

Housing Santa Cruz County 2024 Candidate Questionnaire - Lani Faulkner

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?

Thank you for your patience and for the opportunity to respond to this questionnaire. I apologize for it taking so long to get this questionnaire back to you.

It is important to engage all hands-on deck in addressing the affordable housing crisis that has compromised the ability of our essential working community members from being able to live in the community in which they serve. Even higher income earners face an inability to buy here and the high rents impact us at every level so that when work becomes available closer to where housing is more affordable, our community members that work here leave. At the same time, we've seen an increase in people who do not work or live here, purchase vacations homes here. Our county is understaffed, in some departments as much as 30%, as the pay is better and housing more affordable in communities 'over-the-hill' and so as people find work elsewhere, they leave, which further overwhelms the remaining workers. We need to be able to provide affordable homes for the people who work here.

I am committed to working directly with the community to shift people's perceptions about building more housing and ensuring we support housing projects that provide affordability.

There are a broad range of criteria I would apply in support of building projects in my district. For example,

I would like to see more multi-family residential projects planned closer to our major transit corridors so that larger numbers of people have easy access to get to work and school without having to use a car.

I support families who wish to use SB9 and SB10 to add an ADU or split their properties and SB4 for faith organizations willing to develop homes on their land. I would look to support projects which have strategic ways to reduce the need for cars and support projects near high frequency transit corridors and also consider strategies to address neighbors' concerns that people will simply take up all of the street parking if they only have one parking space. I would like to see rezoning and urban design principles implemented so we turn ugly parking lot into well designed welcoming mini-villages that include connecting spaces like a central plaza, mixed use so that we can zone for neighborhood grocery stores and cafes, safe walkable-bikeable communities, robust public transit access.

I would like include criteria that allows for more densification and also ensures that we weave connecting spaces, community gardens, and parks so that kids and families who live in these neighborhoods have equitable access to green natural safe connecting spaces within walking

distance of their homes. I would like to see the incorporation of mixed-use zoning so that there can be a corner grocer, a café, and a small eatery within walking distance of every neighborhood. I would like to see that developers ensure that they build in a way that ensures safe walkable and bikeable ingress and egress into their projects. I would also like to ensure builders are moving to all electric with e-vehicle charging stations, bike parking, free transit passes if transit is not free. There are many other considerations that I have not thought about at the moment, but I am a proponent of wise urban design as we work to increase density near our transit corridors and provide ways which encourage people to use alternatives to driving a vehicle.

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

Yes, I attended a Capitola Planning Commission meeting to speak and submit a letter in support in Support 4401 Capitola Road All Affordable Housing Development. I was invited to come to the meeting and consider supporting the project publicly. I've also supported rent stabilization of a Capitola mobile home park that was threatened with a \$500 rent increase by the property owner last year.

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

Yes, I was a participant on the Housing Element Community Stakeholders group which was an excellent opportunity to hear from community members on what they felt were best types of housing and best locations for housing moving into the next 8-year cycle.

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?

One housing challenge we face in our district is the excess of illegal vacation rentals which decreases the number of available places for people who work here to live here. I think that current Supervisor's Cummings and Hernandez are eager to work on reducing illegal vacation rentals. Given the severity of the housing crisis, it seems ironic that a Supervisor would need convincing to support a crackdown on illegal vacation rentals. I would share real life experiences as well as data that shows that reducing excess vacation rentals can help increase the number of homes for people who work here.

Our first district has a high percentage of people with limited mobility who require housing that has easy access on the ground floor or elevators. It is important to ensure we look at determining the percentage of housing that should be fully wheelchair accessible and designed so that residents in wheelchairs can use all of the features of the home.

We desperately need to build more housing in the first district that is affordable for people who work here and is within walking and biking distance to transit. I think that the other Supervisors are very open to approving more housing, especially since the need for more housing is targeted for the First District in the Housing Element. I think the Housing Element, RHNA numbers and the concerns of a majority of our community members align with the need for more affordable housing.

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

Yes, I would like to eliminate exclusionary zoning. As I evaluated the possibility of building multifamily residential infill projects myself, I ran into a number of challenges such as the requirement for 2.5 parking spaces per household and setback rules which prevented optimization of design and use of space. The overall cost of holding a property through the risky 'entitlements' phase is frustrating. I would like to provide potential owner-builders with a better sense of if their projects are feasible before they invest months of their time and spend considerable amounts of money holding a property, so that we can reduce their risk.

Decades ago, people could buy their homes out of a Sears Catalog. There are a number of modular home companies throughout the United States. Work with companies that offer modular homes and have a portfolio or catalog of ever-growing number of house and ADU options that can be 'pre-approved' and factory built in sections will reduce the cost and time to build. I have not found 3-5 story multifamily factory built modular homes, but I would love to see if there might be a company out there that can develop these.

Let's consider rezoning churches and areas where there is already development and instead of prioritizing SFR housing, zone for multi-residential. We should also allow for zoning so that a small market, café or restaurant can be built amidst neighborhoods so that people can easily walk to their closest corner grocer or cafe.

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 support all of those possible ideas as a way to generate more revenue that can be invested into building affordable housing and would prefer to implement some of these taxes on the highest value homes.

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?

It is important to continue to educate the public so that we can help move community members beyond the stigma of renting to people who have Section-8 vouchers. As leaders, I think it is important to have these conversations with our community. Landlords may also be more willing to rent to people with Section-8 vouchers if we guarantee that if the tenant causes a serious problem that we can intercede and even remove the tenant without the lengthy eviction process and/or reimburse the owner for damages. I have rented to and had a great experience with a tenant who had a Section-8 voucher.

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, I think we can use the example of Geneva Switzerland, which is denser than New York City and beautifully designed, as a reference to how communities can be dense, walkable, and beautiful. Part of the problem is that to maximize profits, many developers often build as cheaply and minimally as possible creating boxes which can even be closed off and less connecting to the rest of the community. We can gain the communities trust by initiating a 5-story development in a way that people are pleased with the outcome, by prioritizing welcoming open designs that draw people in and together. In the US, communities of the past and European communities today, 3-5 stories is a sweet spot. Thoughtful design principles can ensure taller buildings integrate well with surrounding housing.

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?

We need to partner with builders and incentivize them by providing faster time to development and cutting red tape. If they build a higher percentage of affordable housing, we need to push them to the front of the line at the planning department, enabling them to receive their build permits more quickly. I would like to consider a requirement to include some percentage of voucher tenants which will count towards a builder's quota of affordable housing but yet they receive market rate rents.

We need to make it easier for local owners to build their ADUs and do lot splits on their own properties per SB9 and SB10 and not just make it easier for big developers who know the buttons to push and people to talk to at county planning.

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?

The advantage of building tiny homes, pallet shelters, or lightweight transitional tent cabins is that they can be purchased relatively inexpensively and erected quickly. I see this as an advantage in addressing the need for transitional housing, housing people who are awaiting vouchers and placement into more permanent housing, and giving them a sense of privacy yet located close to services.

One concern with identifying tiny homes as an answer to addressing permanent housing needs is that it is not the best use of space. Land is extremely expensive and so as we identify funds to build more multi-story projects, I think building multiple stories is the better use of the land in the mid to long term, but I see a need for both.

I support the creation of a fund and services such as tenant landlord mediation that can help people who are at risk for falling into homelessness stay housed. This first line of action and expense can save us considerable funds in the long run. I would also like to collaborate with our local experts on how best to address rent stabilization. Many landlords increase rents annually at a rate higher than tenants see in their cost-of-living increases. There are many people on a fixed income who are struggling and many more seniors are entering homelessness. I have endorsed Measure K as a way to generate more revenue that a portion of can be used as leverage to obtain additional funding to be put towards housing. We should look at using some of our public lands.

Ideally, I would like to see more of a natural integration across socioeconomic and age ranges in the housing projects we build. As people who are unhoused are placed into housing, as long as their mental health is stable, it would be good to integrate these community members into our neighborhoods. I support social housing that models that are funded in part by the state such as was proposed in AB2053 by Assemblymember Alex Lee. I will work to engage the community and landlords in understanding the benefit of renting to those who have Section-8 Vouchers. With Proposition 1 on the ballot there will be a complete shift coming as housing will be a more focused on part of the newest proposals and we will need to understand how to best optimize our practices when the system comes online.