

City of Vallejo
City Council Election 2013 Questionnaire
Solano Association of REALTORS
Local Candidate Recommendation Committee

Candidates Name: Katy Miessner
Office Sought: Vallejo City Council 4 year term
Address: POB 6111, Vallejo CA 94590
Email: KatyForCouncil@gmail.com
Committee Phone: 707-642-2100
Campaign ID#: FPPC ID# 1356439

1. Do you have a professional consultant or manager?

No; I have expert advisors who happen to be friends and who are volunteering their time.

2. What are the three most important challenges facing your city?

- Economic Development, recovery from the exit of the US Navy
- Creating Safe Neighborhoods
- Term limits and changing City Councils, with new people coming on board who are not familiar with many directives of prior councils/issues faced/etc

3. What would you do to solve those challenges?

- To solve the other issues, the City must invest in Economic Development. Some of the groundwork has already been done by the current council. An Economic Cluster Survey and Economic Strategic Plan were created last year. These documents identified the Economic Assets and strengths already here in Vallejo, and these must be built upon. We have three colleges – one can become a Doctor, Engineer or many other professions by attending one of our three colleges. We also have a robust medical industry, valuable historic assets, and access to water ways and other modes of transportation. It is very important that the City of Vallejo completes its general plan and form-based code, and create our own vision of how these industries will move forward in a way where different uses can flourish together.
- Mare Island is the focus of much Econ Dev discussions but it's also the most expensive place to do business. Vallejo can help foster businesses by creating zones where taxes and fees are reduced for a certain amount of time, to allow new businesses to develop their "sea-legs." These zones can focus on certain areas of Mare Island and certain types of businesses as well.
- Vallejo should encourage "pop-up" businesses in the Downtown. The Farmers Market is an example every Saturday, but this would involve longer term leases – six months possible – where businesses are given reduced fees. If the city and the downtown property owners could create a robust pop-up plan, they could create the ongoing critical mass that the downtown needs as a foundation for longer term development. It's obvious by the Farmers Market that—with the critical mass that occurs now on Saturday mornings—our Downtown is sometimes seen as safe.
- Temporary uses should be allowed on Mare Island. Ten years ago, a temporary solar farm was proposed, but turned down by City Hall (not Lennar!) because it was seen as a business that would hinder longer term development. Imagine the revenue that would have been generated if a solar farm had been on North Mare Island for the last ten years. Other temporary uses: tree nurseries, etc.

Vallejo's plan for North Mare Island should include a projection of when the most dilapidated buildings are torn down, an estimate of remaining toxic sites are remediated. Once a clear vision for the island is drafted, the City could easily invite shorter term businesses.

- Vallejo's infill fees are incredibly high – we have many vacant lots, and lots with burned out houses that are beyond repair, or repair doesn't make sense financially. To encourage infill development, especially in blighted areas, Vallejo should reduce tear down and infill fees (this addresses safe neighborhoods and econ dev)
- City Hall should organize itself to create a neighborhood services department, which can act as a liaison between neighborhoods/watch groups/citizens and the various departments within city hall. Navigating city hall can sometimes be daunting and often times it may not be clear which department is the correct one. Vallejo will always depend on neighborhoods to enhance public safety and we have a huge resource in our citizenry, we must take advantage of neighborhood watches.
- Increase community policing efforts, such as beat health, offering trainings to residents on how to not be a victim of a crime (I hear our new Chief is looking into having this done by annuitants), develop training for landlords on how to successfully screen tenants (this was a part of beat health at one point).

4. If elected, what are your top priorities for the city? (if different from 3)
Invest in Economic Development & stabilize neighborhood (see above)

5. What is your opinion/position on the use of eminent domain?

Eminent Domain is an incredibly powerful tool that can be used for positive change—or abused/misused. An example of positive change: the properties along the west side of Wilson Avenue were taken by Eminent Domain and while some folks lost their homes (paid at market value), the resulting award winning street and landscape is now a beautiful entrance into Vallejo. Eminent Domain must be used judiciously and with a very clear, rigorous and vetted plan. Proponents must be able to clearly define their need for eminent domain, and those losing their properties must be reimbursed at market value. See Redevelopment question #7 for more discussion of negative impact.

6. What has the existing city council done that you would like to see continue?

- Hiring of a skilled and competent City Manager who is working to stabilize City Hall and who is hiring skilled and competent department heads. I want to see this continue in the sense that the Council must understand their roles as policy makers and not get involved in the day to day running of our city (which is a violation of our charter).
- Creating ordinances that help deal with some of Vallejo's issues in an "upstream" fashion – i.e. tackling the issue before they become problems. The Vacant Property Ordinance is a great example: secure a home before squatters take over. At one point, there were 4 houses within a five block radius of my house and we had so few tools to address them prior to the Vacant Property Ordinance.
- Starting the 3-year process of updating our General Plan (last updated in 1983) and creating "form-based" codes. This effort is absolutely critical to our long-term economic development.

7. How do you see redevelopment as a tool (or handicap) for the city?

- Redevelopment has been eliminated by Governor Jerry Brown. Unwinding our redevelopment agency, through the new “successor agency” is complicated and may hamper some of the plans our city had under redevelopment.
- Vallejo has not done a good job with redevelopment.
 - In the 1960s, 12 square blocks of downtown were demolished and even a large hill removed. It was supposed to reduce blight, but blight remains around the downtown. Newly built structures were oriented eastward because of plans to build an Embarcadero-style freeway along Mare Island Way, which never materialized. Streets were closed off. Some of the work of the current but now stalled downtown revitalization was to open up these streets: Georgia & Capital.
 - Glen Cove was a redevelopment project to address blight in Home Acres area. However, the blight remains. And, the City of Vallejo was sued because the requisite affordable housing was not built with 20% of the “tax increment” as required by law. The city settled (“Buchongo Settlement”) by promising to build 425 units of affordable housing, and created two 1960s style “projects” in mid-2000s: Sereno Village and Avian Glen.

8. Do you think the current pension system is sustainable? If not, what changes or reforms would you support?

The current pension system isn't sustainable. The returns Cal PERS (Public Employee Retirement System) has projected for years – based on 1999 inflated stock market, returns of 7.25-7.75% a year which are too aggressive. Vallejo will have to pay into PERS from General Fund revenues to make up for the overly optimistic returns that are not materializing. The City of Vallejo is very limited in how we can address PERS on our own. The most recent budget projections show Vallejo's PERS contribution for Safety Employees as 0.44 on every salary dollar, increasing in eight years to a range of 0.62 – 0.76. This translates into millions of dollars that Vallejo will be required to pay into PERS. Depending on what amount of this increase City Employees pay, could have a deeply detrimental effect on the City's ability to provide other services. The Measure B sales tax is also set to expire in eight years (\$10 million in revenue a year) and it will be a tough sell to convince voters to approve it, if it's only to pay retiree costs, with residents not seeing any benefits.

I support reforms such as increased employee share of payments to the PERS system, and possibly switching to a contributed/modified contributed retirement plan, as well as changing the formulas that dictate when an employee can retire and how much they can collect. The PERS crisis is very similar to the housing meltdown – home values were predicted to rise in an impossible manner. Most of the world was convinced they would. Look what happened.

9. Local governments are fiscally challenged. What ways would you suggest to reduce municipal costs and increase efficiencies?

- Much of the fiscal challenges are related to employee pay, pensions and benefits. The City made promises in more rosy (and inflated) economic times that the City can no longer afford. City Hall has likely cut all extraneous costs and created efficiencies. However, there may be savings realized with inter-agency sharing of services, etc.

- True savings – or passing burdens on to responsible parties – must be explored. A great example is to creating new ordinances with fee structures—such as those addressing absentee landlords—to raise revenues and also address problem rentals.
- The City recently passed the Community Benefits District (CBD) ordinance. Older neighborhoods that do not fall under a particular Landscape Maintenance District (LMD) can use this as a tool to generate revenue for certain maintenance issues. Neighborhoods with LMDs can adopt a CBD and reduce their costs. I led an effort to research how my neighborhood—Vallejo Heights—could create an LMD of our own, thereby reducing the burden we as an older neighborhood have on public works, and creating a fund to beautify our area. A city staffer curtailed the discussions; they did not want our efforts to create an LMD to create a tax measure on the ballot (this staff person is no longer at City Hall).

10. Do you support public/private partnerships? Why?

Yes, private entities are often not as restricted by public law in how services can be carried out, and private entities often have skills not found and/or needed on an ongoing basis within City Hall. The city must be careful though, to not transfer duties to a contractor that are best kept in City Hall, for continuity/consistency purposes.

11. What is the role of government in helping to create jobs and increase economic competitiveness? What are your plans to reduce unemployment and spur economic vitality?

The city's role – obligation – is to be very clear and consistent in how development should happen within our borders. I strongly support the creation of a new general plan, with a process representing residents and businesses. This is truly where consensus should be reached and it should be a process that is guided by expert facilitation and with a “half glass full” perspective. Vallejo hasn't created a vision that is shared—the Liquefied Natural Gas Plant is an example. The Mare Island Reuse Plan called for a preserve/park at the southern end of Mare Island, which was temporarily abandoned when Bechtel/Shell proposed a Liquefied Natural Gas/1600 megawatt power plant. This vision would have been permanently abandoned had the community not deeply objected.

12. Do you own or rent your residence?

Own (outright and not underwater)

13. Do you own rental property?

No

14. What is your position regarding the regulations of signs, especially real estate signs in your community?

I would like to see a sign ordinance. In the Massachusetts town my Mom lives, neon is greatly restricted, and many signs must have the same look/materials for “place-making” (carved wood/nautical). Her town is not wealthy but there is still community support for this; it's a proud town with a lot of history (like Vallejo!). Many Vallejo businesses have crude, hand-made signs. I'd like to see some oversight of these signs, because they contribute to blight. I don't see temporary Real Estate and other signs falling under

this, but there should be regulations regarding length of time temporary signs are up, and there should be a requirement that temporary signs are monitored for graffiti removal, repair, etc.

15. Often times, cities look for ways to upgrade properties throughout their perspective jurisdictions. What method do you support in accomplishing goals, such as energy efficient retrofits or water conservation upgrades? (Example: Community-wide approach, a mandate during the real estate transaction, incentive based).

All three methods can be useful. Disclosure mandates—while not popular—can address safety concerns.

Incentives that encourage home owners are preferable; they create buy-in with encouragement and usually a financial incentive that fosters compliance which can start off a good relationship between a new buyer and city hall, rather than mandates with begrudging compliance.

Regardless, any mandates must be clear. I live in an area that has a view district and is also subject to downzoning. New buyers often don't realize this because these city regulations don't transfer with the title (if that's the correct language) and it has created an adversarial relationship between the new home owner and the neighbors/city hall, especially if that new homeowner had an expectation of adding an apartment/in law unit, which is not allowed in an area that's been down-zoned.

Many times, mandates/ordinances have a grandfather clause, which helps when new laws are passed, to get buyin from the community, especially for homeowners on fixed incomes.

16. Any other information you would like to tell us about (i.e., past community involvement, etc.)

My career in financial management has spanned 20 years. With very little formal accounting training and though careful job selection, I moved from entry-level accounting to become the Budget Director of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, managing budgets of upwards of \$25 million. I am tenacious and enjoy problem-solving, and always strive to see the big-picture and understand underlying causes/problems. I'm a trained artist – I have a Bachelor Degree in Fine Arts, and my artistic background gives me a perspective different than others. It makes me more open-minded to different solutions and makes me unafraid of change.

I've volunteered for many efforts since I've moved to Vallejo, which are listed below and which confirm that I work very hard, am results oriented and I follow-through.

- Steering Committee Member, Participatory Budgeting Vallejo, Vallejo, CA, www.PBVallejo.org
Guided the first city-wide Participatory Budgeting (PB) process in the United States. Through this historic process, the Vallejo community will help decide how to spend over \$3 million of sales tax revenue. I facilitated the PB Education Committee, and one of our projects was successful and will be implemented.
- Current Vice-President, Vallejo Heights Neighborhood Association, Vallejo, CA, www.vhna.org
Establish and maintain open lines of communication with the City of Vallejo and other local groups, and promote a community spirit to enhance the livability of the Vallejo Heights area. I have been a pivotal participant in networking our neighborhood into a strong collective and we are well respected in City Hall.

- Current District One Director, Solano County Fair Association, Vallejo, CA, www.scfair.com
Brought together Federal (US Forest Service), State (CAL FIRE) and Local (City of Vallejo) Fire Fighting Agencies for joint fire safety presentations at “Youth Ag Day”
- Current participant, Vallejo Free of Graffiti, Vallejo, CA
Paint out graffiti and reduce blight around Vallejo
- Co-Chair, Vallejo Waterfront Coalition (VWC), Vallejo, CA www.VallejoWaterfrontCoalition.org
Enhanced Vallejo’s Waterfront Master Plan, adding a 4-acre park and architectural changes; won Clearwater Award for Excellence on the Waterfront. Participated in out-of-court settlement talks on CEQA lawsuit between VWC, Callahan-DeSilva and the Vallejo Redevelopment Agency.
- Candidate, Solano County Supervisor, District One, 2012, Vallejo, CA
Raised approximately \$40,000 and in a five-candidate race, placed third with 25% of total votes cast against the top two candidates with extensive political name recognition.
- Treasurer, MIRA Theatre Guild, 2010-2011, Vallejo, CA, www.MiraTheatreGuild.org
Created Mira’s fund-accounting financial system using QuickBooks Online; developed box-office and other control procedures; prepared 2010 & 2012 Internal Revenue Service Informational Return (990).
- Executive Committee (ExCom) Political Chair, Sierra Club/Solano Group, Vallejo, CA, 2004-2010
Produced five Vallejo City Council Candidates’ forums at Vallejo’s Springbrooke Masonic Lodge.
- Participant, Florence, Italy AIDS Marathon Fundraiser, San Francisco, CA, 2006
Raised \$8,400 for HIV/AIDS services while finishing the Marathon.
- Appointee, City of Vallejo’s Downtown Advisory Group (DAG), Vallejo, CA, 2004
Provided criticism and ideas in a collaborative process between Vallejo residents (DAG), the City of Vallejo and Triad Communities to create Vallejo’s Downtown Specific Plan, which won an award from the American Planning Association for Best Specific Plan, State of California, 2006.
- Participant, Honolulu AIDS Marathon Fundraiser, San Francisco, CA, 2002
Raised \$6,000 for HIV/AIDS services while finishing the Marathon.
- Treasurer, Vallejo Artists’ Guild, Vallejo, CA 2001– 2002
Reinstated the Guild’s rescinded non-profit status as of July, 2002 by reconstructing three fiscal years’ of financial statements for the periods of July, 1999 – June, 2002.
- Volunteer, The Shanti Project, San Francisco, CA, 1992 – 1997 www.Shanti.org
Provided practical support through light housekeeping, errands & laundry and emotional support through supportive listening, conversation and companionship to several clients diagnosed with terminal HIV/AIDS.

I’ve also created positive impact at the not for profit agencies I’ve worked for:

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

- Managed all phases of \$25 million budget administration and development for SFAF and its affiliate, the Pangaea Global AIDS Foundation. I played a key role in the creation of “AIDS Life/Cycle”—a 540 mile 7-day Bike Ride that raises funds for HIV/AIDS Services. This fundraiser has raised more than \$100 million since its inception and it’s still going strong.

The Kidney TRUST

- I was a key contributor to the design and implementation of The Kidney TRUST’s innovative CKD Financial Assistance Program built on a Flexible Benefits Card platform.

Shanti Project

- Reconstructed of Shanti’s financial records, resulting in subsequent auditor’s non-qualified opinion and Shanti’s successful litigation against their prior auditors after the San Francisco Department of Public Health identified Shanti’s fiscal non-compliance with Federal Ryan White CARE Act funded contracts in the 91/92 fiscal year preceding my tenure.