

D O W N T O W N V E N T U R A P A R T N E R S

2009 VENTURA CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for your interest in our city council candidate forum. The issues and topics below are of great importance to downtown's residents, property and business owners. We appreciate you supplying thoughtful answers to these questions. **Please return your completed questionnaire via e-mail by noon on September 3** to Rob Edwards. Your answers will be posted on our website for our stakeholders to review. Our candidate forum will be held on the evening of September 8th; further details and a formal invitation will follow.*

And thank you for your willingness to serve our city!

Please respond below each question. Be as specific as possible.

1. Aggressive panhandling and vagrancy have profoundly detrimental affects on downtown Ventura's economic vitality, safety and quality of life. What specific steps will you propose to ensure laws regarding these behaviors are enforced, and how would you fund it?

I am careful to make a clear distinction between lawlessness and simple homelessness. As you know, I do not support policies that make simple poverty and homelessness a crime. However, I have been one of the strongest supporters for taking action to deal with real criminal activity, including drug dealing, prostitution, assault, and general thuggery, both downtown and elsewhere in the City. I believe the most effective way to deal with these criminal activities is to put more police officers on the streets where they are occurring. I have always supported hiring sufficient officers to do that. As for the homeless who occupy our streets and parks, the solution is to provide a place where they can be housed and provided the support services they need. Most people know I have been one of the strongest advocates working to solve that problem in the City. In the long run, the only way to fund either solution is to restore economic prosperity to our community. That means increasing our tourism and our retail sales. I have supported many proposals that would do exactly that. Today the quickest way to do that is to defeat the proposal to limit the size of retail

establishments (the anti-Wal-Mart proposal) and welcome Wal-Mart and other large retailers to town. Similarly, it is simply bad policy to impose a moratorium on new construction in the City as the VCORD proponents are asking the voters to do, precisely at the time that we need any construction activity we can get. And of course another thing that will continue to work against achieving this goal is if we continue to be burdened by a compensation and pension package for public safety that pulls every new dollar we secure to cover the ever increasing costs of our current police force, and prevents us from ever achieving a sufficient amount of money to hire additional public safety personnel. Public safety personnel in Ventura are well compensated already. What we need is more of them on the beat, not more of them better retired.

2. Will you support the city's continued participation in the downtown Property-based Business Improvement District? Why or why not?

It is simply too soon to answer that question. The PBID is not even in operation yet. I supported its formation. My continuing support will depend on what the PBID accomplishes over the next four years. Performance and outcomes are the correct basis for determining whether any organization should continue to receive taxpayer support.

3. Are you in favor of building other parking structures in downtown? And if so, where would you suggest they be located and how would you fund?

Yes. I believe we need at least one and probably two. I support the current locations identified in the Downtown Parking Plan.

4. What's your position on the enforcement of laws prohibiting drug dealing in our downtown? And how would you fund enhanced enforcement?

Already answered.

5. What is your position on the "sleeping in cars" pilot program?

I strongly support the Safe Sleep pilot program proposal. These people are sleeping in cars all over town already. Making it legal to sleep in their vehicles in a specific and defined location, under supervision and with sanitation, makes good sense. It also makes it easier for police to monitor. Every time one of these families gets a citation for sleeping illegally it adds unnecessarily to the financial burdens that drove them into homelessness to begin with. If they do not or cannot pay, it can lead to warrants and arrests, mar their already poor credit, affect their driving license and insurance, etc. – all of which make it just that much harder for them to secure employment and work their way back into the mainstream of our community. The Safe Sleep program is a reasonable and inexpensive way to reduce these problems.

6. Would you support the funding of police foot and bike patrols in downtown and on the promenade? And if so, how would you fund them?

Already answered.

7. What specific actions would you propose to encourage new residential development as well as the relocation of new businesses to downtown?

We have already approved ample new residential projects for the downtown area. Unfortunately, they are the victims of the overly aggressive land speculation and the profoundly increased cost of land that was part of what led to this recession. There is little that we can do at the City Government level to cause those projects to be built short of subsidizing the speculators with gifts of taxpayers' funds. The City Council already gave one such gift of approximately \$5,000,000 in fee concessions over a year ago (I voted NO) to the Olsen project and it led to absolutely nothing. These kinds of concessions have very little effect in a market where there is no demand. As for business promotion, I believe we need at least two major stores, possibly another class A office structure when the recession abates, and a cultural arts facility in the downtown to anchor vastly increased retail activity, and I have urged the creation of an aggressive strategy to solicit such business along with a special public-private strike team to implement it. These have not been concepts that have received widespread support in our challenging budgetary circumstances and in a town where the concern to preserve the atmosphere of a quaint small beach town has high attraction. I have recently achieved a major break through, however, with the unanimous agreement of the Council to most of my proposals directing planning staff to make major changes in the planning and plan review process that will shorten the time it takes to move a project through the process, simplify procedures, make the process and the outcome more predictable and certain, and vastly reduce the costs to developers proposing projects that are within the Downtown Specific Plan criteria.

8. Do you think large-scale events previously fully funded by the City, such as ArtWalk and the holiday street fair, should be restored? And if so, how would you fund them?

I think there is more than one way to skin a cat. I think that with a little creative effort there are organizations, among them the DVO, who could take over some of these programs and events. A private promoter is another possibility. There are other cities where it has been done that way. There is little possibility that the City can resume funding these programs until economic prosperity is restored. Even then, I am not certain that I would concur that the best solution is simply to return to doing things the way they were once done. The fact is that we probably should have looked at some different ways to do some of these

things long ago. I worked, for example, as a member of the volunteer Board of Directors with a group of people to bring the Seaside Highland Games to the city six years ago. We used no public money at all. Today we have one of the most successful Scottish festivals in the State, attracting well over 20,000 visitors, and filling every available hotel room in town, and we still do it as a private organization.

9. With the state raiding municipal coffers, how will it impact downtown operations that are currently funded by redevelopment agency? What will you do to fund those operations once our local funding is depleted?

There will be virtually no RDA money left. Most of that money was committed to on-going projects in any case, and these will now be delayed or re-phased or re-scaled in all probability. New projects will be deferred. There is no money to restore funds for projects that were previously relying on RDA funds that I am aware of. There is no reserve for the RDA District.

10. Would you support the City or the County purchasing the Fairgrounds from the state? And if so, how could it be done?

I would consider doing so. Probably the only way it could be done is to issue a special bond to be repaid from revenues earned on the property. The problem with that is we are not well equipped at either the City or County level to be an effective operator of such a business enterprise. The County has failed miserably for years with the Channel Islands Harbor and with our library system. The City has had similar problems recently with our golf courses. When you use bond financing, there are often significant restrictions that prevent using private lease operators, and contract operators must be managed aggressively, a skill not common among municipal bureaucrats.

11. Are you in favor of limiting "big box" stores (like Wal-Mart, IKEA, etc) throughout the city, per the ballot measure?

No. I do not believe in abusing land use policy to achieve primarily the union or even the social objectives of a narrow special interest group. Land use policy should serve the public interest broadly. I represent all the citizens of the City, not just a highly organized and politically astute minority. I strongly believe that we can and would assure quality design, well conceived plans, and appropriate environmental mitigations and infrastructure accommodations to deal with all the objections some people offer as reasons to oppose the so-called big box stores.

12. What specific actions would you recommend to streamline the planning process?

I have already taken major steps to streamline the planning process. I authored most of the initiatives and directions given to City staff in the recent statement of guidelines and principles unanimously adopted by City Council. These directives require major changes in the planning process and plan review that will significantly reduce the time to complete the plan approval process, assure greater efficiency in the process, make the process more predictable for everyone, prohibit the planning staff from rejecting plans repeatedly as incomplete if the developer has complied with an advance checklist, and refund fees if City staff fails to meet timeline objectives, among other things. The truth of the origin of these changes can easily be verified by comparing my list of required changes published in January of this year and found in many places including on my Facebook page with the list of changes found in the document approved by Council upon the recommendation of myself, Mr. Fulton and Mr. Summers.

*** Completing this questionnaire is a prerequisite for an invitation to participate in our September 8th community forum.**

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