

TAKE BACK OUR PARKS - 2011 Mayoral Questionnaire

TERRY JOAN BAUM

Terry Joan Baum responds:

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'm completely opposed to that--parks should be maintained by the public, not privatized. The SF Green Party has consistently opposed privatization of public parks, going at least as far back as Nancy Pelosi's privatization of the Presidio.

b. Will you continue this RPD privatization strategy?

No, and I would replace Phil Ginsburg with a manager who agrees with me.

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

I have several ideas to raise more revenues for San Francisco. First, tax the rich! Two other major new source of public revenues would be Public Power and the creation of a City-owned, City-run Municipal Bank of San Francisco. The benefits of (and revenues from) public power have been extensively discussed in the Bay Guardian, so I won't review them here. A Municipal Bank is an old idea whose time has come again. It would bring in revenue by investing public pension money, allow borrowing by City residents at below-market rates, and fund local business development. The presence of a state-owned bank in North Dakota helped shield that state from the current economic collapse, and a similar bank here in SF would do wonders for both our economy and City finances.

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.

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

Yes, I think it should be reversed; in a time of economic recession, we should be hiring more City workers, not firing them. I would raise revenues as discussed in my answer to the previous question.

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.

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 do not know about this; I disapprove of the outsourcing of City jobs.

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?

Community space (such as clubhouses) should be reservable for free, on a first come-first served basis, by community groups and other non-profits. After all, community rooms in district police stations are reservable for free on a first-come-first-serve basis, as are library community rooms.

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

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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 Parks 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?

Yes, I would oppose these changes. Both the lights and the replacement of grass with synthetic turf are very problematic. RPD's plans to lease the space to generate revenue should also be stopped; parks should be for the public, not leased out as revenue generators.

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

Yes.

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, for bonds that have already been sold. The Green Party generally opposes bond funding for maintenance items such as fixing parks. We should fund such expenses out of the general fund, because funding with bonds costs at least twice as much in the long run, as a rule of thumb.

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?

Yes. I oppose locating the recycled water plant in the park.

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

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In general, yes. However, I support ideas such as the "G-line" MUNI rail into the park, and that might require building a bus shelter or other small building.

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?

In concept I support making Golden Gate Park a Historic District. However, the Historic Preservation Commission is entirely appointed by the Mayor and therefore would be unlikely to challenge any RPD decision, so I don't understand what effect this proposal would have in practice. I'm undecided until I have more information.

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?

Appointments should be split with the Board of Supervisors, with the Board (being more democratically elected) having the majority of the appointments.

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

The Green Party supports decentralization of decision-making, and local control over priorities for handling public

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resources. We would therefore empower local neighborhood councils to set spending priorities for smaller local parks. Large parks that have more wide appeal (e.g., GGP) would still be subject to RP Commission control. The RP Commission would set priorities, and the manager would carry them out (unlike the way it is now, with the RPC subservient to staff).

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.

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?

Yes. The Green Party has opposed this fee consistently.

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

Yes, although the Mayor could do this without legislation.

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.

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?

Yes. This is a direct result of the corruption that comes with

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one-party rule in SF. As long as SF voters blindly support anybody with a (D) next to their name, even if they are tools of Wall Street, the public will continue to lose out. One party rule didn't work in the USSR, Egypt, or Syria, and it doesn't work here. There is a "pay to play" policy in SF that has continued at least as far back as the days of Willie Brown. City contracts go to corporations, non-profits, and individuals who make the right "donations" or pay off well-connected political consultants. Outrageous contracts, often with "golden parachute" clauses, are given to politically connected cronies (some of whom were called "special assistants" under Willie Brown and "municipal executives" today). Many City contracts serve as shields to avoid Sunshine laws and appropriate public oversight of funds. One-party corruption has directly led to many of the other major problems in SF: environmental racism, crumbling infrastructure and public transit, and unsustainable development.

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. The Green Party revoked its prior endorsements of Jane Kim and David Chiu over their support for these neoliberal policies.