

Housing Santa Cruz County 2024 Candidate Questionnaire - Kim De Serpa

There has been a pattern for supervisors to applaud housing projects in other districts but not always in their own if there is any opposition, and/or a general attitude that most housing should be built in Santa Cruz since that is where the jobs are. What criteria would you apply to deciding whether to support a project located in your district?

Our governor has made housing a cornerstone of his administration and I agree that its an important need across the state including here in Santa Cruz County. I support projects that have density, near already established infrastructure and along transit lines. That said, the best locations are near employers, but “the best sites” would be along existing development and away from wildlands, agriculture and sensitive habitats. New housing should be developed throughout the county.

In the last five years have you attended a Planning Commission or Board of Supervisors meeting to support or oppose a housing project?

No I have not. I work full time and serve on a school district board. I have viewed some online meetings.

Did you attend community meetings, participate in the surveys, or make comments on the County's Housing Element?

I have watched and read about our county's housing element. I have participated in surveys. i have met with content experts in affordable housing to better understand the regulations and requirements.

Each district has its own needs, what housing/affordable housing challenges do you think your district needs to address, and how would you go about convincing the other supervisors to agree to it?

District 2 is unique in that it is rural and has a multiple state parks, coastal areas and more rural roadways than any other district . Despite this,, there are sites that have been identified In the Housing Element that could be developed with housing units. It is important to have housing developed throughout the county. I will work with the other Supervisors to ensure that housing is distributed to many locations throughout the county. My style is collaborative and I hope to establish friendly working relationships with my fellow board members.

Are there policies that make it harder to build housing in your community that you would like to change?

One giant complaint heard over and over, is the difficulty getting any permits through the planning department. Hopefully with a new board in place this will be improved. While the county has come a long way regarding allowed density, we must develop smartly and as

densely as possible. The Coastal Commission may be a large factor regarding the development of sites along our coastal zones.

I am very pleased that the county is opening an office in Watsonville. I believe that it will make doing business with the county easier for mid- and south-county residents. It will also help to alleviate traffic going north.

100% affordable housing projects have a better chance of acquiring funding if the county funds part of it, land is one of the ways, but also cash funding. Would you support any of the following to provide funding: a parcel tax, a real estate transfer tax increase, or an increase to the TOT tax dedicated to housing?

Our first and easiest support can come through the donation of land especially county owned land. In addition, local funding is important to match to state and federal funds and securing Project Based Vouchers from the Housing Authority. I support many paths toward new dedicated funding. However, we must be smart about this and seek the least impactful ways for county residents and home owners who are often on fixed budgets. I would support studying these methods to determine feasibility.

Even though the county a few years ago working with the Housing Authority promoted landlords to consider Section -8 tenants there is still a long wait for housing units for those qualified. Do you have any ideas for incentivizing beyond what the program already provides, or any thoughts on how to encourage the program?

I believe the Housing Authority has done a remarkable job attracting landlords to rent to Section 8 voucher holders. My family has a section 8 renter as a result of our values and it's worked out really well. The HA has also improved its Project Based Voucher (PBV) Program best to meet the needs of those on the waiting list. Many people don't understand that the PBV Program is portable after one year. I think this should be marketed more effectively to encourage more people to accept them instead of direct Section 8 vouchers. Finally, Congressman Panetta has sponsored a bill to allow Housing Authorities to increase the percentage of HUD allocations for PBV. While it did not progress last session, the bill is being rewritten now to be more acceptable and will be reintroduced soon. I will make sure the county supports this. Increasing the amount of funds for PBV will assist in funding more affordable housing projects.

Consultants report that 100% affordable housing projects usually need to be at least 50 units, and depending on lot size would most likely be 5 stories. There is a general community push against anything over three stories. Would you support a 100% affordable housing project of that size if it was on a major transportation corridor?

We cannot afford to limit the size of projects. Land is too precious. I will also work to ensure that the design suits these neighborhoods best. Heights on buildings can be stepped back, and taller buildings can be located within the interior of sites.

The new RHNA numbers in the Housing Element are daunting. Construction costs have escalated, and interest rates have skyrocketed. The state has a 68-billion-dollar deficit and the Federal government has done little for housing. What ideas do you have to incentivize builders to build housing in the unincorporated portion of the county rather than somewhere else?

The county must identify funds and/or free land as a match for state and federal funds. We must also prioritize planning approvals for affordable projects and secondly for market-rate projects. Longer delays also impact housing costs due to compounding interest rates on the loans used to build these projects; the longer we delay, the more it will cost. I have learned this from my work as a school board trustee. Another significant issue is that the cost of housing grows with time as predevelopment funds are borrowed, and then we must pay interest for a longer period. We also must market our opportunities and be more competitive than other jurisdictions. Assigning a staff person to shepherd a project through all the county departments that need to approve a project will assist with current projects and destigmatize working with the county.

Housing the homeless has been, and continues to be, a significant challenge. The strongest opposition to a project in recent times was the 35-unit Park Avenue supportive housing project. Cities like San Jose are working on finding locations for and creating villages using tiny homes. What ideas do you have for housing the unhoused -- supportive housing?

First, while tiny homes can sometimes be installed quickly and at a lower cost, this is just a band-aid that we cannot afford. The density of these projects is nothing compared to three-story (plus) housing. I wholeheartedly support housing first. Supportive housing is a concept that includes social services, mental health care, substance use disorders treatment, nutritional services, medical services and recreational activities. As a social worker I housed multiple people in my career from a-z. I did so by developing relationships with people and helping them with stability. We need a whole team of people ready to assist in order to help our most vulnerable.