

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

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## 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!**

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

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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?

Enforcing the existing laws on the books is all it would take to reduce and hopefully eliminate aggressive panhandling and abusive vagrants. Between the drug use and the unlicensed and potentially disease carrying pets that accompany many of the vagrants downtown, simple enforcement efforts to prohibit panhandling and move the vagrants along would solve most of the downtown area's problems. Furthermore, as an expert in charitable giving, I know the best way to help the less fortunate in our community starts with local non-profit organizations and not by filling city parking lots with vagrants.

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

While I applaud the revitalization efforts in our downtown, I do not see the benefit to citizens to impose a fee on the taxpayers for further involvement in an organization which produces very little by way of return to the average citizen.

With an initial cost to taxpayers of \$89,00 the city council is hard pressed to justify this expense in a period of economic downturn and budget cutting.

I believe it is up to the business owners in the area to decide for themselves if the BID is the right fit for their district. The city need not subsidize private interests.

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?

Instead of building additional and unnecessary parking structures downtown on taxpayers' dimes, I propose improving the existing public parking lots. The fact of the matter is, on any given day there is available parking in the downtown area. If the city determines that new parking lots and/or garages should be built, they ought to require developers to incorporate them into new building and design plans. In addition, our downtown area has been revitalized in recent years; let's not take a step backwards by increasing costs and decreasing sales by re-installing unnecessary and expensive parking meters.

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

I am very much in favor of enforcing the drugs laws. Many of the gangs in our city profit from drug dealing. Furthermore, drug abuse is rampant in the vagrant community. Drug dealing a public drug use should be a priority for police enforcement. I do not believe that additional funding is necessary. The police are already paid and charged with enforcing public laws: Greater enforcement is necessary, not greater funding. Requiring police to conduct more foot patrols in the downtown would help reduce public drug dealing and use, fights and graffiti.

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

I think this is a terrible idea. What Ventura needs is a homeless shelter for the less fortunate, not a parking lot full of vagrants. We have a homeless tent camp near the harbor. We have non-profit organizations assisting those in need with food, clothing and shelter at various times of the year. What the city ought to do is assist interested charitable organizations in finding an acceptable location for a permanent shelter. The downtown business and residential district is not the place to set up a de facto homeless camp. The last thing Ventura needs is to become the "new" Santa Monica inundated with homelessness and panhandling.

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?

I definitely support an increase in foot and bike patrols. Again, I do not think this requires additional revenue so much as it does better use of the funds already allocated to our police department. The city council authorized over \$130,000 in

taxpayer money to be spent on “non-mandatory police training” and a bureaucrat to oversee neighborhood police storefront stations in the 2008-2009 budget. This is money that could have been used to keep our citizens safe. It does not cost any more money, in fact it saves money, to ask our strong and dedicated police force to walk a beat rather than drive it in a police cruiser.

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

Cutting through the red tape the city has imposed on new businesses is the key to encouraging the continued revitalization of our downtown. I oppose the 26 foot height building limit on the November ballot. Limiting new structures to such an unreasonable building height is tantamount to denying revitalization to the Thompson Ave. corridor. Our city council needs to be joined by a member who does not place too much faith in new taxes, fees and fines to cure its problems. As a tax attorney, I understand both the need for a fiscally conservative system and the methodology to implement it. I do not support the sales tax increase. Instead, the council should work harder to bring more retailers of every size to Ventura. Let's increase the sales tax revenue by increasing sales, not taxes. Increasing the sales tax in our city will further dissuade consumers and, in turn, new business development.

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 grew up attending our local street fairs, beach parties, parades ArtWalks and other civic events. I really enjoy the sense of community spirit and interaction with is produced from these events. Now is not the time for the city to incur such costs without the contribution of those benefiting from increased sales and exposure. What the city ought to contribute is a waiver of fees costs which may otherwise be imposed on private organizers. Our community spirit and involvement does not depend on city coffers to thrive. Such events can continue with the cost shared in some ratio by private interest, charitable involvement and civic leadership.

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?

The current city council leadership has tried their best to maintain a vibrant and forward looking city. And at times they have done a good job. Yet, for all their successes, they have made many costly mistakes. Wasted resources, questionable expenditures and gross fiscal waste have contributed to the financial woes of our city. Prioritization and wise use of tax payer money should always be observed and now the need is more apparent than ever. Cutting costs

and eliminating government waste will go a long way to ensuring the future prosperity of our citizens and our beautiful city.

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

The fairgrounds are a valuable resource to our city. Many events bring in hundreds and sometimes thousands of attendees. This, in turn, increases sales at local stores and this increases the sales tax revenue generated for our city government. However, with the city facing a historic financial crisis and with many services being reduced now is not the time for the city or county to continue its old ways and spend on unnecessary and expensive acquisitions. The fairgrounds already serve a local interest, putting the responsibility in city or county hands makes very little sense to me at this point in time.

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

I am in favor of reasonable use of our city spaces for retail business. I am in favor of sustainable and reasonable zoning requirements to reduce the impact of large retail areas on residential neighborhoods and property values. I do not support a ballot initiative that would ban retailer stores from creating jobs, increasing competition and eliminating the need for tax increases. I believe that our city council should focus on increasing sales tax revenues by encouraging new retailers of every size to offer their services to our citizens. Instead of asking residents to pay the city more in taxes, fees and fines, they should be asking new businesses to setup shop in our city.

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

The planning process in our city can be a long and arduous one. Limiting the length of time the committee has to rule on a proposed development or building plan is a crucial step in reducing the uncertainty and time it takes to gain approval. Conditional Use Permits, Zone Changes, Variances, Subdivisions, and General Plan Amendments are all subject to the whims of committee members. More cogent guidelines and regulations on what role the judgment of committee members should take in the decision making process would also help streamline the process. Finally, the city should recognize and provide more deference to ownership rights. Developing clear regulations on the committee is a major issue that must be addressed.

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

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