

Housing Santa Cruz County 2024 Candidate Questionnaire - Kristen Brown

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?

When considering support for housing projects in District 2, I will focus on proximity to vital services, transit, and job opportunities, the inclusion and percentage of affordable units, and whether the developer will ensure fair wages, benefits, and apprenticeship programs for workers. I want to encourage and incentivize housing development while also ensuring that development occurs in places where residents most often travel, work, and play.

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

While I have attended or zoomed-in to every Board of Supervisors meeting in the past year, I have not spoken in support or opposition of any specific housing project.

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

Yes, I participated in a community survey, attended a Housing Advisory Committee meeting, participated in a virtual housing element public meeting, and attended Board of Supervisor meetings where the Housing Element was considered.

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?

The second district encompasses a large amount of agricultural property and rural land outside of the urban services boundary. Because of this, there is need to focus the development of affordable housing within a smaller footprint where vital services, transit, and jobs are located. In order to address this issue, I would work my fellow Supervisors and community members to determine incentives for developing affordable housing within those areas in the district. I would also work to incentivize development within walking distance of a transit stop, the offering of affordable housing to individuals who work within a 2-mile proximity of the development.

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

Yes - overly restrictive building regulations, long permit processing timelines, and vague development requirements that seem to change throughout the process can restrict or delay the development of affordable housing options and drive up housing costs. I would like to change

this by zoning for additional housing development, incentivising development by streamlining the permitting process, and ensuring a fully-staffed planning department to address the permitting backlog and long approval timeline.

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?

I would support an increase in TOT tax, with the revenue collected from the increase being devoted directly to affordable housing.

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?

First, I'd be interested in learning more about the current incentives for landlords to consider section- 8 tenants. Additionally, I'd like to work with our state and federal elected officials to determine opportunities for state tax breaks for landlords who accept section-8 tenants.

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?

Yes. More specifically, I would encourage this development if it was within proximity of a major transit stop rather than just on the transit corridor. Living on a transit corridor still requires travel to the transit stop (bus station, rail station, etc.) unless it is within walking distance.

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?

I would advocate for density bonuses, floor-area-ratio increases, and other benefits and incentives for developers, specifically if they are willing to develop near transit stations and areas where people most often travel, work, and play. I would also work with METRO to negotiate transit pass discounts for residents who live in the developments near transit stations.

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?

I support the housing-first model of addressing homelessness and believe that the development of tiny homes and supportive housing would go a long way in solving for homelessness. Additionally, affordable rental prices and tenant protections that prevent people from being displaced from their homes in the first place are also important measures in the fight against homelessness.