

David Chiu for Mayor

Take Back Our Parks Questionnaire

- 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?**

While I understand the concerns of Take Back Our Parks, I do not believe that RPD management is actually seeking to convert RPD into an enterprise agency, and I do not support such a transformation. I do believe that RPD management has sought to increase revenue through some approaches that have created significant controversies, and as Mayor I would seek to refocus us on our shared values - I would work with everyone who loves our parks to identify long-term budget solutions to move us beyond as many of these divisive fights as possible. I strongly believe that parks are important public goods that play a critical role in improving the quality of life for our residents, keeping families in our city, and creating livable communities. As such, I believe the General Fund should have a significant role in financing much of the RPD budget. I would never direct our city parks and recreational services to entirely pay for themselves since this would likely lead to wide-ranging privatization that will not best serve the people of San Francisco in the long run.

- b. Will you continue this RPD privatization strategy?**

I believe that it is essential that our parks and public lands are maintained as free and accessible as possible for all San Franciscans to enjoy.

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

RPD has seen a consistent and significant decline in General Fund support over the past five years. This, combined with increased labor costs, has created a dire funding situation for the Department and has resulted in layoffs, significant deferred maintenance and closures of facilities important to communities across the City, such as the North Beach Clubhouse in my district.

As Mayor, I would take a balanced approach to funding RPD through the General Fund.

First, as I did when the collapse of the economy in 2008 affected RPD's budget, I would support some of the Department's efforts to increase efficiency and raise revenues in appropriate contexts.

Second, with the fusion of NPC and Neighborhood Parks Trust, the Department will have a unified advocacy nonprofit through which to better seek philanthropic funding, state and

federal grants, and other forms of support. I will prioritize and empower work with this new, stronger park ally to pursue sustainable funding sources.

Third, as the Board of Supervisors representative on the Capital Planning Committee, I have already supported the Parks Bond, and I will continue to play a leadership role on it as Mayor.

Fourth, the Open Space Fund, created in 1974 and renewed in 2000, provides RPD with a dedicated set-aside of 2.5 cents per \$100 in property taxes. While initially intended for acquisition and capital purposes, over the past years it has been used more and more for ongoing operational uses, a situation that is undermining the original intent of the fund. There is discussion of increasing the open space set-aside from 2.5 cents to 5 cents, and I support the investigation of this potential funding source in order to ensure that we are able to dedicate adequate funds to the original purpose, as well as provide the department with more secure funding sources.

Fifth, I support the investigation of new, appropriate public-private partnerships, concessions, and other models for revenue generation. Although the discussion of concessions and revenues often provokes debates about "privatization" of our city's parks, I believe there are ideas in this area worth exploring. For example, plant sales of native plants grown in nurseries on RPD property or farm stands selling produce generated in RPD-managed community gardens are types of concessions that can generate revenue, build community, and reinforce the fundamental values underlying the sustainable use of open space.

Lastly, I have supported new revenue sources such as business tax reform, bringing back the vehicle license fee to pre-2003 levels, and licensing our city's dark fiber. I am also looking forward to more thoroughly reviewing the recommendations in the new SPUR Revenue Task Force report and discussing them with everyone interested in supporting our parks..

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

Since parks are important public goods that our general tax base should support, the General Fund should have a significant role in financing much of RPD's budget.

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 RPD's current approach to clubhouse management should be thoroughly reexamined. While I understand that budget pressures led to significant layoffs of recreation staff, we must do more to restore RPD funding to appropriate levels. I believe that the property management staff can be part of that funding picture.

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?**

As a general matter, I strongly believes that positions that provide direct services to residents are the most critical in our government, and that we must have management-to-staff ratios that sensibly reflect the need for leadership in a given department or agency. As Mayor, I would closely scrutinize all paid staff positions within RPD to ensure that they are actually providing a public service and not just adding a layer of bureaucracy.

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?**

I am not aware of such a policy and have significant concerns with what was described above.

5. 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?**

As the Supervisor for District 3, which has the unfortunate distinction of having the least open space per resident, I understand this problem all too well through the eyes of my constituents. It is an environmental justice issue in addition to a quality of life one. As Mayor, I would direct RPD to prioritize the acquisition of open space in neighborhoods that most need them. I would work with Planning, OEWD and other City entities to develop more incentives for the creation of more open space. I would strongly consider supporting increasing the open space fund set aside in property taxes in order to acquire new open space in these areas, as well as support a parks bond as discussed above.

6. 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 plan to follow this issue closely as the environmental process moves forward, but I do have questions about any plans that require intensive development or new infrastructure within Golden Gate Park. While our city needs to offer high quality recreational facilities, we need to remember that Golden Gate Park is one of the crown jewels of the city. Residents and visitors alike come to Golden Gate Park for a break from the bustle of the city. Any new development that might attract more vehicular traffic to Golden Gate Park should undergo significant scrutiny. As Mayor, I would consider other alternative locations before supporting any new development in the park.

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

See 6a above.

- 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?**

If such savings existed, yes.

7. 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, 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?

See 6a above.

- 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?

As I said in 6a above, I have concerns about new infrastructure, but in concept we should support the recycling of water, and I will continue to learn more about this issue.

- 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?

I would consider such an approach if I concluded that on balance this particular building should be placed in another location.

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

No, I do not support making GG Park a Historic District. I believe that specific buildings are already sufficiently protected.

9. 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?**

Many residents feel a significant disconnect between their \$6.8 billion dollar, 26,000 employee, 50 department bureaucracy known as the City and County of San Francisco. We need to evolve our city government to be one that is truly community based - and this why I support community-based budgeting, community-based planning, and community-based policing. Since it is so critical that city residents have a real dialogue with city agencies, especially those that touch their lives as directly as the Recreation and Parks Department, I would like to replicate a model of collaboration that I have championed. In my Supervisorial district, residents, merchants and city staff come together on neighborhood councils to tackle local problems, and this model should be applied citywide in every neighborhood to tackle tough issues. I would also use technology and new open government tools to get direct citizen feedback on everything from the lateness of a Muni bus to the latest repair needed in a neighborhood park.

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

My priorities for RPD would be the following:

A. Finding sustainable funding sources. Our parks have seen their funding cut dramatically over time. As Mayor, I would fight to shore up funding for our parks and recreation centers, help lead the next general obligation bond for the parks, and make sure that our already-committed dollars are well-spent – and that past bond monies don't end up in long delays for projects, as has been recently the case.

B. Increasing open space. As seen in the most recent Recreation Assessment report, there is incredible pent-up demand for more open space in some places, for more active recreation opportunities, for more community gardens/urban agriculture, among other findings.

C. Improving park maintenance. In addition to increasing funding sources for our parks and better utilizing volunteer park stewards, as Mayor, I would direct RPD to plan better for future park maintenance. In the past, the City has often created new parks, or infrastructure within parks, without attention to their ongoing maintenance requirements. The City should not use capital funds to create new parks or infrastructure, or accept bequests of new parks or infrastructure, without a plan for dedicated maintenance in perpetuity. Additionally, there are some mini-parks and other facilities that are isolated and require considerable time and effort for RPD maintenance, and there is the potential that some of these properties might better serve RPD and the community needs if they were converted to other uses, such as community gardens, which would be primarily maintained using different less-intensive models. As Mayor, I would support and encourage such transitions when and where appropriate for both RPD and the communities' needs.

D. Encouraging community involvement. Community engagement is key to delivering for our neighborhoods and ensuring that the decisions we make about parks and open space are supported, or at least understood, by the public. Much of the frustrations with city government are based on lack of adequate community outreach and transparency when it comes to how we allocate our scarce resources, and this is particularly true when it comes to our parks. Whether it is the lack of planning around clubhouses, lack of input on recreational activities, or lack of feedback regarding the RPD budget, we need to do a better job of implementing a real community- based budgeting and planning process for our park needs. In my district's diverse neighborhoods of Polk Street and North Beach, we brought together residents, local businesses and community leaders to directly tackle the issues they face together in the form of neighborhood councils. Our neighborhood council model has empowered the community to face their problems first-hand and provides them the resources and access to do so, and I would look to expand this citywide, particularly to address issues of parks, recreation, and open space.

11. 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 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?**

I do not support split appointments at this time, but I am open to considering more qualifications for Rec Park commissioners.

12. 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?**

Yes.

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

I reluctantly voted for the fee, but as Mayor, I will seek a broader approach to park funding that would hopefully eliminate or reduce the need for this charge.

13. 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, see Question 1.

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?**

See Question 1 for my approach to these issues.

14. 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?

The fact is that to adequately fund the programs and services that we all want, we must grow our General Fund. But our revenue-generating policies cannot discourage job creation or entrepreneurship at a time when San Franciscans are struggling to find work to put food on their tables and roofs over their heads. It's a delicate balancing act that requires a balanced approach. Most corporate taxes in San Francisco are collected through a payroll tax which, by all accounts, has created significant disincentives for job creation and driven many companies and workers out of San Francisco. Furthermore, only 8,000 of San Francisco's 80,000 businesses actually pay it. I believe the payroll tax is unfair and must be replaced by a smarter, better tax that encourages job creation, and is fairer and more broadly based. That is why I continue to work with stakeholders to develop a gross receipts tax to replace our payroll tax system and ensure that government will continue to have the resources it needs to provide the services San Franciscans depend on.

In the meantime, I support tax incentives for businesses that are actually creating jobs for our residents and making neighborhoods more livable in our City. The recent Tenderloin/Mid Market Payroll Tax exclusion was extremely targeted, applying only to companies that create *new* net jobs in neighborhoods that our City had been struggling to revitalize for decades. Moreover, and most importantly, this program will actually *benefit* our City's General Fund, by retaining direct tax revenue (like property taxes) from companies like Twitter and Burning Man that would otherwise leave San Francisco, and by encouraging entrepreneurs to start new businesses in the area and generate economic activity.

I have been a strong supporter of the America's Cup because it will bring 9,000 jobs and over a billion dollars of economic activity - money that will end up being used to hire workers, pay taxes, and grow businesses. In addition, I have strongly supported legislation to allow San Francisco to reestablish the Vehicle License Fee to its pre-2003 levels, and recently proposed leasing some of the City's unused high-speed communications infrastructure -- called dark fiber - to the private and nonprofit sectors.

We simply must have a multipronged strategy to generate the revenue we need to ensure that RPD is fully funded, and as Mayor, I am committed to doing just that.