

# 2018 Santa Clara County Supervisor Candidate Questionnaire

Silicon Valley at Home (SV@Home) is an affordable housing policy and advocacy organization working to ensure housing affordability for all who work and live in Silicon Valley. As a candidate running for office, we invite you to participate in a survey regarding affordable housing. Responses to this survey will be shared widely with community members, and SV@Home members and partner agencies.

Please complete the survey by September 17th, 2018

Candidate name

Don Rocha

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## A. What are your housing priorities?

My primary housing priority as a City Councilmember has been to significantly increase production both of market rate and affordable housing units. I would continue with that same priority as a County Supervisor.

As a Councilmember I have pursued two main strategies in service of this priority: first, increasing funding for the construction of affordable housing and second, changing San Jose's General Plan policy to be more friendly to both market rate and affordable housing. On the funding side, I was a leader in championing San Jose's housing impact fee and have been a persistent advocate for adoption of a commercial impact fee. I have not yet succeeded in convincing the Council to adopt a commercial impact fee as there is a narrow majority who opposes asking the commercial development community to contribute, even at a low level, to affordable housing production, but I will continue to look for opportunities to advance this issue even in my final months on the Council.

On the land use side, I have been a vocal critic of San Jose's "jobs first" General Plan. I have repeatedly pushed back against its rigid and oftentimes nonsensical rules against converting commercial and Public/Quasi Public land to housing, even in instances where housing or a mixed-use project is clearly the best use of a site from a planning perspective. I have been a vocal and forceful champion of housing projects that challenge the General Plan status quo, such as the teacher housing project proposed in Willow Glen or the three conversions proposed in 2015. Unfortunately I did not see success in either of those instances as the Council decided to stick with its "jobs first" orientation, but I did convince the Council to liberalize the General Plan's 1.5 acre rule, which allows affordable housing projects to be built on commercial sites of 1.5 acres or less provided they meet certain criteria. The criteria were originally that the site is bordered by housing on two sides, but I convinced the council to require housing on only one side, significantly increasing the number of parcels that are eligible for affordable housing.

I would bring this assertive approach with me to the County. The County does have a slightly different role and different opportunities that might slightly change the focus of my housing advocacy, if not my priorities. Obviously, the top priority at the County is successful implementation of Measure A. I think one of the big opportunities for the County in implementing Measure A and increasing the affordable housing stock is in thinking about how the huge breadth of services it provides, from the criminal justice system, to foster care, to domestic violence prevention, link up with rapid rehousing and homelessness prevention. For example, individuals who interact with the criminal justice system, who are in foster care, or who are victims of domestic violence may be at higher risk of homelessness than the general population. I would very interested in trying to build systems across all of the County's service provision that leverage our affordable housing stock and other resources to prevent

homelessness before it starts.

I'll close by adding that while housing production is hugely important, it's also important that workers earn a living wage. In a valley blessed with overflowing wealth, poverty-level wages are just not acceptable. We have to pay workers enough to meet their basic needs, including housing. I would be a strong champion for the living wage and workers' rights.

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## B. What are your thoughts about the potential for housing on the Civic Center site, the Fairgrounds, and the Reed Hillview Airport?

On the Civic Center site, I am already on the record as supporting housing on that site. I think it's a great place for housing and an amazing opportunity for the County to help address the housing crisis.

On the Fairgrounds site, I think there is absolutely a place for housing. The community obviously has an interest in recreational uses on the site, so I would look to foster a variety of uses in addition to housing, but the site is big enough to accommodate a substantial housing component.

Unfortunately, the Reid-Hillview site does have some legal obstacles that are not under the County's direct control. My understanding is that the County has accepted Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grants for improvements on the site that have made Reid-Hillview what's known as a "federally obligated airport." These federal obligations impose strict limitations on use of the property until the year 2031.

Within the scope of these legal obligations, I would support housing on the site. I would also support a policy of not accepting any additional FAA grants that would lengthen the term of restrictions on the property, to ensure that the County has maximum discretion in deciding how to use the property in 2031.

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D. Do you support or oppose fast tracked or streamlined permitting of residential or mixed-use development in the County? Please explain your response.

I would support fast tracking of residential or mixed-use development within the County provided that it applied to urban areas where dense residential growth is appropriate.

I know from experience that the County has much more geographically limited land use authority than the City. Even where the County has jurisdiction over urban areas, such as within county pockets surrounded by cities, the County very frequently doesn't have land use authority over new development. The reason for this is that LAFCO policy, County law, and often City-County agreements all dictate that urban development must happen in cities on parcels that are eligible for annexation. As a result, the County often lacks the discretion to approve development on urban parcels within its jurisdiction because the law requires that those parcels be annexed to a city before they can be redeveloped. Once annexed, the those parcels would thus fall under the city's land use rules, and the County wouldn't have authority to fast track residential proposals.

That said, there are some parcels in urban areas where the County would retain land use authority. The County could approve urban development on a parcel that is within an urban area, such as within a county pocket, but not situated such that it's eligible for annexation to a city (for example, a parcel that isn't contiguous with a city boundary.) In such instances, I would support fast-tracking residential development.

I would want to impose geographical limitations on fast tracking, because the County retains land use authority over a large number of parcels in rural areas. It may not be appropriate to "fast track" residential development up in the foothills or on agricultural fields. It would be prudent to limit fast tracking to urban areas.

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## E. What do you think the County's housing role should be in the broader region?

I believe that the County can play a greater role in convening Santa Clara County cities in developing a coordinated approach to the housing crisis. I know from my time at San Jose that the power of cities to regulate land use can have a huge effect on how much affordable and market rate housing is built. In particular, cities will have control over where Measure A projects are permitted. The kind land use policies I advocated in San Jose—such as the 1.5 acre rule I mentioned above—can make it easier and cheaper to build affordable projects. There are many other similar policies that cities can adopt to promote both affordable and market rate residential development. The County has an opportunity to convene cities and jointly develop a menu of land use policy best practices for affordable development and encourage cities to implement them in a coordinated way.

I also think the County has a role as a leader in the Bay Area. Through its influence on regional bodies such as MTC and CASA, it should be a zealous advocate for establishing regional policies that tie money and other benefits directly to successful housing production.

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