

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?

Aggressive panhandling is not protected as free speech under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. In fact, it is a violation of state statutes and is, therefore, criminal activity. Depending upon the circumstances, a violation can be prosecuted as an infraction, a misdemeanor or a felony (strong-arm robbery). As an infraction or a misdemeanor, a peace officer must directly witness the act for prosecution to take place, or an individual, with the assistance of a peace officer, can make a citizen's arrest. In the case of a felony, anyone can make an arrest and turn the apprehended suspect over to the custody of a sworn peace officer for prosecution. In all instances a peace officer's presence is required at some point.

Obviously, if aggressive panhandling is occurring in any part of the city, an effective police presence will be required to mitigate this problem. It is imperative to track crimes in the city and to deploy

police resources in such a way as to bring crime incidences down to "tolerable" levels – regardless of the type. Determining what is "tolerable" and setting service levels to achieve crime reduction goals citywide is the first key to success. To date the City Council has not done this – we have no standards, nor has the council ever set public safety service levels. The second is to develop a strategy that will actually be effective in achieving crime reduction citywide. The third key is to adequately fund public safety efforts to achieve these community goals.

Funding these increased levels of police service can be achieved initially by taking advantage of the City's geographic information system (GIS) to better deploy resources to crime "hot spots". Overtime is another issue; it equates to more 50 percent above regular hourly pay. In other words, for every three hours of overtime eliminated, we can increase our net total patrol hours by one. Eliminating 80 hours of overtime nets us one additional officer on patrol for a full week. Redistributing City General Fund money away from the Community Development department to the Police department can fund equipment and other overhead. The money diverted from the Community Development department will not adversely effect that department's operations if we switch to full cost recovery, which is presently only 76 percent based upon City Council policy. Additionally, by making City operation more efficient overall, and setting different priorities, some current General Funds can be redirected to this community top priority

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

No, not unless there is an actual majority vote of the private property owners to do so. The recent vote to create the DPBID was skewed when the City of San Buenaventura (City) and the Redevelopment Agency of San Buenaventura (RDA) voted yes to do so. Their combined properties accounted for one-third (33.4 percent) of the total votes cast in the affirmative. Do the math! If their votes had been evenly split (half yes and half no), the total affirmative vote would have been only 59.3 percent in favor -- not the 76 percent "in favor" with the skewed vote -- of the 66.7 percent required under California Government Code section 53722 (Proposition 218). With a fair vote the DPBID would not exist at all and the "vote" is obviously a Ventura City Council/RDA imposed tax on many unwilling property owners.

Additionally, many of the residential property owners included in the district will receive little to no direct benefit. This is because the DPBID's fund expenditures are skewed to benefit businesses, not homeowners. Plus, the City's proportion of these funds initially amounts to \$86,003.61 taken directly out of the City's General Fund. Well, so much for hiring an additional full-time police officer to patrol downtown. The RDA's portion is \$3,659.73, which could instead be used to pay back the City's General Fund line-of-credit loan to the RDA. Apparently, the Ventura City Council will stop at nothing to increase our taxes so as to continue funding their pork barrel spending.

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?

Eventually yes; at present no. Currently, there is sufficient parking downtown for most uses. Eventually, given the types and densities of proposed development downtown, it will be essential. We need to determine the best way to develop adequate parking in the future and start saving funds today to actually implement these strategies, as they become necessary in the future.

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

Drug dealing is a felony and laws need to be enforced to be effective. See response to question one.

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

I not only support what the Ventura City Council has done to date, but also believe that it does not go far enough.

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?

Yes. It was my efforts in previous years that led to bicycle patrols downtown being initiated. But, for some unjustified reason, the program was greatly curtailed (discontinued). Bicycle patrols are not only cost effective (lower overhead costs), but they also give officers an edge in sneaking up on criminals (i.e. criminals often don't see or hear the police officers coming up on them). It is important that bicycle officers also have regular patrol units available for backup, support, supervision, and the transportation of apprehended suspects. To fund these operations, please refer to the response to question one.

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

If we had allowed the approximately 750 units that were proposed to be built downtown under the 1995 Downtown Specific Plan (DSP) to move forward a couple of years ago instead of making them wait for the revised version, we would already be benefiting from these units. However, the Ventura City Council, in their "infinite wisdom" chose to put them on hold for the new DSP. Now we are in a recession and we must wait for the economy to recover. All we can do now is wait and hope. One other thing, if we now had these units, the tax increment received by the RDA would have been substantial and would have gone a long way towards funding many other City/RDA endeavors. Oops! Oh, and they called these actions "Smart Growth"!

As for attracting new businesses downtown, the community should evaluate other coastal communities to see what businesses are succeeding based upon their demographics. Then we could see if we can match or change our demographics to capture our fair share of these markets. At that point we should actively recruit the identified business types that can succeed downtown based upon these current or changed consumer demographics.

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?

No. I have higher priorities for scarce City funds. If these activities can make money and that is the key –profitability – then private parties will conceive, fund and operate such ventures. What the City can and should do is create policies, and their supporting ordinances, to facilitate and enhance these opportunities.

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?

Obviously, with the state absconding with the RDA's tax increment money there will be less available to the Agency to fund its operations and projects. It is no secret that I have no intention of replacing this deadbeat agency's funds with scarce City funds.

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

No. The last thing I want to do is give the Ventura City Council or the Ventura County Board of Supervisors (VCBS) control over this valuable community/state asset. The Ventura City Council would most likely give it over to their developer buddies virtually for free and turn it into housing, and the VCBS would probably do something even more ridiculous!

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

I support Measure C. But only to protect the grocery worker unions from the predatory actions practiced by Wal-Mart management's union busting tactics with their sale of groceries.

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

It is true that the City's development process is antiquated and labyrinthian in nature. However, to me, "streamlining" does not mean cutting the public out of the public process. If we can create a clear and concise series of events with reasonable oversight, outcomes and timelines, I am all for it. So far, this has not been the case – actually far from it! To *begin* to answer the question, I offer the following:

- **Develop a clear series of events that lead to clear decisions;**
- **Provide early public notice at the beginning of each event so that all interested parties may fully participate in the process;**
- **Have clear guidelines that lead to transparent decisions at each stage of the process;**
- **Limit the number of events to expedite the process without compromising participation of all interested parties and without sacrificing the quality of projects nor the community's quality of life;**
- **City cost recovery must be 100 percent, but work done by public employees must be monitored and adjusted to be efficient, effective and affordable;**
- **All interested parties must have equal access to all available information and to City staff at least 72 hours before any hearing -- if not sooner (my preference);**
- **All laws must be followed -- not only in letter, but also in spirit (no back room deals);**
- **City staff must communicate clearly what is to be done when, by whom, and what is expected of all participating parties or individuals;**
- **City staff must clearly understand what is expected of them**

- **All costs to all concerned must be accurate and fair to all;**
- **All reviews must be thorough and well thought out with full disclosure every step of the way;**
- **Any appeal process must be affordable and fair;**

These are just a few of my thoughts so that the public knows where my mind is going on this issue, and, of course, does not include all of my thoughts and ideas. Any improvements to the process, and they are many, will need to be worked out with a long and probably arduous public dialog.

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

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