buildings from sea level rise. If the City were to be hit by a 100-year flood event, a jail in the inner harbor area housing hundreds of inmates will be a huge safety and security issue, for the inmates as well as the community.

I absolutely believe we must discourage building in areas that are vulnerable to future flooding and/or are suitable for ecosystem enhancement.

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.

ANSWER: Absolutely not. Besides being designated as open space in Redwood City's General Plan, the Redwood City salt ponds are designated as open space in Cargill's contract with the state of California under the Williamson Act, and many state and federal laws protect the Bay.

If the City Council decided to approve a change in zoning in the General Plan, it would essentially be a futile move as it would not affect the designation as open space under the Williamson Act, nor would it affect the state and federal laws protecting the Bay. Even if one chose to disregard all the concerns addressed in the answers to questions #1-#5 (regarding traffic impacts, quality of life, climate change planning, public safety, and fiscal responsibility), it's important to understand that such a zoning change would only create a potential jurisdictional nightmare and unnecessarily place the City of Redwood City in conflict with other governing bodies that have jurisdiction over the Bay, of which the salt ponds remain undeniably a part. It makes far more sense to keep with the current designation as laid out by our award-winning General Plan and work with, not against, other agencies that have jurisdictional authority when planning for the future of the salt ponds.

I am proud to be the only candidate in the city council race who has a history of advocating at the ground level, from within the community, for responsible development that focuses on our downtown core and properly addresses climate change and sea level rise concerns, for the purpose of keeping our community safe, sustainable, enjoyable, and fiscally strong.

I respectfully ask for your vote on November 5.