

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?

This is whole Ventura problem; downtown is the heart which is supposed to pump positive energy into the rest of the city. It is the outside world's first impression of our community, which helps companies and people decide if they want to live here. With downtown punctuated with panhandlers, vagrants, drunks, drug dealers and users, it has become a community-wide problem because downtown generates tax revenue that provide services that benefit all the community. The more tourists we can attract (which means we must first be attractive) translates into more dollars and more jobs for Venturans.

This issue is so important it deserves a stakeholder brainstorming. An idea that I would suggest is that downtown stakeholders make an effort to educate the rest of the community on how key downtown is to their own prosperity; that downtown is not some separate "Vollywood" We need to communicate that Downtown is a key to prosperity and local jobs coming to their neighborhoods. So as downtown goes, goes Ventura.

If the issues of downtown are not seen as insular and pertinent only to downtown, downtown could have more support in solving the vagrants issue. It is going to take a public private partnership to focus and stay focused for very likely a year to change the downtown subculture. Lawbreaking vagrants are firmly entrenched. As one who has spent nearly every Saturday for 2 ½ years standing in the middle of it, I can tell you they have a very strong community of their own in place. The police will never be able to do it alone. They can only chase them from one place to another. More police will just mean more chasing. They're back in minutes. It's going to take the whole town to save the town.

You need one super salesperson to get together all the disparate stakeholders..the faith community, county services, police, fire, business leaders, representatives from all city areas. There are people who won't come downtown because they think it's not safe. And last Saturday, after seeing the increase in the criminal activity in the Mini Park, I began to have doubts of my own, and decided I could no longer recommend that parents bring their children to "Open Mic for Kids" on Saturdays. I could not guarantee a wholesome experience for them. A few months ago, some young mothers, having a children's party at EP Foster Library had their children exposed to a vagrant who exposed himself to the children as they were filing out of the room. The vagrants at the library are intimidating to children and could be dangerous. This must end, not just for the downtown merchants, but for our whole community.

Of course, after letting vagrants know twice that the law will be enforced by a certain date and taking their names twice when giving them the information, you must have an alternate place for them to go (with restrooms and showers) Maybe we could set up a homeless shelter with tents at Emma Woods. There must be a place. Anyway, the van comes back in two weeks, and they go to the retreat center or elsewhere...their choice. Maybe they would appreciate a bus ticket home if they have a family.

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

It always depends for me, what the people want to do. If the people who are paying for it are in favor, then the city should support it. My personal preference is NGO's in order to prevent influence peddling and politicization. It's easier to get things done.

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?

It seems we will need another parking structure, but the location would depend on where and how the development goes. The funding issue needs a lot more study before I would opine on that. I rely on many friends downtown for their knowledge on this subject and we haven't had time to discuss it yet.

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

I stood across from the Hamilton Hotel this Saturday while kids told me the drug dealer from whom they buy meth and heroin is 87 years old, in the upper left window. They say they have told the police. There is a twisting juniper in the front corner of the mini park on Main street and it is a drug drop off. I could arrest these people myself, I guess. But activism can go just so far before it becomes vigilantism. If the downtown organization has the money, you might get more focused attention to these problems with a private security force. I would certainly look into it. Seriously, this is more important than your ad budget. You can do a lot of free marketing now on the internet. The last thing you want to do is advertise and have a tourist see what we are currently looking at. Word travels fast.

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

I always understood this program to be about people sleeping in their cars on a church parking lot. If it's ok with the church, and its safe, that seems like the most compassionate and relevant place for them to be. I am sure the inspiration from the congregation is needed at a time like that. These are not the same people that are vagrants downtown.

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?

Absolutely, we need feet, and wheels on the street. I would explore the experience that other city's have had with private security patrols to make sure you get the most for the money. I even think there are so many good people out of work here in Ventura, who are capable, who would jump at the chance to do this, and that would be an option to explore. They, being Venturans, would have skin and pride in the game. You might even find some able-bodied folks who have AA experience and could help get the vagrants on another path. Funding? TOT, PBID, Need more study...Maybe we need an event...Taste of Ventura for Safe/clean Streets.

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

First of all, the property values need to be adjusted to today's reality. Building on a lot appraised at \$100. would seem to be less difficult than building on one appraised at \$1 million....especially when today's real value is actually \$100. People could afford the housing and the developers could see a decent profit.

Most of us have dumped our losers by now and are moving on. If the developers get the land prices out of the previously inflated stratosphere and still have the stomach to build, I think we have made the painful point to the city that the city's "my way or the highway" attitudes will literally bankrupt developers and effectively put our city out of business.

The codes have become nonsensical and crazymaking because they do not allow for common sense. I think another brainstorming session with community planning and the stakeholders is due. It seems we may have a reasonable guy there now who will hear what we have to say so it might not be another waste of time.

Downtown is desperate for downtown residential. It would make all the difference in the world for the downtown businesses, and our entire city would feel the benefits.

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?

Anyone who has been to art walk knows that is a wonderful event to make our city look good to visitors so they'll come back. All the stores and restaurants are getting customers. I cannot imagine why they wouldn't have at least three a year. On the Christmas fair, I have heard it doesn't do anything for us, but that doesn't mean it couldn't be reconfigured as another kind of holiday event that would draw visitors. And why do these events have to be funded by the city? If they make money, they could be done, maybe using or hiring city employees, by the downtown organizations to be more profitable.

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?

We don't know the impact yet. If downtown has its own bank account for the PBID money, you should be exempt from the pillaging and might be able to pitch in on what the redevelopment money did. I look forward to learning the details of this. Have grants been explored? I look to you to educate me more on this.

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

It is my understanding that the property would go back to the EP Foster Family in the event of a sale by the state. If that happens, we might have to float a bond to buy it ourselves. This is another question that needs indepth study.

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

Just limit them to the appropriate places by zoning.

I believe that Victoria , by Trader Joes, is the wrong place for Walmart. We agree that Trader Joes is a number one treat for shopping for Venturans, and finding a parking place there even now can be a stressful experience.

I think things need to be in the places most appropriate for them. IKEA,WALMART,FRYES would be ok by the auto park by the freeway. Just look at the traffic at Mills and Main since Lowes went in. (And we lost Manhattan Hardware!)

Location is key.

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

I am meeting with Jeff Lambert next week so I will have a more informed answer. Meanwhile, I will ask one of my developer friends for input.

Thank you for this opportunity to engage with you. Though I only spend money downtown and don't make money downtown, I work downtown every Saturday and will be happy to run polls for you, Currently, the for and against Sales Tax poll is 175 against it , 26 for it. People seem angry. Rightfully so, but as a friend said to me, "The alternative is worse."

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

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