

TAKE BACK OUR PARKS – 2011 Mayoral Questionnaire

LELAND YEE

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?

The Recreation and Parks Department's focus on revenue generation over the past two budget years is fundamentally out of line with its core mission – increasing access for all to parks, open spaces, and recreational activities. I strongly oppose what seems like a concerted effort to privatize the city's parks and to limit access to only those who can afford it. I have spoken out against charging entrance fees at Strybing Arboretum, and will continue the fight to protect public access to parks as Mayor.

b. Will you continue this RPD privatization strategy?

No.

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

These are difficult economic times for the city and we will have to do more with less. The city must reduce administrative expenses and duplication of services where possible without compromising important services like our parks and recreation programs. As we move forward, we need to work to identify new sources of stable, sustainable revenue so that we can continue to meet our commitments to our parks. I strongly support additional revenue at the state level and also at the local level, including a tax on higher income individuals and the extension of expiring tax measures.

As Mayor, I will pursue grant and philanthropic funding opportunities. In Sacramento, I sponsored workshops for local agencies and organizations seeking parks grants for parks improvements and acquisitions – and would encourage San Francisco to look into grant funding sources. Funding our obligations to our parks in these challenging times will take creativity, and I am open to all approaches to funding, but I remain committed to the parks as a public asset, and I will not support any efforts to privatize our parks.

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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?

The loss of 166 recreation directors is felt most by our underserved communities, those least likely to benefit from for-profit offerings provided by the new leaseholders. I do not support the current move toward privatizing the parks and under my administration these policies would be not be continued. To restore the cut services I will look to restructuring Recreation and Parks the same way I would look at restructuring any and all agencies that increase management staff while cutting positions that interact directly with the public.

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?

I do not agree with the changes that have been made within the Recreation and Parks Department and I would not continue with the current course. As a matter of principle I do not support hiring practices that lead to bloated middle management at the expense of our public facing staff.

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?

We are seeing a national trend of replacing union labor with cheap, low paying, non benefited, and non unionized positions. This is a disturbing trend that San Francisco should and must

stand against. As Mayor, I will never support replacing Union jobs with low wage jobs.

I have a long history of fighting for fair wages and benefits. I fought to pass the California Living Wage Act, which would have required the State and any qualified contractor to pay a living wage to each of its employees. I have fought for fair benefits for workers and in 2009 I authored SB 791, which would have extended health care benefits to In-Home Support Staff health care workers. I have repeatedly voted in favor of and helped pass laws raising the penalties for violating Gender Pay Equity laws, and to toughen the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement to guarantee more violators are caught and held accountable. Not only do I support the concept of prevailing wage, but I have fought for long overdue increases to California's minimum wage and will continue to do so in City Hall. I have supported every minimum wage increase put before me for a vote.

I cannot support any policy that replaces full time, unionized workers with part time non-union labor. As Mayor, my administration will not continue this practice.

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?

Our Parks and Recreation assets should be available and accessible for everyone. I strongly oppose current efforts to privatize San Francisco's parks and to limit access to only those who can afford it. The leasing of city property to private entities should never come at the expense of our underserved communities having access to our civic resources. Leasing facilities like the Laurel Hill Clubhouse at market rents to private groups sets a very bad precedent, and seriously disadvantages the underserved communities who most rely on our public facilities. The Laurel Hill lease replaced a free parenting class run by City College for 38 years with an expensive, for profit pre-school. While Recreation and Parks should have some flexibility to lease facilities that are not being used or maintained, we should certainly not be entering into long-term lease arrangements that may prohibit the

public from opportunities that may arise as funding conditions improve.

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?

Golden Gate Park is a San Francisco institution, and a treasured public asset. As a general principle, I support sustainable practices that allow San Franciscans to enjoy both recreational and natural experiences in our public spaces. Any major alterations to Golden Gate Park—even those with the best of intentions for sustainability—should be carefully weighed and measured.

With regard to this project, I am concerned about environmental impacts, such as migratory bird pattern disruption and the effects of tripling use of the fields. The only prudent course of action is to do a full environmental review, which will be completed next year.

The findings of that report will better arm us with the information and tools to determine what is best for the park. Accordingly, I can't support the project until or unless the EIR deems there are no serious environmental impacts.

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

Pending the current EIR, I'd be interested in exploring more environmentally friendly compromise plans such as a renovation using natural turf.

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- 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?

The proposed renovations to the Beach Chalet soccer fields are funded with both private money and with bond money from the 2008 Clean and Safe Neighborhood Parks Bond. If bond funding is saved from a change to the plan and, if that money can legally be repurposed to other capital improvements to the parks system consistent with the intentions of the 2008 bond measure, I will see that it is done.

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, 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?

I support the intentions of the Golden Gate Park Master Plan in calling for the park to remain an urban wilderness and seeking to limit any development that takes away from enjoyment of the landscape of the park. Golden Gate Park should be a haven for everyone in the city – as was envisioned at the park’s founding – and, as Mayor, I will ensure that the park remains a wilderness escape from urban life.

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

I will review proposed construction in Golden Gate Park on a case-by-case basis and will only consider new construction that is consistent with the Golden Gate Park Master Plan and supported by the community.

- 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?

I support the use of recycled water in San Francisco’s ongoing efforts toward increased sustainability – however, I have serious concerns about the location of the water plant within Golden Gate Park and the effects construction would have on the park and surrounding natural areas. The current plan would require removal of hundreds of trees, piping under the

Great Highway resulting in further beach erosion at Ocean Beach, and doesn't account for future expanded construction that could have serious environmental implications for Golden Gate Park.

The planned wastewater treatment plant is at odds with the Golden Gate Park Master Plan – which states the park is intended solely for recreational purposes. The Plan includes provisions for a water treatment facility, but requires that any water treatment facility be completely underground. Because the current water treatment facility is not underground, I cannot support it. As Mayor, I will direct and assist the Department to find alternate locations and pursue a water treatment facility.

- 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 do not support the current plan for the wastewater treatment plant in Golden Gate Park. I will direct the SFPUC to look for alternate sites for the wastewater treatment plant. If SFPUC cannot find a suitable alternative site, the community should have a chance to make a decision about the proposal.

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?

The Historic Preservation Committee is currently reviewing the proposal to make Golden Gate Park a Historic District. I am aware of the review and I look forward to hearing its findings. I feel that Golden Gate Park is a civic treasure with a unique historical significance, and that we should do our utmost to protect the park and its singular character. However, as the Historic Preservation Committee has not yet brought forth its proposal, due to the complicated nature of this issue I cannot fully support the proposal at this time. I look forward to reviewing their recommendations, along with those of recreation and Parks and stakeholder input, and considering this proposal.

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?

It is concerning that the Recreation and Parks Commission is being criticized for its responsiveness to public feedback. Our government should be as open, transparent, accessible and responsive as possible. To address these issues, I am open to changes to the make-up of the Commission in order to make it more responsive. Additionally, I will appoint parks experts to the Commission with the input of community groups and stakeholders. Finally, I will consider the creation of a citizen's advisory board to formalize the process of citizen engagement on parks issues.

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

It is important to hold all Departments accountable to the people that they serve, and as Mayor I will. That means no privatization of services, and no political appointments. As Mayor, I will not continue the current course of Recreation and Parks towards privatizing our parks. The core mission of our Recreation and Parks Department is to ensure access to quality green spaces and recreational programs to all of our neighborhoods and, under my administration I will ensure this mission is defended.

I have stood against privatization in every form, and I will continue to stand against privatization as Mayor. All departments and personnel under my authority will have clear direction from my administration to change course if they are conducting business otherwise.

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 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 understand that there is frustration with the make-up of the Recreation and Parks Commission, largely because of recent actions towards privatization of our public assets – something I would not have supported. In light of these actions, I would consider creative approaches to make the

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Commission more responsive to the public – like splitting appointments or reserving seats on the Recreation and Parks Board for qualified parks experts, such as arborists or advocates for our parks. As Mayor, I will be committed to appointing knowledgeable and qualified individuals to the Commission, and I will rely on the city’s established communities of interest to help identify those individuals.

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

I have spoken out against charging entrance fees at the Arboretum and will continue the fight to protect public access to parks as Mayor.

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

Yes.

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.

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

I am committed to fully funding our parks through general fund dollars. As Mayor, I will work to make current spending more efficient and also develop stable and sustainable new revenue sources to ensure that the General Fund can adequately provide for all of our obligations.

- 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?

I do not understand why the Recreation and Parks Department has elected to charge entry fees for our parks and clubhouses. As I’ve repeatedly noted, I do not support the privatization of our public parks or charging entrance fees at our public park facilities. These policies will not be continued in my administration.

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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?

I want to make San Francisco a city for working families again, not just for the wealthy and well connected. In my administration, tax breaks and subsidies will be carefully weighed to ensure that San Francisco can maintain and grow its business economy without sacrificing public services.