

# South Bay Progressive Alliance Candidate Questionnaire For City Council



Please download and complete the questionnaire and email the completed document to [info@SouthBayPA.org](mailto:info@SouthBayPA.org). By submitting your responses to this questionnaire to the South Bay Progressive Alliance (SBPA), you agree that your responses are public and that we may share your responses with others.

Name: Gordon Chester                      City Council Jurisdiction: City of San Jose - District 9

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Line of Work: Civil Service

## Candidate Pledge:

(If you cannot make the following 4 affirmative pledges, the SBPA cannot endorse you at this time.)

**CORPORATE-FREE.** I commit to be a corporate-free candidate and publicize that I am a corporate free candidate in my campaign literature.    YES X NO

**PLEDGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY.** I commit to publicize and hold regular listening sessions with my constituents, to stay in touch with their needs and concerns.    YES X NO

**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.    YES X NO

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION.** I commit to help level the playing field for ALL people and prioritize the development of leadership among under-represented communities.    YES X NO

## General Questions:

### 1. Endorsements—

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

I have not been asked to make any endorsements.

- b. Who has endorsed you?

I have been endorsed by Alex Lee and Ash Kalra and am solely endorsed by the Santa Clara County Democratic Party.

I have been endorsed by the Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 393 Union, a dual endorsement from the Asian Pacific American Democratic Party Club, solely endorsed by San Jose YIMBY,.

- c. Whose endorsements are you seeking or expect to receive?

I am hoping to have the support of the following groups, in addition to yours: Santa Clara County Democratic Party, DAWN, Afro UPRIS, Jewish Democratic Coalition of the Bay Area, Silicon Valley Asian Pacific American Democratic Club, Silicon Valley Democratic Club, Silicon Valley Working Blue Democratic Club, Silicon Valley Young Democrats, San Jose Silicon Valley NAACP, and the South Bay Labor Council (and their independent, associated unions).

I also hope to be endorsed by the following individuals and am already reaching out to them:

San Jose Councilmembers: Pamela Campos, Anthony Tordillos, David Cohen, Peter Ortiz, and Domingo Candelas.

Santa Clara Supervisors: Sylvia Arenas, Betty Duong, Susan Ellenberg.

Local city leaders outside of San Jose: Rob Moore, Maria Ristow, Rob Rennie, Sergio Lopez, JR Fruen, Angelica Ramos, Emily Ann Ramos, Jim Beall, and growing.

State elected leaders: Gail Pellerin, Patrick Ahrens, Marc Berman, and Josh Becker.

2. **Campaign Funding** —How much money do you plan to raise for your campaign? \$150,000. Where will the money come from? Mostly community members. Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any). See Below. How much money do you currently have for this race? Approx. \$15,000. How much money do you plan to raise? \$150,000. Where will the money come from, endorsers, community, neighbors, family and self.

- a. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from oil companies, oil company associations, public utilities, and PACs which take money from any of the above including, but not limited to, Chevron, Valero, Western States Petroleum Association, and Sempra Energy? YES X NO

- b. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from law enforcement groups? YES X NO
- c. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from the Apartment Association of the Association of Realtors? YES X NO
- d. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from for-profit health care entities and insurance companies? YES X NO
- e. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from charter school associations? YES X NO
- f. Will you reject campaign contributions and endorsements from corporate PACs? YES X NO

### City Council Questions:

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

I decided to run for this office after reviewing the initial candidates and not seeing policies that meaningfully addressed San Jose’s cost of living, especially housing, small business vitality, and transportation. I couldn’t imagine volunteering my time, let alone entrusting them with our future.

Since 2015, I’ve worked for the City of San Jose in the Building Department, where I’ve seen firsthand how land use and development decisions shape our tax base, our environment, and whether people can realistically live car-light or car-free in this city. That experience, combined with countless conversations with my neighbors about safety and quality of life, has shown me how our policy choices determine whether San Jose is affordable, sustainable, and safe for working people.

I’m running because I understand how our city and neighborhoods function today, I see how we can become more financially resilient tomorrow, and I’ve woven my neighbors’ concerns together with my values into a platform for a Safe and Sustainable San Jose where people can afford to live, run a small business, and get around without sacrificing their entire paycheck to housing and transportation.

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?

Housing (unhoused and affordability).  
 Safety (emergency response and public spaces).  
 School Closures.

Specific tasks I want to take on include streamlining small, sensible land use changes so we can build more homes, local businesses, and community spaces where they are needed. By making it easier and faster to build mid-scale, wood-frame housing, we can add more naturally occurring, lower-cost homes that come online more quickly and fit into existing neighborhoods. As our housing supply grows and stabilizes, it raises the city’s financial floor, giving us more revenue to invest in safety, child services, parks, libraries, and truly affordable housing. When we prioritize homes for families and seniors, we also help more families afford to stay in San Jose, which can strengthen public school enrollment at a time when closures are on the table.

3. **Qualifications:** Please give a brief summary of your background and qualifications for being a City Councilmember, and include any community volunteering or activism. If you're an incumbent, how would you assess your own job performance? Please give some specific examples of accomplishments and setbacks.

I've worked in retail, warehousing, customer service, summer camps, youth sports leagues, and childcare. Those jobs, along with the lessons I learned from my parents, shaped the values I bring to policy making.

For the last 11 years, I've served as a public employee for the City of San Jose. I started in the Building Department, where I worked closely with Planning, Fire, and Public Works and learned how our city's past decisions brought us to where we are today. My studies in communications, history, land use, and economics help me think clearly about how to tackle housing, public services, and sustainability for both our government and our residents.

I also stay engaged at the neighborhood level. I serve on my daughter's School Site Council, and I previously served as a short-term member of the Cambrian Community Council before it dissolved.

4. **Housing:** If elected what policies and programs would you put in place to address affordable housing, market-rate housing, and homelessness? What incentives or policies would you propose for first-time home buyers? How would you improve city rental ordinances? Would you implement rent control in your city? If so, what would your rent control policy look like? Do you support Opportunity Housing?

In 2021, I urged my councilmember to keep pursuing Opportunity Housing even after SB 9 and SB 10 passed, because I didn't believe those state laws would create enough meaningful housing in San Jose. I continue to support Opportunity Housing and other policies that add "missing middle" homes in our neighborhoods.

If elected, I would push Planning and Public Works to streamline approvals and modestly upzone so we can build more small-scale, wood-frame mixed-use buildings that support local small businesses and add homes people can actually afford.

I support mobile home residents in opposing recent changes to the Mobilehome Rent Ordinance, and I believe mobile home parks must remain a stable source of affordable housing.

On homelessness and affordability, I would prioritize housing that people in interim shelter can truly afford on minimum-wage or low-wage incomes, and I would support local programs that help families cover rent gaps to prevent eviction wherever possible.

5. **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, use of force, etc. What can be done to improve our local criminal justice system?

District 9 residents, particularly older residents, have fewer direct experiences with our unhoused community; they often have the strongest impressions and feedback about the unhouse and why they are unhoused. Working to build more housing and creating better transitions to permanent housing may be the most meaningful positive change to older residents that we can facilitate.

Middle-aged residents, especially parents, are focused on whether their kids can safely move through the city. They want their children to be able to walk, bike, or take transit to and from home, school, and activities without parents worrying every time they leave the house.

I will work to create real pathways for people in emergency interim housing to “graduate” into permanent, affordable homes. That frees up interim beds for people who are currently unsheltered and keeps us focused on long-term solutions, not “forever sheds.”

My safety agenda also comes directly from voters: making our youngest and our seniors safer and more independent with better crosswalks, streetlighting, bike lanes, bus shelters, and public art that makes people feel welcome in their own neighborhoods.

6. **Immigration:** Do you support the current sanctuary policy of your city and the current county policy?

Yes, I support the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County policies as of today (and believe there is room to improve).

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?

I would focus on racial and gender equity in hiring by pushing the City to recruit from underrepresented communities, use diverse interview panels, and remove unnecessary barriers in job qualifications. I would also support fully implementing San Jose’s equity commitments in our own workforce, regularly reviewing pay, promotions, and workplace conditions by race and gender, and requiring action plans when disparities appear. Finally, I would uphold and strengthen local labor standards, like fair-wage and opportunity to work policies, so women and workers of color in part-time and low-wage jobs have a real path to stable, dignified employment.

8. **Land use:** What are the most important land use issues facing your district? How would you reach out to your district residents for their input?

I’ve been meeting with Home and School Clubs that are facing school closures because enrollment is falling and families can’t find enough family-sized homes in San Jose at prices they can afford. Many of these parents are open to moderately taller buildings that create more family homes if it means they can save or regain their neighborhood schools. This approach could be one of the most broadly supported ways to grow, especially given the lower cost and faster pace of wood-frame construction. It lets us add homes, strengthen our property and sales tax base, and reinvest that revenue back into residents in the ways they deserve.

I will keep meeting with parents at school events, seniors at community centers and senior housing, and I will host town halls across every part of District 9 so I can hear directly from as many residents and small business owners as possible, as often as possible.

9. **Business:** How do you view business growth in your jurisdiction? What, if anything, would you do to ensure residents are not displaced? Under what circumstances would you support corporate subsidies, tax breaks, and credits, to attract business to your city?

Business growth in District 9 has stagnated because we've pushed most commercial activity onto a few major corridors, which drives up rents and makes it harder for new, locally owned small businesses to open and survive. Small businesses are a core part of San Jose's tax base, especially through the sales tax revenue that funds our general services, so when they struggle, the city's budget and neighborhood vitality both suffer along with them.

I want to protect small businesses when properties are redeveloped, including exploring "right of return" options so they have a real chance to come back after construction. I'm also open to targeted tax breaks and incentives when they support small businesses, co-ops, or unionized workplaces that keep money and jobs in the community.

Would you like a version of this that names one or two specific types of incentives (for example, reduced business license tax in the first years after reopening)?

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

Alleviating traffic is a long term, multi-jurisdiction solution. We are decades behind the light rail build out that we deserve, however, it's never too late to start. We must work with the county and VTA to create the next expansion that has the best potential to reduce highway traffic. There are multiple options, and my policies for increasing sales tax directly helps VTA since it's funded so much through sales tax. I want to see light rail and Bus Rapid Transit expansion in a way that is also designed for emergency services to use for quicker response times (something many people ask for). I am supportive of Transit Oriented Developments (and neighborhoods).

11. **Environment:** What local policies would you propose to locally address climate change and the environment? What is your target date to make your city a zero-carbon city?

Transportation is San Jose's biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, so that's where I believe we can make the fastest, largest impact. That means getting serious about how people move every day: smarter traffic signal timing, real bus signal priority, and dedicated bus and BRT lanes that don't stop at the San Jose city line. These improvements only work if we coordinate with our neighboring cities and regional partners, so riders experience reliable, fast transit across the whole corridor, not just inside District 9.

I also want San Jose to lead on electrification at home. That includes helping residents transition away from natural gas toward cleaner, all-electric homes that reduce emissions, improve indoor air quality, and lower long-term energy costs.

12. **Budget:** If you were on Council, what decisions would you make differently from this year's budget? Do you think the city needs additional revenue, and if so, how would you generate it?

Yes, I believe San Jose needs additional revenue, and as a councilmember I would focus it on retaining and fairly compensating the staff who keep our city running. Right now, we are heading into what's projected to be the toughest budget year in the five-year forecast, uncomfortably similar to the period that led to layoffs in 2011, this is a moment to protect core services and the workforce behind them.

My priority would be to avoid repeating those layoffs by stabilizing the budget and making San Jose a more competitive employer with better pay and benefits. To do that, I support raising new, ongoing revenue through smart land-use changes that grow our tax base encouraging more housing and jobs in

the right places, near transit and existing infrastructure so we can fund essential services without constantly lurching from crisis to crisis.

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

My priorities for youth are education, safety, and real independence in how they move around our city. I want San Jose to fully live up to the Children's Bill of Rights we passed years ago by making it easier and safer for young people to get to school, jobs, parks, and community spaces, even if they don't drive.

On education, I would work closely with Councilmember Campos and other partners to support programs that connect students to career pathways, mentoring, and after-school opportunities, especially in neighborhoods that have been historically under-resourced. On mobility, I would invest in redesigning streets, crossings, and public spaces to improve safety for kids and teens walking, biking, or taking transit.

To finance this, I would tap multiple sources. New development and the tax revenue generated by smart land-use changes I've proposed would raise our long-term "tax floor," creating more stable funding for youth programs and safer streets than the city can provide today.

14. **Education:** How could your city improve education opportunities for its young people? What is your position on charter schools?

I believe in public schools being the best option for many reasons.

Although city council does not directly affect public schools, decisions made regarding land use have indirectly altered how public schools are funded and therefore the quality of them (since they rely on average daily attendance). By working to create more family oriented homes, especially affordable homes, throughout the city, we can bolster school enrollment and funding for school districts.

Our city facilities, primarily libraries and community centers, should have the ability to boost education and increase the educational opportunities for our young people. This includes traditional school topics as well as topics they often do not get to teach anymore: home economics, civics, small business startup, and create pathways to internships and jobs (age pending) to help them find their passion.

15. **Elections:** Would you support electoral and campaign finance reform? If so, what kind? How would you propose to improve civic participation in your city?

Yes, I support electoral and campaign finance reform in San Jose as part of a broader effort to reduce the influence of big money and rebuild trust in local government. While the most sweeping changes would require federal action to overturn the idea that corporations are people, locally I would like San Jose to move toward a small-donor matching or public financing system that amplifies contributions from everyday residents and, potentially, explore reasonable spending caps so campaigns are driven more by ideas and community support than by fundraising totals.

To improve civic participation, I believe representation matters. Right now, each councilmember represents roughly 100,000 residents, which makes it hard to truly reach and engage everyone, so I'm interested in adding two to four council districts as past Charter Review discussions have suggested so each office can build closer relationships with their communities and more residents feel that City Hall is accessible and responsive.

16. **Access:** How do you propose to make yourself accessible and accountable to the residents of your city?

I will be a councilmember residents can actually see and talk to. I'll regularly attend neighborhood meetings, school and PTA events, small-business gatherings, and community events, and I'll hold frequent in-district office hours so people don't have to come to City Hall to be heard. I'll also focus on explaining what the city can and can't do, so residents have the information they need to hold me and City Hall accountable.

Constituent service will be at the core of my office. I will build a district staff whose primary job is to respond quickly to resident concerns whether that's a safety issue on their block, a problem with a city service, or help navigating bureaucracy and to track those cases until they're resolved. When a council office is truly responsive, it not only solves individual problems, it builds trust, makes our neighborhoods stronger, and helps ensure that every part of the district has a voice in City Hall.

17. What type of retail establishments should or shouldn't be in your district (e.g. what is your position on payday lenders and marijuana dispensaries in your district)?

I want District 9 to have retail that supports families and neighborhoods, not businesses that prey on people or add more pollution. I do not support expanding payday lenders and would consider stronger limits so they don't cluster in vulnerable areas. I also think we should rethink our reliance on gas stations, I think we already have enough; the city has leaned too heavily on them and similar uses for revenue, and that's not sustainable. We should be attracting more neighborhood-serving shops, cafés, childcare, health services, and arts or cultural spaces that strengthen community life while still contributing to our tax base.

On cannabis, District 9 has one dispensary located next to the lowest-income area in the district, which I'm not comfortable with. I'd be open to one or two additional, well-regulated dispensaries in higher-income, currently under-served parts of the district especially near Campbell and Los Gatos so we spread impacts more fairly and keep more sales-tax revenue in San Jose.

18. Does your campaign commit to engage substantial numbers of new voters? If yes, what is your plan to make it happen?

Absolutely. I and volunteers will be doorknocking. We plan on having advertisements targeted by zip code or voting block before we knock on doors so people can expect us, making it more likely to get the door open. We will be looking to motivate young people, people new to the area, and help them understand how San Jose arrived in the poor fiscal position we are in and how to change the trajectory so we can be invested in the way we deserve.

19. **Anything Else?** Is there anything else you would like to share?

## Positions on Issues

Please answer YES or NO for each statement.

- Do you support raising the minimum wage in your city? YES X NO   
To what amount? I think tying minimum wage is best tied to cost of living.
- Do you support a restorative justice program in lieu of prosecution? YES X NO
- Do you support ending bail bonds? YES X NO
- Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in budgeting)? YES X NO
- Would you support an elected rent board? YES X NO
- Do you support a civilian review board with subpoena power of your police department? YES X NO
- Will you support City divestment from fossil fuels? YES X NO
- Do you support funding projects to reduce the number of cars on the road? YES X NO
- Do you support Ranked Choice Voting? YES X NO
- Do you support Proportional Representation? YES X NO
- 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>) YES X NO
- Do you support free public education, pre-school through graduate studies? YES X NO
- Do you support legalization with a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.? YES X NO
- Do you support marriage equality and the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice? YES X NO
- Do you support use of city funds to develop worker-owned cooperatives? YES X NO
- Do you support an ordinance or charter amendment to create a local public bank? YES X NO
- Do you support Medicare for all? YES X NO