

Mayoral candidates meet with community journalists

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some streets, but you have to involve the neighborhoods. It's just nuts to say you can do eight stories along certain streets without working with the involved communities."

Ammiano believes the higher densities "could work in some places, but not in others — we always need to keep buildings to scale in the neighborhoods."

Alioto stressed the need to look at each neighborhood's individual character and to reflect on policies more thoughtfully. "Planning just rushed this through," she said. "I start with the premise that there's a scam going on. It's a rush job and I wonder, 'Who's benefiting?'"

HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness, political shenanigans, money mangling — in the candidates' minds these bugaboos were almost always linked.

District 9 Supe Ammiano sees the most promising solution in "direct access" housing — full, on-site services in SROs — for those with "the most egregious problems," the homeless mentally ill. "Direct access is working and it costs only \$900 per person per month, but it's only serving 200 people now," he said. Putting the homeless mentally ill in San Francisco General Hospital costs \$900 a day, he added. "My idea is to fund [direct access] by taxing people who make over \$1 million."

City Treasurer Susan Leal has a five-point strategy for homelessness. "It's not a quick fix — it requires persistence," she said. First, she'd name a lead agency, Public Health, probably.

"Then, the mayor needs to meet with key agencies and nonprofits weekly, and we need to make sure who's in charge of those with the most difficult problems." She also called for a move "from cash to real care — more stable housing, like those under the master lease program," and urged lobbying in D.C. with other counties to get federal drug treatment money.

Many of the services to help the homeless — shelters and transitional housing — are "broken" now, said District 5 Supe and board President Gonzalez, who is a Green Party candidate. "It's better to give services, as in Care Not Cash," he said, "but the amount of money available just isn't enough."

Ribera, police chief from 1992-96, would dismantle the Mayor's Office of Homelessness and replace it with a committee of reps of all the departments affected by the homelessness problem. "The homeless are not our enemy, but we're making no progress," said Ribera, the only Republican mayoral candidate besides Roger Schulke. "My goal is to reduce homelessness 20% a year. . . . We've lured people to San Francisco because of our policies — we've made it too lucrative for the scammers."

"Here's my plan," said former Supervisor Alioto. "I'll get 1,500 volunteers who will recruit homeless people willing to go to one of 22 neighborhood centers. There, an expert will say which of the city's 400 programs will work best for each. I consider the homeless problem a mission."

District 2 Supe Newsom's Care Not Cash was due to go before the full Board of Supes the next day [they rejected it on a 6-5 vote, throwing it back to the courts to decide if it should become law]. Still, he was upbeat: "I have 32 other homeless proposals, based on what's working elsewhere," he said. Homelessness in San Francisco is "a national disgrace, but we don't have the answer. No one spends more money than we do. But if you let 169 people die on the street. . . ."

THE CITY BUDGET AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Candidates weighed in on the cost of city government — all wanted to make it leaner, and some meaner — and on the city's general economic health. "Small business" got the prize for the most sound bites.

Leal believes in the viability of small business, which, she said, employs 80% of all people in the city. "Small business is the key to growing the economy. We need to invest in people and ideas, link them to capital and micro-enterprise loans." She dislikes the payroll tax, preferring a gross receipts tax that doesn't penalize businesses for hiring people. And she worries that cutting government fat by attrition results in essential city jobs staying vacant.

"Building owners want to blame [vacancies] on progressives, like me and (Supervisor Chris) Daly," said Gonzalez. "But the les-

son of the dot-com bust is that we have to diversify our economy." He called for promoting "traditional tourism," getting a good business tax before the voters in 2004 and protecting some industrial zones. City government, he said, must be made smaller and more efficient, and money found for delayed maintenance. But using attrition to lower the city's payroll is dangerous, resulting in "savings that undermine services."

Ammiano believes that diversifying industry and improving the infrastructure are economic essentials. "They're not sexy," he said, "but they generate jobs." Small business, "the unrecognized economic engine in the city," needs all the support that can be mustered, and business in general "has to step up to the plate, along with unions," he said. City government would benefit from year-round attention to the budget from department heads, and appointment of those managers and commissioners "based on expertise and professionalism, not patronage."

Alioto wants to fix the loopholes in the city payroll tax so that all businesses would pay, but she'd defer the tax for small businesses, whose health, she said, is one of her primary concerns. The city's budget reflects "staff who may be corrupt and a consulting budget that's unbelievable. . . . We can't have this top-heavy government — I'm all for getting rid of city jobs that pay over \$100,000 and that are [new] in the last seven years."

Newsom, too, pumped small businesses — "the backbone that defines our neighborhoods." "I'm not someone who likes the easy answer of raising taxes to improve the economy," he said. "Instead we need to increase the tax base." Government growth needs to be slowed, and while attrition is the best way, "we still need to make investments and be more creative about reaching out to corporate and foundation sources." One of his ideas: "Establish a Resource Development Office whose staff would go out and get money for the city."

Ribera wants to cut city government 6% over the next four years. "Mismanagement in the city is at a crisis proportion. We'll look at the top — more than 3,000 city jobs pay over \$100,000 a year now — and we'll get real about contracts and consultants," he said. He's opposed to new business taxes: "Businesses feel they're not getting a fair shake from the supervisors, but I do look to business to do its share, to get involved in supporting the helping agencies."

ON RUNNING FOR MAYOR

Leal: "Our numbers keep going up in all polls but Gavin's. We've done more than 1,000 events and 200 house parties."

Newsom: "We can't work much harder than we are — we've done 368 house parties as of yesterday."

Gonzalez: "People are looking for an alternative candidate. I'm trying to articulate progressive values. . . . Discourse has been in the cliché mode, with no nuts and bolts."

Ribera: "It's hard to be a Republican."

Ammiano: "My campaign is gathering momentum — I'm consistently No. 2, but it's an uphill challenge."

Alioto: "My father [Joe Alioto, S.F. mayor from 1968-76] used to say that campaigning is a four-year liberal arts education in seven months. . . . I'm excited with my progress. Polls show me in second place."

FLATTERY

The 16 publications that belong to the S.F. Neighborhood Newspaper Association, with a combined monthly circulation of 306,000, are, like the communities they represent, a diverse lot. At the candidates' forum, we learned that we share a common soft spot.

Ammiano came into the conference room and eyed our various papers spread out on the table.

"If I want to read real news," he said, "I read your newspapers."

We blushed. We loved it. ■

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