

## South Bay Progressive Alliance Candidate Questionnaire for San Jose City Council 2018

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Committee Name: Omar Vasquez for San Jose City Council 2018 D7

Line of Work: Bus Driver

District Description: Describe the geographic area and demographics of your district.

District 7 is from Story Rd. & King Rd. to Capitol & Yerba Buena Rd. and all the way to Hwy 87.

Your ballot statement: Please attach a file or copy paste in the body of an email to us. *Not available until February.*

Demographics: 32% Latinos, 30% Asian, 3% Blacks, 35% others

### **SBPA CANDIDATE PLEDGE**

*If you cannot not make the following 4 pledges, the SBPA cannot endorse you at this time.*

Please circle **Y** or **N**

**CORPORATE-FREE.** As a corporate-free candidate I commit to refuse donations from corporations, industry lobbyists, corporate representatives, political bundlers, and Political Action Committees (except for unions) and publicize that I am a corporate free candidate in my campaign literature. (Y) N

**PLEDGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY.** I commit to publicize and hold regular listening sessions with my constituents, to stay in touch with their needs and concerns. (Y) N

**PROGRESSIVE POLICIES.** I commit to author, co-author, support, promote and defend people-focused progressive policies and practices that incorporate SBPA core values to improve communities and the quality of life for my constituents. (Y) N

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION. I commit to help level the playing field for ALL people and prioritize the development of leadership among under-represented communities. (Y) N

## CITY COUNCIL QUESTIONS

1. **Motivation** : Why did you choose to run for this office?

San Jose is a rapidly growing city and I feel that our elected officials do not always take the leadership needed to make sure immigrants, low income families, and minorities are included in this economy.

San Jose is a rapidly growing city and I feel that our elected officials do not always take the initiative as leaders to ensure that the needs of San Jose residents are taken into consideration. Especially those needs of the most vulnerable populations, such as immigrants, low-income families, and minorities.

2. **Priorities** : What do you believe are the major issues facing residents of your district? What are some specific tasks (e.g. specific legislation, policies, etc.) you intend to accomplish while in office?

A major issue for the residents of San Jose is the current housing crisis and the skyrocketing cost of living. Many families are homeless and many more are being pushed out of the area or are barely meeting their ongoing needs. This is my primary concern, as someone who engages with San Jose's homeless community on a regular basis, I have huge concerns for how well our solutions are working to address these issues and what else we can do. Furthermore, I would strongly urge increased protections for tenants and policies that will contribute to the availability of affordable housing, such as measure A.

3. **Qualifications** : Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for being a City Council-member, and include any community volunteering or activism.

While I have never held a position as an elected official, I do have over 5 years of experience being actively engaged in the community, local politics, and service. In 2013, I joined LUNA, a community organization specifically aimed at improving people's lives overall. While there, I conducted a survey in District 7 to determine some of the concerns that the residents had. Following the survey, we identified the top three concerns, which were public safety, neighborhood services, and open spaces, and we invited neighbors and city officials to come together to find solutions. During that time, I worked alongside residents advocating support for policies that benefited low income people and minorities.

In 2015, I began working for Sacred Heart Community Service to begin a renters' rights campaign. Since then, I have worked with the community on issues that renters were facing, creating a solution to achieve renters' rights, and also worked with the broader Silicon Valley on transit issues.

In 2016, I went back to LUNA and continued working and supporting the renters' right campaign. Since then I have also supported the fight for \$15, the right to a union, immigrant rights, Measure E or opportunity to work, improving public transportation, and clean, safe streets, open spaces, and public safety.

Outside of my work with LUNA, I have worked with the homeless community to provide basic services such as food and clothing, I have also used my voice to advocate on their behalf. I contribute to park and community clean-ups and have organized a student leadership group and meet with youth bi-weekly.

4. FOR INCUMBENTS ONLY : How would you assess your own job performance? Please give some specific example of accomplishments and setbacks.

**5. Housing** : If elected what policies and programs would you put in place to address affordable housing, market- rate housing, rent control, eviction relief, and homelessness?

Housing is a complicated issue to address and will take strategic short term and long term solutions.

Short term: In the short term, we need to find solutions to help residents keep their housing, which would prevent an increase in homelessness. Additionally, it is important to seek solutions for those currently homeless such as warming centers, RV spaces, and shelters.

Long term: In the long term, we need to allocate more money to build more housing and affordable apartments, and consider solutions such as tiny houses.

**6. Public safety** : How would you prioritize and address the most important public safety issues facing the residents of your district? Consider community trust, racial tensions, police conduct, police militarization, etc.

I supported Measure F to reform the law enforcement pensions and to hire more police officers because many houses in East San Jose were being vandalized; I support the continued hiring of more officers so that SJPD is not so short staffed; as we know, a short staffed police department is negative for officers and the community. Our police officers are being used to address homelessness and not crime. I will do the opposite. I am concerned about the increasing incidents of police brutality against minorities and addressing this is a huge priority of mine. Finding a balance between addressing crime and gaining community trust is extremely important.

**7. Diversity**: What policies and practices would you implement for inclusiveness and diversity in city government, particularly for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community?

As an immigrant person of color myself and a parent of a young woman, diversity is an issue that is close to my heart. I am a supporter of equity and inclusion and have made a point to learn as much as possible about issues facing the LGBTQ+ community so that policies and practices to increase inclusion can effectively be implemented. I have intentionally surrounded myself throughout this campaign with women and those who have a variety of experiences, so that they will inform my service to the community.

Personally, I am a longstanding supporter of policies to ensure that women receive equal pay, access to healthcare such as planned parenthood, and policies that do not restrict these services.

As an elected official I hope to strengthen existing policies that support the LGBTQ+ community as well as policies that are inclusive and protect their rights. I am a big supporter of inclusiveness and the representation of minorities.

In terms of ongoing practices, I feel it is important to ensure that I reach a diverse audience, maintain open channels of communication, and be accessible to the residents that I am serving.

**8. Criminal justice:** What can be done to improve our local criminal justice system?

A few things that I would like to see implemented in San Jose are an end to the current bail bond system, restorative justice policies, and deepening the accountability of our police department.

**9. Land use:** How would you balance development vs. preserving and/or enhancing open spaces? What are the most important land use issues facing your district?

I will always support the preservation of open spaces. In terms of balancing this with development, I believe there are opportunities to direct growth more efficiently within urban spaces. This would serve both developmental purposes as well as enabling residents to live near

public transportation. It would also preserve open spaces and keep development from encroaching on agricultural land. Specifically for District 7, there is a lack of open spaces for residents to use and enjoy.

10. **Google:** What are your thoughts about the proposal of Google to bring ~20,000 jobs to San Jose Diridon Station area?

Google will bring ~20k jobs, but it will also bring employees from other places. There is little benefit for current San Jose residents when there is not a commitment from Google to hire people from San Jose for the well-paying jobs. Along with the potential for jobs, Google brings other challenges such as impacting the housing crisis, inequality, and traffic problems.

11. **Transit :** What specific proposals do you have to alleviate traffic? What are your views and positions on public transit oriented development?

Improving public transportation for all is something necessary in order to alleviate the traffic problem. We have advanced technology at our fingertips; we can easily take into consideration alternative forms of transportation that can be included in our public transportation system. If more San Jose residents could rely on public transportation, the number of cars in some areas of San Jose could be vastly reduced. We also need to take into consideration all of the new kinds of transportation such as hoverboards, new types of skates and bikes, and wheelchair accessibility--and include them in our transit system.

12. **Environment :** What local policies would you propose to locally address climate change and the environment? Do you think San Jose should be a zero-carbon city?

Yes, I would like to support long-term policies that would reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Improving public transportation will also significantly help to reduce our carbon footprint.

13. **Budget** : If you were on Council for the budget year 2019 what decisions would you make differently from the council members dealing with the budget in 2017? How much additional revenue should the city aim to take in, and how would you generate it?

I would like to see more people included in participating in the budgetary process. This would allow decisions to be made democratically and more people would benefit from them. In the future, more revenue could be generated by implementing an employee tax on large corporations. This could benefit many services for San Jose residents.

14. **Business** : Under what circumstances would you support corporate subsidies, tax breaks, and credits, to attract business to San Jose.

There are no circumstances that I would support this.

15. **Youth** : What are your priorities and policies for youth in San Jose and how would you implement and finance them?

My biggest priority for the youth in San Jose is increasing the high school graduation rate. Right now, almost 50% of students in East San Jose do not graduate from high school. One thing I'm currently working on is creating a youth leadership group to keep kids focused on making positive impact in their communities and their lives and prevent them from issues such as gangs, drugs, and crime. An additional improvement would be more after school programs that will address student needs.

**16. Education :** How could City of San Jose improve education opportunities for its young people? What is your position on charter schools?

As a city councilperson, there are limited options in terms of improving education; however, this doesn't mean one can't work to improve it. If elected, I'll make sure that youth--especially minority youth in District 7 schools--have equitable access to resources and opportunities to seek higher education. I am respectful of parents' decisions for their children's education. However, I'm also aware of the privatization of our public schools; therefore, I feel that our focus should be on improving our public schools so that all kids can have the same opportunities as others with more privilege. I feel that charter schools tend to take resources away from our public schools and this is a concern. We need to improve our public schools so that this is the first choice for parents.

**17. Elections :** Would San Jose benefit from electoral and campaign finance reform? If so, what kind? How would you propose to improve civic participation in San Jose?

San Jose would benefit from the many electoral and campaign finance reforms such as allowing participation and monetary funding from noncitizen residents. Researching alternatives to current campaign financing such as public financing and the use of resident vouchers could also make improvements. This would help reform campaign finance, improve civic participation, and encourage low income people including immigrants and women to vote. I also support implementing a Ranked Choice Voting initiative for campaigns.

To improve civic participation I feel that supporting grassroots organizations encourages people to vote and makes the processes more accessible for all San Jose residents.



**18. Access :** How do you propose to make yourself accessible and accountable to the residents of San Jose?

I pledge to continue attending community meetings as well as continue to build relationships with organizations in the community. I plan to host bi-weekly opportunities for residents to meet with me on an ongoing basis, such as *cafecitos*. I'm running with the pledge to not take corporate money and I'm running this campaign with only funds and support from individuals in the community. If elected, I'll continue to go back to my base so that I don't lose their support. I am committed to those who have helped me get to this position and will remain committed to their support.

**19.** What is your position on payday lenders and marijuana dispensaries in San Jose?

I feel that payday lenders have a negative impact on our residents as a result of their very high interest rates. It's challenging to address because many are struggling and often there is a need for a payday advance. Supporting an alternative to these payday lenders with a non-profit community based option that is low-interest could prove to be helpful for residents.

Regarding marijuana dispensaries in San Jose, I feel that this can have a positive impact on the community in a few ways. First, it is a safe and regulated store. Also, the taxes that come from these sales will benefit the community. Lastly, this recreational legalization cuts the pipeline to incarceration for many people and especially minorities.

**20. Endorsements :**

a. Who are you endorsing, from President all the way down ballot to local races?

- Gayle McLaughlin for Lt governor

- Shay Franco-Clausen for San Jose City Council

b. Are you endorsing anyone else in your own race?

- Not right now.

c. Who has endorsed you?

- Sandy Perry - Housing Authority Network
- Peter Ortiz - Mt Pleasant Elementary School District Trustee
- Salvador Bustamante
- Gloria Quiroz - San Jose Resident and SEIU-Local 1000 San Jose

d. Who do you expect to endorse you?

- Sierra Club
- South Bay Progressive Alliance

**21. Campaign Finance:** How much money do you currently have in this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where has/will the money come from?

Right now we have collected over \$5,000 and we are expecting to raise \$15,000 more. All of the money is coming from people from San Jose and friends who live in other cities.

**22. Anything Else ?** Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

I might not collect the amount of money that other candidates collect, but I have the support of my community. I have also been getting all of my support from volunteers, I do have paid staff and 100% of my current volunteer staff is women. My donations average \$10; however, I have received larger donations from organizations such as Laborers Local 270. I am conducting house meetings and have met with over 100 individuals regarding my campaign, I have a personal goal of knocking on 5000+ doors.

## **POSITIONS ON ISSUES**

Circle **Y** or **N** next to the statement. Add an explanation if you would like.

Do you support raising the minimum wage? (**Y**) **N** To what \$22.00

Do you support a restorative justice program in lieu of prosecution? (**Y**)  
**N**

Do you support ending bail bonds? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in city budgeting)? (**Y**) **N** Would you support an elected rent board? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act? **Y** (**N**)

Do you support a civilian review board of the SJPD? (**Y**) **N**

Will you support City of San Jose should divest from fossil fuels? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support funding projects to reduce the number of cars on the road? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support a woman's right to choose? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support a reduction of the defense/war budget? (**Y**) **N** By this 8%

Do you support Ranked Choice Voting? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support Proportional Representation? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support "amending the Constitution to make clear that corporations and other artificial entities do not have Constitutional rights and that money is not speech and campaign spending should be limited through regulation? Pledge from MTA (<https://movetoamend.org/take-pledge-amend>) (**Y**) **N**

Do you support single payer healthcare? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support free public education from preschool through graduate studies? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support legalization with a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support marriage equality? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support the use of city funds to develop worker-owned co-operatives? (**Y**) **N**

Do you support an ordinance or charter amendment to create a Public Bank of San Jose? (Y) N