

Santa Clara County League of Conservation Voters
Local Government Candidate Questionnaire
Due by 8.16. 2020 to rjdiridon@gmail.com

Candidate Information

Name: Teresa O'Neill

Office being sought: Santa Clara City Council, District 4

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In answering these questions, please remember that most of our endorsement decision is based upon your environmental accomplishments, environmental aspirations, and campaign preparedness.

Please provide explanations with your answers and please include the original question with your response. Your response must be returned in the text of an e-mail, and as an attached MSWord file. The file must include your name in it, please.

General Questions:

1. We consider your past record as the best indicator of your future action for the environment. What have you done to protect natural resources and the environment?
 - I proposed and lead the effort to convert 12 acres of Santa Clara Unified School District land to an organic educational farm.
 - I worked with another council member to have the Santa Clara City Manager bring forward a developer park fee ordinance and got the ordinance adopted for fees to be paid at 100% of land values. Santa Clara has been able to add new parks and remodel and maintain existing parks for the first time in decades since the adoption.
 - Brought to the City Council and got enacted an ordinance to update and expand Santa Clara's second hand smoke restrictions for the first time in approximately 20 years.
 - I am the City Council's leader for electric power issues, including representing Santa Clara at the state, regional, and national level on energy policy. During my tenure, we have eliminated coal-based generation from our power content and adopted a policy to prevent the addition to our electric grid of any new generation that releases GHG. We are engaging in experimenting and testing new technologies for renewable electric generation.

2. What do you regard as the major environmental and conservation issues facing your community and the Bay Area as a whole?

The first and most pressing issue is slowing and managing the impacts of massive climate change that we are now living with everyday. Climate change is impacting all the other environmental challenges we face in Santa Clara—air quality, water supply and quality, food supply and quality.

3. What are the principal areas of the environment that you will work on if elected? How will you deal with them?

If I am re-elected, I will continue to work in areas where I have chosen to engage: electric power generation and distribution, and transportation. I chose these areas because power generation and transportation sectors are the largest contributors to carbon release. These sectors must work together more effectively if we are going to have the right infrastructure to electrify transportation. I will also continue to work on open space and having more of our food supply produced locally in a sustainable manner.

4. Have you attended SCCLCV gatherings? (Not required for endorsement).
Yes, a couple of past fundraisers.

Issue Questions:

Sustainable Land Use

- 5a. What are your views about the creation of downtown and transit hub specific plans that zone for building heights sufficient to generate significant economic value that will benefit your entire community and provide significant affordable housing? What types of development conditions (for example: Residential Parking Permit Programs to reduce redundant parking) would you support to reduce land waste, unit cost and auto dependency?

I am very supportive of specific plans to help create full-service communities located near transportation and employment centers. During my tenure on the City Council, we have initiated specific plans for Tasman East, Lawrence Station, El Camino, Downtown, and Patrick Henry areas of Santa Clara. These plans will all include affordable housing developments and affordable units in market rate developments in close proximity to public transit. Contributions will be paid to VTA and Santa Clara to support transportation improvements. We will have transportation demand management programs. With these elements in place, we can look at a number of options to traditional parking.

- 5b. Do you support making funds available to assist in the development of more affordable housing, provided that it prohibits building on former hazardous sites and in environmentally sensitive areas? Do you support having all new affordable housing providing their residents access to a public transit stop within a reasonable distance and through a safe, walkable route?

Yes, Santa Clara has implemented an inclusionary housing ordinance, with an emphasis on including affordable units on site with market rate units. We have several affordable projects that have been entitled to be built on city-owned property. I led the effort to obtain “boomerang” funding commitments from Santa Clara County for funds the County obtained from Santa Clara’s prior Housing Authority. We are actively working with affordable housing organizations to find ways to leverage funds we can access to start developing more affordable housing.

Open Space & Urban Recreation – Access to Nature

6. How will you ensure that residents in your community have access to safe and enjoyable parks and open space?

As I mentioned above, Santa Clara now has a strong park fees program which we are using to fund new parks. We are also including parks and trails in our new development plans. We will be adding a 30 acre community park next to our Related Santa Clara development. We are in a master plan process for our largest park, Central Park, recently completed pedestrian and bike plans, and are working on our first trails master plan. I talk about parks and trails to every developer who is interested in working in Santa Clara. Most of them are now accepting that the value of their projects increases if they participate in providing open space and recreation areas.

Sea Level Rise

7. Scientific analysis overwhelmingly concludes that sea levels are rising and that San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties are seriously threatened in this century. Please give us your thoughts as to the near term tasks that you think should be undertaken by your community and the Bay Area?

At least we have acknowledged the issue in having a number of local conferences on this topic and mapping resources on the internet to learn more about what we are facing. Bay Area voters passed Measure AA, so we are all paying a small parcel tax to help support efforts to mitigate against sea level rise. All communities, whether they are located on the shore of the Bay or not, need to help with restoration of wetlands. We need to work with Valley Water to assess the condition of and risks to the creeks and rivers that flow through our cities. All building projects need to be evaluated for their placement in flood zones.

Wildlife

8. What would you do to help preserve wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors in the face of pressures from the growing human population?

On a personal level, I have contributed to the fundraising effort to build a wildlife tunnel under Highway 17 to help reduce the numbers of animals killed as they migrate. I support identifying and preserving wildlife habitats and corridors as part of our development and open space plans as well as on a regional basis.

9. What will you do to reduce light pollution and bird collision hazards in your community?.

I have advocated for adopting the Audubon Society design standards for building and lighting design to minimize interference with bird breeding patterns and bird strikes into buildings. While I haven't gotten Santa Clara to formally adopt the Audubon standards, I have received commitments from developers to make adjustments to projects that will bring their projects into compliance with Audubon standards. In our Tasman East specific plan, I believed that earlier commitments on made on the distance of buildings from the Guadalupe River and other elements of their design that would lessen impact on having bird flight corridors had not been followed and when I wasn't able to get changes, I was forced to vote against the adoption of the plan

Transportation

10. What types of transportation projects would you support to provide people with an alternative to the private auto?

I am working on expanding the capacity of the Great America Station in Santa Clara to make it a true multi-modal station, beyond the growing usage by Capitol Corridor and the Altamont Corridor Express, including improved access by light rail, buses, pedestrians and cyclists. If Santa Clara can implement our bike and ped master plans, we will increase the numbers of people who will walk and ride bikes if they feel safer and have more direct routes. I support expanding our

Safe Routes to Schools programming so that we can decrease the thousands of cars that make 2 trips daily to Santa Clara schools. I also am interested in exploring creating HOV lanes on highways and expressways for buses and shuttles, as well as possibly adding some community shuttles, perhaps funded through developer contributions and TDM programs.

Water Conservation & Recycling, Rivers & Creeks

11. California will continue to face increasing droughts; do you support increasing the use of recycled water in your city, the Bay Area? What other actions do you support to make your city water smart?

Santa Clara is a part owner of the Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. We participated in creating South Bay Water Recycling and over 17% of our water sales through our utility are recycled water. Over 70% of our municipal water use is recycled water. I am supportive of expanding our purple pipe network and production of recycled water. It may be more efficient and effective to purify water to a recycled level for a variety of uses rather than taking the extra steps to make the water potable. We can continue to review our building codes to bring in more water conservation and efficiency elements and provide incentives for drought-tolerant landscaping and irrigation, along with Valley Water.

12. What is your position on stream setback requirements for development? Do you believe current requirements are too strict, too lax, or just right?

In the past, in my opinion, Santa Clara allowed building, particularly houses, far too close to creek banks. We are now following Valley Water's requirements, which I think are appropriate.

Internet Equity

13. Are you supportive of current initiatives to define High Speed Internet as a Public Utility thereby expanding participation by communities of color in the internet economy and education while reducing dependence on commuting?

Yes, but there will probably be major opposition from telecomm companies. Santa Clara does have a dark fiber network in the more industrial portions of the city, but the cost to expand will be very high. From what I have heard, the results with high speed internet offered through public entities is somewhat mixed. Another approach is to require existing providers to expand their program offerings in lower income neighborhoods as part of their franchise agreements.

Campaign Readiness –

Tell us about your campaign readiness, including funding, volunteers, and organization. Please share examples of your prior and current campaign literature.

Campaigning in the age of Covid and unsafe air quality is very challenging. I have started fundraising to support voter contact. I am gearing up to have online outreach starting with Labor Day. We have yard signs and will do flyer drops with volunteers. As I am getting feedback that people won't welcome unannounced door-knocking, I will be doing different types of voter outreach, including having Facebook Town Halls, in addition to the monthly open resident meetings I have held during my tenure. I plan 1 or 2 mailers to consistent voters. I have a core committee that is working with me to direct the campaign. I am attaching one of my flyers from past campaign. I recognize that many of my volunteers are very data driven and there is a lot of data on this flyer. I am going to streamline messaging this year.

1. Please list your endorsements. If they are on your website – please just insert your URL.

Assemblymember Kansen Chu
Mayor Lisa Gillmor
Police Chief Pat Nikolai
Council Member Debi Davis
Council Member Kathy Watanabe
Former Council Member Jamie McLeod-Skinner

Former Council Member Kevin Moore
SCUSD Trustee Albert Gonzalez
SCUSD Trustee Jim Canova
SCUSD Trustee Vickie Fairchild
SCUSD Trustee Mark Richardson
West Valley Mission Community
College District Trustee Robert Owens

2. Please include below an exact copy of your ballot statement as submitted at filing.

Think back to January 1, 2020. The start of a new decade full of promise for the City of Santa Clara. Due to strong fiscal management and oversight from the City Council, we saw effective public safety, new and updated parks, streets repaired, and lowest utility rates in the Bay Area with low city taxes. We still had much work to do, including in housing, transportation, and climate, but together we were developing plans for our future.

And then Covid-19 changed our world.

Santa Clara is better prepared financially and structurally to navigate this crisis than most cities, but may be facing the most challenging period in our long history. To be successful long term, we must come together even more as community. Our council must be decisive and strategic, not only to get us through this crisis, but to position Santa Clara to rebound when recovery comes. We have many dreams yet to fulfill. With your help, I believe I still have the leadership, dedication, experience, and caring for all Santa Clarans for us to succeed. As your council member, I offer you head, hands, and, most importantly, heart, to get us safely home. I humbly ask for your vote in District 4. www.teresaoneill.org