

PDB – ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONS

1. What plan do you have for promoting the development of more affordable/attainable housing in Benicia?

Benicia, like most cities in California, faces a housing crisis, particularly concerning affordable housing. We need to meet state housing requirements, but my focus would be on ensuring that housing is affordable for both our young people and seniors. For instance, I want to make sure that when young people graduate from college, they have affordable options to move back to Benicia if they choose to. Additionally, as our population ages, many seniors are looking to downsize or move into assisted living but often have to leave Benicia due to a lack of affordable options.

The shortage of affordable housing deeply affects our seniors and working families. shortage deeply affects our seniors and working families. Ensuring access to affordable housing is crucial, as high housing costs disproportionately affect these groups. To address these concerns, I believe there are ways to increase affordable housing without compromising the community culture that both residents and business owners value. The city has an opportunity to expand housing options by supporting measures to increase affordable housing and identifying developers that align with the communities needs and character.

2. At some point the refinery may shut down. What measures should the City of Benicia plan to take to prepare for that scenario?

The City of Benicia is currently implementing a five-year plan to balance the budget, but a significant portion of our revenue comes from Valero. This plan relies heavily on those contributions. It's crucial that we start planning for development, including real estate, now to avoid being caught off guard if the refinery closes and that revenue disappears.

Many neighboring cities have successfully attracted technology sectors, and Benicia has the potential to do the same. Considering the high cost of living in areas like Silicon Valley and the scarcity of commercial property, Benicia could become an attractive option. We offer a lower cost of living, available space in our industrial parks, and access to a highly skilled labor market.

Bay area refinery towns, such as Richmond, are planning for a “just transition” away from depending on funds related to their refinery. Benicia should too. If the industrial safety ordinance passes and a Community Oversight Commission is installed, that body could examine what a just transition for Benicia looks like.

The time for the City Council to act is now. Even if Valero never closes, we must focus on what's next for Benicia. Diversifying our revenue streams is essential for our city's long-term financial health.

3. If the tax measures on the November ballot fail, what are your plans and priorities for balancing the budget?

While the current City Council has made progress in stabilizing Benicia's finances, there is still more work to be done. I believe that my fresh perspective can help identify new opportunities to generate revenue and cut costs where appropriate, without significantly impacting essential community services. Creativity will be crucial in bridging the gap between revenue and expenses.

The tax increases approved by Benicia voters in March 2024 will provide some relief to the budget in the coming years. However, balancing a budget while retaining the services we all enjoy and staying competitive enough to keep essential city employees is no easy task. We must focus on increasing revenue through growth and, whenever possible, revisiting existing city contracts to reduce costs or enhance revenue. If the November tax measures fail, the City Council and city staff will need to work together closely to reassess all options.