



Local candidates hope to hit the mark with voters.

Election Time Again!

FOR

THE MID-COUNTY

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Supervisor Candidates Prioritize Vital County Programs and Services

Top Issues Include Public Safety, Affordable Housing, Density and Environmental Action

COPA Encourages an Ambitious Housing Agenda

Candidates for the three open county supervisor seats have made appearances at many voter forums to let people know where they stand on the issues they champion. COPA, Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action, opted instead to tell candidates what its members want to see happening in local government.

About 350 people crowded into the multi-purpose room at Live Oak Elementary on May 12 to support progress in nine specific areas, asking each candidate to answer whether or not he or she would agree to help. Many did, and even those candidates who did not support every element praised the group's members for taking an active role in the election process.

COPA's agenda, developed over several months of discussions within its member churches, temples and neighborhood organizations, focused on four broad categories: improving economic development, affordable housing, public safety and health care.

COPA is a non-partisan group and does not endorse candidates, but strives to identify and work with elected officials who support COPA's "shared prosperity" agenda.

COPA leaders have also been working to share these goals within its member groups, which brought a total of more than 1,400 support signatures to the event and want to hit 2,000 by the election.

COPA member Karen Malloy estimated that each signature represented a half-hour conversation explaining the issues and process.

COPA's agenda identified nine specific goals within the broader categories. These include expanded training opportunities, rezoning land for affordable housing, preserving existing mobile home parks and Section 8 [federally funded] apartments, establishing youth programs, preserving county health care programs and including long-term care facilities in land-use planning.

This forum expanded on COPA's similar effort during the 2006 Third District election, which Neal Coonerty won. One of its first actions was to take him on a tour of the county's only redevelopment district, show him parcels and discuss plans. Supervisors serve as trustees for the district.

Each of the candidates May 12 agreed to meet with COPA within 30 days of taking office.

In exchange, COPA promises to have members attend meetings and stay informed. It has already played an active role in advocating for affordable housing rezoning, and members plan to attend the June 10 supervisor's meeting to support such an effort.

It also arranged for Santa Cruz Adult School to offer English classes in Live Oak, and has been developing an "achievement academy" to teach parents how to support their children's education. ■

by Linda Fridy

What can and should the county government provide to its citizens?

In tight budget times such as these, it may be easy for county supervisor candidates to express support for many programs, but truly making progress will require willingness to find money and build consensus.

The *Mid-County Post* asked local candidates where they would focus their energy if elected to the Board of Supervisors.

Three of the five seats on the Board of Supervisors are up for election June 3, with runoffs as needed set for November. Two of those seats, the First and Second Districts, represent the Mid-County, and with a widely varying population, reflecting the myriad concerns and needs of county residents.

The First District, whose current supervisor Jan Beautz is retiring, ranges from the upscale neighborhoods of Carbonera in Santa Cruz and the expansive properties of eastern Soquel to the more closely packed neighborhoods, apartments and mobile home parks of Live Oak, Capitola and Soquel Village. Live Oak particularly is also home to many Spanish-speaking and low-income families.

Five candidates hope to win that seat: Michael Pisenti, William Hay, John Leopold, Carolyn Busenhart and Betty Danner.

The Second District also includes parts of Capitola and continues to see denser development in both Seacliff and land adjacent to Cabrillo College. Further south, the district's neighborhoods grow more affluent, often bordering life-style blocks, small farms and open space.

Two-term incumbent Ellen Pirie faces two challengers, Doug Deitch and Dan Young.

How to Address Crime

Candidates for both districts agree that public safety and rising gang activity are primary concerns among residents, but offer different ways the county can fight back.

The unincorporated areas are served by the Sheriff's Office, which has been understaffed for several years, often resulting in a triage approach for how to assign officers.

Public safety is the top priority for First District candidate Danner, a business consultant and former director of the county's Criminal Justice Council, as well as Second District challenger Young, a music teacher and founder of the Surfrider Foundation.

Danner would draw on her long-term relationship with county-wide law enforcement and knowledge of successful programs that serve families and neighborhoods with gang activity.

"These are proven strategies that have made a difference in people's communities," she said.

She praised revived Neighborhood Watch efforts, and would work with them to build confidence.

"They need backup. They need to know who to reach and what that response is going to be," she said.

Young supports multi-county efforts to stem gang activity, saying, "It doesn't stop at the county borders."

As the father of three now-grown children, Young also believes that parents of juvenile gang members should be held accountable for their children's actions.

"They need to be held responsible. 'I didn't know' is not an acceptable response. We should charge them with contributing to the delinquency of a minor," he said.

Leopold Criticizes Sheriff's Department

Many candidates agree that the first step to deterring crime is to get more

Sheriff deputies on the streets and in the neighborhoods.

First District candidate John Leopold criticized the county for waiting until this May to begin a study of the recruiting and retention problem. He points to Cabrillo College's decision to expand law enforcement training programs, and believes the county should expand similar kinds of efforts.

Busenhart said that the county should require new officers to sign a contract agreeing to repay training costs if they do not stay for a contracted amount of time.

Pirie, however, worried that such an approach could deter potential deputies.

"That would make us less competitive with other organizations," she said.

She believes programs such as additional help with mortgages, which the county is implementing, help young

officers establish roots in the community.

Busenhart would also advocate for harsher penalties for gang crimes, saying that would deter others, however court sentencing is the purview of the criminal justice system.

Other candidates want positive alternatives for students.

Young would like to see after-school youth programs housed with a sheriff's substation, which would do more than provide an added sense of security.

"Kids would get to know law enforcement as friends," he explained.

Leopold is another strong proponent of expanding youth programs.

"We need services for young people and families where they live and not just in Santa Cruz," he said.

Danner said space is readily

available for programs in Live Oak at the Simpkins Swim Center, which also houses the county parks department.

Another possible challenge to public safety is reduced funding for the county's 9-1-1 call center because of recent court decisions, a possibility that worries First District candidate Hay, a retired DMV administrator. He said he

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would actively support passing a tax if the current fees must be put to the voters.

"All our emergency agencies rely on that [center] to get information," he said.

He added that he was very impressed by it as a member of

the Grand Jury that reviewed the system. "It's one of the best-operated public agencies that exists," he said.

Addressing the Environment

Several candidates want the county to use its land management jurisdiction to address environmental concerns.

Second District candidate Doug Deitch believes that protecting the county's water supply should be the county's number-one concern, a platform he has run on several times. He continues to urge the Board of Supervisors to

declare a groundwater emergency and address issues of salt-water intrusion in south county aquifers.

"This is the worst resource loss by saltwater intrusion anywhere in the world," he said.

He is a vocal critic of heavy

water use by strawberry farms, and would work to decrease the amount of land used to produce berries. Without that drain on the water supply, Deitch believes the county could maintain adequate reserves and create more high-paying jobs.

Both Pirie and Young agree that water is an immediate concern, but do not wish to lose prime agricultural land. They want to include farmers in any solution.

Hay's environmental concerns focus on the impact of global warming, his top priority. The county needs not only to encourage reducing carbon emissions but also to stop issuing building permits in areas that would be impacted by rising sea levels, he said.

Young believes the county should do more to advance sustainable housing, emphasizing rainwater retention and

solar power. He said many local contractors are ahead of the curve, sending employees for training in new technologies.

“One thing Santa Cruz County has is talent,” he said. “Business has seen the light. They’re not waiting for government to tell them what to do.”

Creating Jobs and Housing

Redevelopment funds should be used to encourage business development that would provide both jobs and an additional tax base, according to several First District candidates.

Leopold would like to see the county use redevelopment funds and land for training centers for “green-collar” jobs, such as those in the burgeoning solar industry.

“We should provide green-collar [job] training in Live Oak to allow local people to get good local jobs that will be here in the future,” he said.

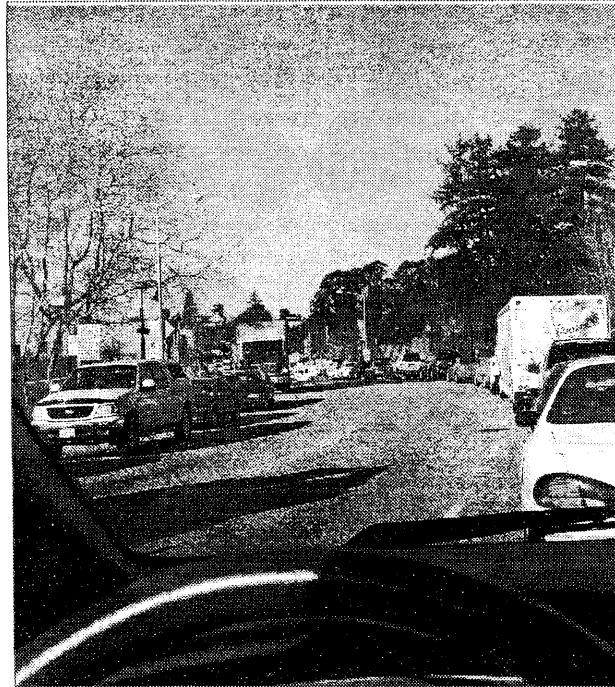
He would use redevelopment funds to build the training center and then allow Cabrillo College to run a program there.

Fellow candidate Danner agrees that as the Redevelopment Agency enters the second half of its life, it should move away from the successful community projects of the past, like parks.

“We should be using redevelopment money to support and enhance small neighborhood retail businesses,” she said, noting that Live Oak residents do not have a local post office, full-service grocery or drug store.

Instead, they often do their shopping in, and generate sales tax income for, neighboring cities.

Young said the county could do more to support existing local businesses by hiring local firms whenever possible, which he did by using local designers and printers for all his campaign materials.



Candidates for Mid-County’s two open seats on the Board of Supervisors having competing views on local transportation issues, from the debate about purchasing Union Pacific’s right-of-way to widening Highway 1.

Balancing Demand for Housing

Even with a softening housing market, Santa Cruz County remains one of the nation’s most expensive housing markets. Under state mandate, the county has identified several parcels for high-density, affordable housing.

Supervisors must balance this need with neighborhood concerns about traffic, school crowding and access to services. One way the county has tried to achieve this is by requiring developers to include a percentage of affordable units in their projects.

This strategy has not been an effective way to create affordable housing, Busenhart said. “All inclusion-

ary housing does is jack up prices for the rest,” she said.

Ellen Pirie disagrees, saying the Measure J, passed in the ‘80s, has a 15-percent requirement that creates affordable housing that looks like the rest of a neighborhood.

She also supported the requirement that any land rezoned for housing must make 40 percent of it affordable.

“Residential land is much more valuable in this county than other forms. When you rezone property, you’re greatly increasing the value,” she explained. “Since it’s a public action that creates the higher value, the money shouldn’t just go into private pockets.”

Leopold and Danner both voiced concern about adding additional high-density housing to the First District.

“We still, to this day, have more than our fair share [in Live Oak and Soquel],” Danner said.

Such projects should be located in areas with the services and infrastructure to support them, she said.

The problem supervisors must address, said Pirie, is a state mandate to identify land for 20 units per acre, a process the board went through in 2006 and could face again.

Everyone’s favorite form of affordable housing appears to be mobile homes. All the candidates — even Howard Jarvis Taxpayers’ Association-endorsed Busenhart — support continuing rent control for mobile home parks and oppose Proposition 98 on the upcoming ballot.

First District candidates split, however, on budget approaches.

Pisenti and Busenhart would like to cut taxes, while the others have programs they feel are worth the cost.

Hay summed it up by saying, “People have to realize that government provides valuable services that have to be paid for.” ■