

# TAKE BACK OUR PARKS – 2011 Mayoral Questionnaire

CESAR ASCARRUNZ

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1. Currently RPD management is seeking to convert the Department into an enterprise agency and end General Fund support, effectively making a commodity out of the commons.

a. What is your thinking about removing the Recreation & Park Department from the General Fund and transforming it into an enterprise agency?

I do not support privatizing our parks. Our Park and Rec department is essential to maintaining and improving our parks and also being a vessel for residents to also be involved in the changes being made to their local parks.

b. Will you continue this RPD privatization strategy?

No.

c. If you oppose this strategy, what would be your approach to funding the RPD?

Maintaining community involvement and also bonds for improvements to our parks. This will generate jobs for locals and beautify our city.

d. Do you believe the RPD operations should be supported by tax dollars?

Yes.

2. The Department recently fired its recreation staff who delivered services to children and families, hired supervisors to outsource programming, and added a highly paid property management team to lease out recreation and park facilities.

a. Do you think this model should be reversed, and if so, what would be your plan to providing those services?

I believe that community parks should be free to the public. To charge for space rentals will be beneficial so that we don't have to continue to charge.

3. According to figures gleaned from the Controller's office, in 2009 the City laid off nearly 2,000 employees who were the interface with the public and whose average cost to the City was \$37,000 for a "savings" of \$70 Million, and at the same time added 779 management employees whose average pay was \$147,000 for a total cost of \$115 Million.

a. Would you reverse this practice and reduce management and use the savings to hire employees who provide direct services to the people?

Yes. It is not fair that employees who make less get cut first and more of them get cut. Most often than not, it is management who makes a bigger dent in annual pay and reducing that would keep many employed versus many layoffs.

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- b. Are you aware that RPD is hiring hundreds of outside recreation providers who are limited to 16 hours/week with no benefits to replace former recreation directors? Do you approve of this policy?

No. I believe that any jobs that are created should be created for those who live locally.

4. The Recreation and Park Department has been aggressively marketing and leasing out clubhouses to private entities. In many cases this has resulted in loss of clubhouse use for the neighboring communities.
- a. How would you ensure that neighboring communities have regular access to clubhouses?

I believe that RPD should always allot time and space for the community and residents.

5. The Recreation and Parks Department has proposed to develop the western end of Golden Gate Park by building a large artificial turf soccer sports complex with 60 foot tall stadium lights. This project will destroy the naturalistic landscape character of the western end of Golden Gate Park. The woodland character of the western end of Golden Gate Park is supported by both the 1998 Golden Gate Park Master Plan and the 2004 National Register of Historic Places application. Both of these documents were written by the Department of Recreation and Park and yet, they are being violated by this project.
- a. As mayor, would you oppose changing the Beach Chalet fields into a soccer complex with artificial turf and 60 foot lights?

I will make sure that I will support residents if this is something that they do not wish to happen.

- b. Would you direct the Department to renovate the Beach Chalet soccer fields with real grass and no lights?

I believe keeping the natural grass will maintain the parks but lights are very important in parks especially at night. With such a huge park like golden gate we need to factor in safety.

- c. Renovating the Beach Chalet fields with real grass will save bond funding that could be used in other parks. Would you direct the Department to use the remainder of the bond funding to fix up other parks?

Yes. Many parks around the city are in desperate need of renovation. If there is a way to maintain Beach Chalet whole also helping other parks in the rest of the city, it will be a great way to use the remainder of the funding.

6. The Recreation and Parks Department is allowing the SF PUC to build a 40,000 square foot recycled water plant in Golden Gate Park, in the area north of the Murphy windmill,

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contrary to the Golden Gate Park Master Plan.

a. Do you support Golden Gate Park as a landscape park as described in the Master Plan?

Yes.

b. Do you oppose any more new buildings in Golden Gate Park?

No.

c. Would you direct the Recreation and Park Department and the SFPUC to find other locations for the water treatment factory outside of Golden Gate Park?

Yes.

d. If the SFPUC refuses to move the project, would you uphold the charter and put a measure on the ballot to vote on the placement of this building in Golden Gate Park?

Yes.

7. The Historic Preservation Commission has proposed to make Golden Gate Park a Historic District. Do you support this proposal, and why or why not?

Yes. I always believed that Golden Gate Park has been such a long part of San Francisco history that one day it should be acknowledged as historical site.

8. On May 11, 2011, RP Commission President Mark Buell explained to a Commonwealth Club audience that he views the RP Commission as primarily responsible to respond to RP Department Staff. There was no mention of focus by the Commission on the public's proposals. The Commission has not demonstrated a track-record of incorporating public feedback.

a. How would you make the RP Commission more responsive to the public?

I will make sure that whatever plans that are made have to be approved by the residents.

9. What, if any, changes would you make to the management and priorities of the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department?

I will let the department make whatever changes feel that are best. This is a section that has people who want to be involved in the development of the park. I will like to maintain independence.

10. Currently the Mayor appoints all seven members of the RP Commission and the General Manager, which has resulted in near 100% approval of staff proposals and nearly uniform

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dismissal of citizen objections.

- a. Do you support a more balanced approach to appointments to the Recreation and Park Commission, such as split appointments between the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor?

Yes. I believe that collectively we will be able to appoint people who are passionate about our parks and who will do a good job in the department.

11. The non-resident entry fee to the Arboretum has proven to be a financial failure and resulted in a dramatic reduction in visitation by both non-residents and by residents.

- a. Have you reviewed the data and concerns of the public about the fee and this path to privatizing the Botanical Gardens?

I have not. I cannot give an answer until I have fully researched it.

- b. Would you be willing to introduce and support legislation to eliminate the fee?

I have not. I cannot give an answer until I have fully researched it.

12. Implicit in past public support for the Recreation and Parks Department has been a promise that our parks will continue to be free and our clubhouses will remain open to everyone.

- a. Would you willing to place a higher priority for General Fund support to the Rec & Park Department?

Yes. I cannot see a city where we charge our residents to go to parks. This is what makes parks so wonderful. They are always there for everyone no matter the income.

- b. Can you explain why we are being denied what we have already paid for, with fees for park entry and new rental charges for clubhouse use?

This is not fair and as Mayor I will always support and advocate to keeping our parks free.

13. Should you become mayor, would you continue the policies of committing tens of millions of tax dollars in subsidies to the wealthy like Larry Ellison and Twitter and continue to deny sufficient general fund money to hire more gardeners, custodians and recreation directors to maintain our parks and staff our playground clubhouses?

No. Taxes are what pay for our parks. Everyone should pay their share.