

## **Housing Santa Cruz County 2024 Candidate Questionnaire - Monica Martinez**

***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?***

Since much of the 5th District is rural and mountainous, it is not entirely appropriate for all types of housing. I would consider supporting multi-family housing projects that are within the urban services line, that meet environmental standards, do not create excessive strain on resources, and support the goal of creating transit-oriented communities. For projects in the more rural areas of the 5th District, I would consider whether the neighborhood is equipped for additional housing (considering water, transportation, and septic needs), the environmental impact of the project, and the ability of emergency services to access the property.

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

In recent years, I have participated in public meetings in support of several affordable housing projects planned by MidPen Housing, the downtown project planned by Eden Housing, and the Veterans Village project.

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

Yes. I participated in community meetings for both the County's Housing Element and the City of Scotts Valley Housing Element.

***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 5th District is facing several housing challenges. On top of being a very high cost of living area, which already makes it difficult to find housing, 911 homes were lost during the CZU Lightning Complex Fire in 2020, and more were lost or damaged during the 2022-2023 winter storms. As SLV property values are lower than other parts of the county, the 5th District is also one of the last places where "first-time homebuyers" are able to purchase a home. However, due to the shortage of properties on the market, home prices continue to rise and there are fewer opportunities available.

In order to convince the other supervisors that the needs of the 5th District should be addressed, I would start by identifying their concerns and priorities. Some might be swayed by the shortage of affordable housing, others by the plight of fire victims. I would also present comprehensive research and data to support the project, such as demographic trends and

economic benefits like job creation, increased tax revenue, and increases in property values. I would also demonstrate community support for the project by holding public meetings and obtaining testimonials from residents. I would also ensure that the project meets environmental and sustainability standards, as well as green building practices. Finally, I will anticipate and address potential objections or concerns that other supervisors may have, like traffic congestion or a strain on local resources.

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

Yes. Much of the 5th District is rural, mountainous Wildland-Urban Interface, and thus not appropriate for multi-family housing. However, the County of Santa Cruz has made it very difficult for people to rebuild their homes after the CZU fire and other disasters. We should allow these individuals more flexibility in rebuilding; the implementation of composting toilets and greywater systems to reduce or eliminate septic requirements is one example that other places in the United States with difficult soil conditions have allowed. We should also implement much faster and more consistent permit reviews, including allowing applicants to engage third party permit reviewers directly. In infill areas (e.g. many areas within the urban services line and especially where there are jobs, walkable neighborhoods, and transit) we need a lot more density to solve the overall housing crisis. Many of the policy needs are well known - not requiring commercial spaces to be built in more areas, increased height and density in central locations, training staff in changing state regulations, actually allowing people to submit applications rather than join waiting lists just to apply to build housing, etc. That said, the state has provided the tools to many projects to address those barriers and has required the county to plan for more housing in the best locations via the upcoming housing element. However, the county needs a sensible and efficient permitting process that follows both the spirit and letter of state law.

***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 am open to exploring multiple avenues to subsidize affordable housing, including, but not limited to, direct budget appropriations, public-private partnerships, seeking out state and federal grants, tax increases on the wealthiest members of our community, issuing bonds, and making appropriate government-owned parcels available for affordable housing development.

***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's critical that more Section 8 housing is made available for those in need, and I am open to exploring multiple avenues to achieve that. I would consider supporting the establishment of a system that guarantees timely and uninterrupted rent payments if the unit is dedicated to voucher holders. I would also support expediting the inspection process for potential Section 8 properties to reduce the time a unit stays vacant, as well as flexible lease terms to accommodate landlords' preferences. I would also promote holding events or workshops specifically for landlords to meet with housing authority representatives, ask questions, and discuss concerns face-to-face.

***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?***

I am open to considering projects of many sizes, and I recognize that the status quo will have to be changed if we are to meet the demand for affordable housing, or the state's requirements. There is no question that such a project would have to be built within the urban services line, and I would require that thorough needs assessments have been conducted, as well as an assessment of the capacity of existing infrastructure, such as transportation (including ensuring that the increased density does not greatly increase congestion or reduce mobility), water supply, wastewater treatment capacity, and other essential services. I would also want an economic feasibility study done, including consideration of construction costs and the impact on property values.

***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?***

Incentivizing builders to build housing in the unincorporated county is a priority of mine, and I would support offering reductions or waivers for development fees, impact fees, and other regulatory costs associated with construction. I am also very committed to streamlining the county's permitting process to reduce the time it takes to get projects approved, not just for new construction, but for remodels and fire victims who want to rebuild their homes. I will also support providing density bonuses to builders who include affordable housing units in their projects, as well as subsidies to offset construction costs for projects that include a significant amount of affordable housing units. Finally, I will support investments in infrastructure development to support new housing projects, like ensuring that roads, utilities, and other essential services are in place, which reduces the burden on builders.

***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 advocate for compassionate approaches to homelessness, focusing on addressing its root causes and offering comprehensive support, services, and housing solutions for individuals and families seeking stability. These strategies necessitate a nuanced and holistic perspective that considers the unique circumstances of each homeless individual or family. Successful outcomes require collaborative efforts among government agencies, non-profit organizations, and the community, fostering enduring change and compassionately reducing homelessness. As previously mentioned, Housing First is one such compassionate solution, emphasizing the importance of increasing the availability of affordable housing. Supportive housing, another vital approach, combines affordable housing with essential services like mental and physical health care, substance abuse treatment, and job training. Prevention measures are crucial, encompassing emergency financial assistance, housing assistance, legal aid, and other services to help individuals avoid homelessness. Lastly, public education and awareness initiatives play a crucial role in diminishing the stigma surrounding homelessness, fostering community support for compassionate solutions.