

South Bay Progressive Alliance Candidate Questionnaire For City Council



Please download and complete the questionnaire and email the completed document to 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: Seema Kanani

City Council Jurisdiction: At Large

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Line of Work: Medical Social Worker (LCSW)

Candidate Pledge:

(If you cannot not 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 ☒ 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 ☒ 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 ☒ 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 ☒ NO ☐

General Questions:

1. Endorsements—

- a. Who are you endorsing, from national races all the way down ballot to local races?
While not endorsing anyone, I am supporting and donating to Jane Kim, Alex Lee, Patrick Ahrens, Rob Bonta, Seema Patel for San Mateo, and Seema Lindskog of Cupertino Together
- b. Who has endorsed you?

Milpitas Firefighters Local 1699

SEIU-UHW

Cameron Sasai, former Mayor of Pinole and CDP Filipino American Democratic Caucus Chair

Asm Alex Lee

Asm Patrick Ahrens

BOE, Sally Leiber

San Jose City Council member Peter Ortiz

Former Milpitas City Council member Anthony Phan

Americans 4 Hindus

Marsha Grilli: Trustee San Jose Evergreen Community College; Former Milpitas Vice Mayor

Rob Means, SBPA co-coordinator and secretary

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

Working Families Party, Silicon Valley Young Democratic Club, South Bay Progressive Alliance, South Bay Labor Council, SEIU 2015, SEIU 521, SEIU 1021, County Supervisor Otto Lee and Betty Duong, San Jose City Council member Pamela Campos, and Milpitas POA

- ### 2. Campaign Funding —
- How much money do you plan to raise for your campaign? Where will the money come from? Describe sources of financial contributions for your campaign that you would refuse to accept (if any). How much money do you currently have for this race? How much money do you plan to raise? Where will the money come from?

I plan on raising \$30K. Currently I have relied on donations from the general public; friends, family, colleagues and union brothers and sisters. I would not take money from any large conglomerate, corporate PAC, or Super PAC. I would also reject large donations/ Independent Expenditures that would go against the values I stand for or harm the working class. I have currently raised \$9300.

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

City Council Questions:

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

I decided to run for city council of Milpitas, because I've seen that residents of this city have clear opinions and interests that aren't reflected in the decisions of the current Council. As a mother who grew up in this community, I now watch my teenagers thrive in the same community. I feel compelled to do my part to uplift and lead this wonderful city so others can thrive. As a social worker, it is ingrained in my DNA to advocate for the needs of all our community members. During the last presidential election, and while attending the annual National Association of Social Worker's conference in D.C., I distinctly remember how very few elected officials and keynote speakers shared the progressive values of the NASW members in the room. This highlighted to me how interconnected policy and politics are with my passion to create a better community for the next generation. My work with Kaiser and as a member leader of SEIU-UHW, resulted in a proven track record of fighting for 1) better working conditions for all healthcare workers, and 2) safe, exceptional care delivery for all patients, regardless of their ability to pay or immigration status. If endorsed by SBPA, I will wholeheartedly uphold the progressive values, and create lasting change in our community that can benefit multiple generations to come.

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?

My top three priorities are:

1) **Housing affordability and preventing displacement:** I will work to preserve existing affordable housing, responsibly increase the housing supply, and expand permanently affordable and workforce housing. Caregivers, educators, city employees, seniors, people with disabilities, and working families should be able to live in the community they serve. Housing policy must focus not only on how many units are built, but also on whether Milpitas residents can actually afford them. I will advocate for faster processing for genuinely affordable projects and enforceable affordability requirements in private development.

2) **Safe neighborhoods and strong public services:** Public safety depends on recruiting, supporting, and retaining qualified city employees and first responders. I will prioritize adequate staffing, competitive total compensation, employee safety, mental-health support, training, career advancement, and respectful labor-management

relationships. Workers should not have to endure hours-long commutes or sacrifice time with their families to serve our city.

3) **Smart and accessible infrastructure:** I will invest in well-lit streets, safer intersections, accessible sidewalks, maintained parks and sports fields, responsible bike-lane planning, and reliable transportation connections. These improvements are especially important for seniors, children, pedestrians, cyclists, and workers traveling during early or late hours.

Together, these priorities will help Milpitas remain a safe, affordable, inclusive, and economically strong city for residents of every generation.

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 am first and foremost a hard working American, raised by immigrant parents whose hard work I saw daily. I came from humble beginnings and as an immigrant, I had to work 4 times harder just to get the same results as my fellow classmates growing up. As a healthcare worker at Kaiser in Milpitas, I'm talking with residents daily. I am a community activist who protested unfair treatment of fellow healthcare workers in hospitals as they keep us safe. I have participated in campaigns that brought hospitals to the negotiating table where better working conditions and better wages were secured for healthcare providers. Being an advocate and change agent for our community is a quality that every city council member should possess. Overall, my work ethic, and work experience make me a strong candidate when it comes to running for city council as well as fighting for our community.

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?

I will work to preserve existing affordable housing, responsibly increase the housing supply, and expand permanently affordable and workforce housing. Granting right-of-first-refusal to resident co-ops would also reduce displacement. I will advocate for faster processing for genuinely affordable projects and enforceable affordability requirements in private development. I propose incentivizing developers to build affordable housing options. I will revisit the permit approval process, and seek opportunities to make it quicker and more efficient. I would like to prioritize housing assistance for seniors, teachers, first responders, and other lower income workers, especially after the recent passage of the 21st Century ROADS to Housing Act that's aimed at increasing the supply of housing and reducing barriers to homeownership, particularly for individuals rather than institutional investors.

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?

Milpitas has a long history of highly professional police officers that results from a culture long established. Problems that other communities experience with police are rare in Milpitas. One area of concern is the reduced number of police officers per-capita. Today's count is the same as it was in 1986, back when the population was 46,000 instead of above 85,000 as it is now. MPD has also made progress on involving appropriate professionals in dealing with people in need of health care or psychological support. I will seek opportunities to expand that approach, while also encouraging restorative justice options.

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

Yes, immigrants are the life blood of our city, and they deserve as much protection as everyone else who lives in our city. I do support the current sanctuary policies of the state. Milpitas falls under the California Values act which basically states that local law enforcement is limited in collaborating with ICE, and they are only allowed to work with each other in the exception that a very grave crime has happened. Serving as the Co-Chair of the SEIU-UHW Immigration Workgroup Committee since its inception 2 years ago, I've learned there is no such thing as an "illegal" human. Not only do I support sanctuary policies of the city and county but also advocate at the State Capitol to seek support from elected officials to pass immigrant rights legislation.

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?

"If you are not at the table, you're on the menu." With me at the table, women, people of color, and all humans regardless of their birth or identified gender or sexual orientation will be represented and have a voice when policies and practices are being made. Advocating for what is reflective of the needs and gaps for each of the diverse groups, is what I would ensure as an elected official.

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?

Populating the Innovation District just East of the Milpitas Transit Center is an opportunity to increase revenue, and better utilize the \$2.3B investment that brought us BART. Aging shopping centers have already been identified as potential housing sites. Working with Assembly member Alex Lee, a proponent of social housing, may yield unforeseen opportunities to create affordable housing. Holding in person townhalls and "block talks" to hear from residents for their input versus only having online access during council meeting will be a high priority if I'm elected.

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 will be challenging over the next few chaotic years especially. There were missed opportunities for business growth during the recent FIFA and Super Bowl events that were held in our neighboring city, especially with the available federal grants for the events. At this time it's important to remain realistic and prepare ourselves for steady business growth. Milpitas properties offer plenty of value to attract businesses without subsidies, and city leaders can collaborate and ensure that people, profits for small businesses and the environment, all benefit. The community's and it's residents' long-term well-being will be my priority and commitment if elected, not big corporations.

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

With 2 of the 4 major East-West corridors passing through Milpitas, congestion is a regional problem heavily impacting local residents. Rather than attempting to solve the problem of car congestion, supporting alternatives that empower residents to avoid congestion is our best use of resources. I support maintaining and expanding safe, reliable, and affordable public transportation. An example would be adopting the [MOU](#) to pursue a podcar network proposed by non-profit LoopWorks which could generate many benefits for the City. In my visit to European countries, these modes of transit have proven to be very instrumental.

As a result of decades of planning/zoning the Metro Area, Milpitas has established a substantial TOD. A fundamental flaw of TODs is a focus on small areas. In Milpitas, the Metro Area TOD (half-mile radius around the

transit center) is about 0.8 square mile, or just 5% of Milpitas (14 sq-miles), leaving lots of opportunities unserved by frequent public transit. A podcar network could expand the reach and ridership of the Milpitas Transit Center.

The success of the city's SMART transit service shows the demand. The Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) would do well by investing in these modern technologies.

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?

Silicon Valley Clean Energy is effectively supporting electrification of homes and businesses, but transportation accounts for 59% of CO₂ emissions in Milpitas. Rather than electrify privately-owned cars that sit idle most of the time, encouraging micro-mobility alternatives and investing in public transit that uses shared vehicles makes economic sense. Fleets of podcar networks (that use 90% less energy than cars) are worth exploring to provide better mobility options to the 1 in 3 residents who cannot drive.

Due to the efforts of the corrupt Republican regime at the national level, a target date to make Milpitas a zero-carbon city is unrealistic.

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?

Rather than hiring freezes commonly used by the current Council, I would prioritize raising new, sustainable revenue and finding administrative efficiencies before continuing cuts that adversely impact frontline workers and residents. The Council's decade-old approach of belt-tightening has harmed services to residents and driven away many great employees – leading to higher training costs, lower productivity, and undue stress. Instead, let's find creative ways to tax the billionaires and their huge corporations that benefit from our community while not doing their fair share of supporting us.

At the state level, I support closing corporate tax loopholes so profitable corporations and billionaires pay their fair share while protecting working families, homeowners and small businesses. First step, pass the Billionaire Tax on the November ballot.

In the event of a shortfall requiring real trade-offs, I would insist on transparency with the public, and early, good-faith engagement with city employee unions so that solutions can be identified jointly and not imposed unilaterally.

I will evaluate revenue measures based on necessity, equity, accountability, and their impact on working families rather than supporting or opposing every tax categorically.

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, wellness, and mobility - making it easier and safer for young people to get to school, jobs, parks, and community spaces.

On education, I would work with MUSD to support programs that connect students to career pathways, mentoring, and after-school opportunities. On mobility, see 9. Transit above.

To finance youth-oriented programs, I would tap multiple sources as mentioned in 12. Budget above. Another source could be from local cannabis tax revenue. There are untapped pipeline resources available to me through the SEIU-UHW union and Kaiser in the form of tuition free health care education and careers. Since before

becoming a candidate, I have been working with the School Board to support and connect students to these resources post high school graduation.

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

Major pillars of support for education - Universal Child Care for families, healthcare for all, and free education – must be implemented at the state level. And, as a city, we can urge our representatives to deliver these programs that make our society stronger.

Locally, as youth transition into adulthood, our schools must be the vehicle that supports students in developing a career path that will lead them to earning a family-sustaining wage and affording a comfortable retirement. I will work with MUSD to support programs that connect students to career pathways, mentoring, and after-school opportunities.

Charter schools are a way for-profit investors use to extract wealth from public funds and communities. I understand some charter schools with specific focuses, such as serving our youth with physical disabilities, are very beneficial to families. However, we need to invest our public funds into public schools so they can be the top choice for parents, and produce the productive citizens that keep our society healthy and strong.

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 Milpitas as part of a broader effort to reduce the influence of big money and rebuild trust in local government.

Locally I would like Milpitas to adopt a small-donor matching or public financing system that amplifies contributions from everyday residents. Public financing programs promote civic engagement by encouraging new and more diverse donors to give, particularly from historically underrepresented communities. Although not an option for General Law cities like Milpitas, ranked choice voting is another pro-democracy change that improves public participation, and one being considered at the County level.

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

I find that Block Talks have been successful in interacting with community members while also building community cohesion and trust. A Block Talk is a gathering of people interested in meeting me and doing something fun like eating ice cream or getting a manicure. Combining such public listening with the more intimate and personal listening I do with members of the community, it will provide the feedback needed to well represent voters who elected me.

Because we must collaborate to create remarkable results, I will attend public meetings, reach out to organizations and community leaders, speak to groups, and continue posting on social media. As for accountability, I expect feedback at Block Talks, Council meetings, and other public events. More importantly and decisively is the result of elections.

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)?

While I oppose payday lenders, I support strong oversight over liquor stores, marijuana dispensaries, bars, and nightclubs. Although opposed by the Mayor and Council, I support allowing a carefully regulated number of retail cannabis businesses in Milpitas. As a healthcare worker, I've witnessed the health decline and symptom burden of patients with cancer, autoimmune diseases, and chronic conditions – and I've seen improvements from using cannabis.

Done responsibly, dispensaries can generate local revenue while displacing the unregulated market. I would require operators to sign labor peace agreements, pay prevailing/living wages, and provide safe working conditions for employees. On the public-health side, I'd require strict age-verification, limits on proximity to schools and youth facilities, security and product-testing standards, and community reinvestment – for example, directing a share of local cannabis tax revenue toward affordable housing or youth programs.

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

Our team plans to inspire new voters from two groups; those with Indian heritage, and younger voters that have accepted the myth of “their vote doesn’t count”. Indian women, after many years, has a candidate who looks like them, and “identity politics” will inspire them to vote. Even before announcing my candidacy, I had attended the No Kings Rallies in Milpitas, and taken the initiative to approach members at the rally that may look “young” as a way to research their mindset regarding voting. I heard many members aged 24-40 not know who the city’s Mayor is. Reaching out to youth has been a priority and outreach that I have started with a recent 30-second reel. Contacting high school youth may bring some to the polls, while others may prompt their parents to vote. They have a big stake in the outcome of elections, and many know it!

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

N/A.

Positions on Issues

Please answer YES or NO for each statement.

Do you support raising the minimum wage in your city? YES ☒ NO ☐
To what amount? \$25/hr (currently \$18.50/hr)

Do you support a restorative justice program in lieu of prosecution? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support ending bail bonds? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support participatory budgeting (citizen involvement in budgeting)? YES ☒ NO ☐

Would you support an elected rent board? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support a civilian review board with subpoena power of your police department?
YES ☒ NO ☐

Will you support City divestment from fossil fuels? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support funding projects to reduce the number of cars on the road? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support Ranked Choice Voting? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support Proportional Representation? YES ☒ 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 ☒ NO ☐

Do you support free public education, pre-school through graduate studies? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support legalization with a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support marriage equality and the right of transgendered individuals to use the restroom of their choice? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support use of city funds to develop worker-owned cooperatives? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support an ordinance or charter amendment to create a local public bank? YES ☒ NO ☐

Do you support Medicare for all? YES ☒ NO ☐