

# VOICES OF VALLEJO

## Questions for Candidates

Please return by July 14

### **Katy Miessner**

#### **1. What policy approaches do you recommend for providing an adequate stock of affordable housing for all income levels, including those who are currently homeless?**

Vallejo has a challenge—like most bay area cities--that often, residential development has to be market rate or above in order for the development to break even and turn a profit. And in Vallejo it is more difficult because our housing prices are lower but building costs are likely the same. Affordable housing requires subsidies. The City of Vallejo isn't in a position to subsidize housing from the General Fund at this time.

However, we could implement policy changes to spur development. Our new, award winning General Plan is complete and this coming year we are to embark on a Form-Base Code, which I am VERY excited about, and it will be another community-based project. Our general plan was so successful because the city was committed to it being a community-based project.

A Form-Based Code is powerful alternative to conventional city zoning. It is a development regulation that promotes high-quality public space by using the physical form, instead of separation of uses (i.e., much of our suburbs in East Vallejo, miles and miles of homes, very car-dependent). A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.

This Form-Based Code could foster the redevelopment of much of our vacant and dilapidated commercial and strip-retail properties. This process even has a development industry term, "Gray-Fill." I would like to encourage conversion of these into live/work/retail, and since much of the strip-retail is along our transit corridors, we could work with SolTrans to make sure these developments are served well by our bus-system. Having Factory\_OS in our city is also very exciting, perhaps they could be a partner in these redevelopment projects.

Factory\_OS is already partnering with the City to build Permanent Supportive Housing for the homeless Vallejoans on Sacramento Street, which could house up to 150 residents. Unfortunately, it will take time to build, but it is very important that we use our limited funds to serve the homeless in the most effective way.

Getting folks in housing, and then treating any mental-health or substance use issues they may have and stabilizing their lives—known as “Housing First” is much more effective than emergency shelters, which have rules that many homeless folks can’t adhere to, such as abstaining from drug and alcohol use, or banning of pets.

The Permanent Supportive Housing uses PB Funds and will need much other funding to be successful. The project costs are anticipated to total \$ 5,660,016 by the time the housing is complete.

The City purchased the Sacto Street property for \$1,124,000; \$632K was PB money. Additional funds were HOME (Federal) Funds: \$469,000 and CDBG (also Federal) funds: \$23K

We will also be taking a 1,600,000 loan from State of California Low and Moderate-Income Housing Asset Fund (Former Redevelopment)

And we are also using three sources of HUD Federal Subsidies totaling \$2.9 million.

I list all these costs because it is difficult for a city to build housing for the homeless. This list doesn’t even include the services needed once built, these are only hard costs. And finding the right property is a challenge. The city has a concentration of low-income residents in our heritage neighborhoods, and that hinders the capital investment that some of our grand old homes and downtown require.

Salt Lake City, Utah’s permanent supportive housing program is successful because the development looks good, and it is away from the environment where they were homeless, and where they perhaps had access to drugs, alcohol or other substance they may have been using. San Francisco invests more funds to end homelessness and yet there are still so many living on the streets. I used to volunteer for a man with AIDS who lived in a Single Room Only (SRO) hotel, and his buddies that drank were only a staircase away to the sidewalk. His health was terrible and yet the temptation to drink was always there.

I have a family member who was homeless, and I am one of the trustees of a trust we set up to move this person into housing and address the mental-health issues that hinder employment. The homeless need social work programs to help them reconnect with loved ones who may want to reconnect. I was able to reconnect my client with AIDS to his family—who at one point rejected him due to his sexuality. That was years prior and the family deeply regretted it. They took him back and he was so happy to go, where he could live out his last few months in comfort.

The council recently approved the Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance. I asked that compatibility with the existing structure and the neighborhood be considered, because we still want a good product, and, since I asked that the ordinance be reviewed in two years to make sure potential absentee landlords weren't renting substandard housing.

We also need to reduce permitting costs for infill – vacant lots are an attractive nuisance; a place for dumping and generally not maintained by the owners without code-enforcement action. Reducing permit fees for infill will help make building projects pencil-out and encourage investment.

I think the council should also consider some type of rent stabilization; people are being driven out of rentals – especially vulnerable folks such as seniors.

**2. How can we move to a more proactive approach to economic development and rational land use planning that provides for the health and well being of the citizens of Vallejo, the economic prosperity of residents and City employees, and stewardship of the environment?**

Over the past several years, and because we had the support of the Vallejo community through Measures B, C and V, the City Council had the funds to invest in Economic Development. We were able to expand our staff from one to six, and develop various and aggressive marketing, with a reach far outside Vallejo.

We created resources for those interested in developing in our city — comprehensive information with great features about Vallejo, easily accessible in the form of [www.choosevallejo.com](http://www.choosevallejo.com).. Check out the YouTube channel!: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CityofVallejo>

Under my leadership, we also invested the sales taxes in a desperately needed new General Plan and included the community in the policy-making and goal-setting process. This was done via the General Plan Working Group (GPWG)—consisting of Vallejo Residents—which was formed to guide direction to the process, and to communicate the process to their friends and neighbors. After the City and GPWG's three-year rigorous process, our [award-winning new General Plan](#) is complete.

This plan aligned our outdated plans with the Community's 21st Century vision. The Plan—our roadmap for City growth and renaissance—clearly shows interested developers the type of healthy industries, enterprises, development and neighborhoods that we want and where, that I will continue to champion for Vallejo in my next term on City Council.

In the coming year, the City will be embarking on revamping our zoning-code, and I will insist on a similar process, which includes Vallejo residents.

It is exciting that we are seeing the fruits of this labor. I have contributed to the City of Vallejo's exceptional success bringing new businesses to Vallejo that are compatible with our existing strengths in light industry and manufacturing, tourism, health services, and higher education. Mare Island has recently seen enormous successes: [Factory OS](#), [Savage & Cooke](#), [Film Mare Island](#), [Mare Island Dry Docks](#), [Alstom](#), We recently awarded exclusive rights to negotiate with the [Nimitz Group](#) for 157 acres on North Mare Island, which envisions Film Mare Island Film Studio, wine production and retail tasting room, commercial office space for the high tech, educational and green manufacturing industries, retail storefronts with restaurants and a pedestrian walkway/community park along the Napa River.

[California Maritime Academy](#), [Touro University](#), [Solano Community College](#), [Kaiser Healthcare](#), [Sutter Solano Medical Center](#), and [La Clinica](#), along with other current and new businesses compatible with our existing strengths, continue to expand. California Maritime is bursting at the seams as their lucrative degrees attract more and more students. These are all examples of growth in our local economy under my leadership.

During my tenure on council, I have sent a clear message that we want and welcome new, 21st century businesses, those who contribute to a healthy economy, provide healthy and abundant jobs for our residents, and sustain a healthy environment for our community, and I will continue to do this in my next term.

### **3. How should the Vallejo Climate Action Plan inform decisions regarding future economic development proposals?**

In 2006, I was a part of a group that sued the City of Vallejo and Callahan Development because of the lack of water conservation and green building practices.

One of the biggest contributors to climate change is burning fossil fuels. Reducing commutes by creating good, living-wage jobs locally and creating transit-oriented development are the City's most powerful ways to reduce carbon emissions and impact climate change. Vallejo has one of very few precincts in the Bay Area that is eligible for Green House Gas Reduction Funds for tree-planting. The Student Conservation Association was awarded funds to plant trees in Vallejo, and I am currently assisting them in locating City, GVRD and Vallejo School District public spaces for tree planting (you can see some in the Carquinez Heights park in South Vallejo). The trees are planted by Vallejo Highschool students who are paid.

I want to bring Community Choice Aggregation to Vallejo (a way to buy cheaper and greener energy for residents by the City). I recently attended a workshop on

CCA. Benicia is the only city in Solano County that participates in CCA and I'd like to add us.

Our new General Plan also incorporates and strengthens the City's Climate Action Plan, in particular, in the Natural Resources section, and when the form-based code is drafted, it must include Climate Action Plan initiatives, and policies/requirements such as LEED design.

The process of "gray-fill" is also important, to create transit-oriented housing and reuse existing building structures.

The Resilience by Design team that developed "The Grand Bayway" are very interested in seeing that plan realized and we are connecting them to the Nimitz Group in the hopes that there can be collaboration on this vision.

#### **4. How can we streamline the permitting process for small businesses wanting to locate or relocate in Vallejo?**

Permitting is a robust process because of multiple ordinances, regulations and requirements involved. We must make sure that our permitting process is robust and takes all these requirements into account when a customer initially interfaces with the planning counter.

The City needs to ensure that there is robust communication between the various departments that are involved in the permitting process. I believe some silos exist, and applicants are given different direction, sometimes after they have already started the process. Adding staff to the planning department is important, sometimes silos are created because there isn't time to break them down.

For years there have been complaints about inefficiency and expense in Vallejo's permitting process. The new City Manager has committed to fix it. He should start by examining the entire process, identify any bottlenecks and silos, and redesign the process to be as efficient as possible. I don't think the city incorporates technology as well as it could, and I'd like to see online permitting and e-tracking systems. Clear written documentation/information about the process must be developed, and staff must have a shared understanding about the process. Applicants must be provided accurate and all information/requirements at the very beginning of the application process, so that they know what is needed and what to expect. Staff do not perform well in a system that doesn't function well, and we have to improve the system before we can improve accountability and raise expectations of staff. We need to look at our permit fees and make sure they align with nearby cities, although we will need to prepare for a potential loss in revenue if the examination of fees warrants fee reductions.

## **5. How can the City help improve services to senior residents?**

I reviewed the Florence Douglas lease a few years ago, and while this is not a quick fix, that lease needs to be reviewed when the term is up, to ensure that the subsidized rent they receive from the City translates into the most effective services for the most people. I also would prefer that Florence Douglas be managed by GVRD; I think that could reduce costs, expand transparency since board meetings are open to the public and noticed, and possible expansion of programs via other GVRD programs.

The city has the ability to provide services with Community Development Block Grant funds, for meals especially – this requires viable non-profits to partner,

It is incredibly frustrating that the Area Agency on Aging has suddenly closed their doors. The city has no role in overseeing non-profits; that is a state role. However, if we provide funds to an organization, we should be able to require audit statements from them, so that we can see how they are performing as an agency and if they're viable. This has to be written into the initial contract.

The City may also be able to create opportunity sites to build senior housing and encouraging development by reducing fees. A few market rate senior housing developments are in various stages of development, and we have quite a few subsidized senior housing projects, but we will likely need more in the future.

## **6. How can the City get more involved in county level planning and delivery of mental health services?**

I worked in AIDS Services non-profits for 14 years, and my organization was funded by the County of San Francisco to provide HIV/AIDS Services, as governments are not efficient providers of many mental health services. City governments oversee land-use and public safety services; federal funding for mental health services goes to counties.

Many homeless folks suffer from mental-health issues. The City has entered into a Joint Powers Agreement with the County and other Solano County Cities, to create coordinated entry for homeless folks seeking services. It is of utmost importance that we have accurate Point-in-Time counts as that is how federal funding is allocated. We also might consider the creation of a local non-profit with one-time start-up fees. Volunteer groups are definitely a needed part of the fabric of homeless services, however, they are not eligible for funding. Caminar out of San Mateo provides outreach to homeless in Vallejo through their offices on Tuolumne Street; however, I would like to see robust local non-profits trained in homeless mental health services that can fundraise here.

Creation of the Housing First Model on Sacramento Street will also provide avenues for new funding. Eden Housing is able to leveraging funds for the supportive services they'll provide, and federal funds for mental health services to homeless folks are connected to the Housing First model.

## **7. What is your experience in building community organizations and social activism?**

I have been involved in social activism all my life and I am a do-er. I was influenced by my Great Aunt Mary's work as a suffragette in Britain. She was a well-respected matriarch in my family and her work for a woman's right to vote was a great example to me on how important critical thinking is, questioning authority and protesting against unfairness.

I have been deeply involved in a Woman's Right to Choose; I organized "dialing for dollars" (fundraising calls) for NARAL in Boston, and the "ironing boards" to pass out information to the public. I have been deeply involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS; several men in my art college contracted AIDS and it made me so angry that Ronald Reagan did nothing. I pursued a finance job in AIDS Service non-profits so that my financial expertise could support a good cause and I became a "peer-support" volunteer to assist folks who were dying of AIDS. I was partnered with a gentleman, Rod, and I did his laundry and cleaned his apartment every Tuesday for a year until he died, as his "practical support volunteer." After Rod died, I was partnered with Mike, as his "emotional support volunteer," I hung out with him every week, and often talked with him on the phone about his life and his fears. I hosted a volunteer-support groups for other peer-support volunteers to share and discuss their experiences, because it was a painful and stressful time.

In Vallejo, I was on the Steering Committee of the Vallejoans for Community Planned Renewal, leadership of the group that coordinated the effort to stop the LNG Plant. I worked on several political campaigns, and I wrote and reported extensively about Vallejo City Council on the website Vallejo Independent Bulletin. I built financial systems for the Vallejo Artist Guild and the Mira Theatre Guild, and I successfully wrote grants and fundraising letters for both organizations. As the Vice President for the Vallejo Heights Neighborhood Association, I wrote their monthly newsletter for three years, because I wanted folks to know how great Vallejo is!

## **8. There has been a big push recently for more charter schools. How do you respond to the criticism that these institutions draw resources out of an already impoverished public school system and lead to further segregation and stratification of educational opportunity based on ethnicity and economic status?**

This is a real challenge and because I don't have kids, it is something I haven't had to personally consider. I hear terrible stories about Vallejo Schools but also hear great success stories.

Charter Schools offer an option for parents who don't want to send their kids to our regular public schools, and even though it's a lottery, charter school students are expected to get a lot of support from the parents; and some parents are not able to do this for various reasons. Children taken out of the regular schools leave behind kids who don't have that option, and as I understand, the students left behind may have higher needs and less parental support; unfortunately, these are kids that do require more funding per student to be successful.

I would be more supportive of charter schools if they were more focused on special needs kids, and if they could leverage private funds that are additive to schools, not taking away from current funding, especially ADA.

**9. How effectively do you think the School Board operates now and do you have any recommendations to improve its efficacy?**

There seems to be conflicts that play out in the meetings and I do think mediation and team-building could be useful, if school board members are willing to engage in the process.

The board sets the tone for the district. No matter what disagreements there are, they need to be done respectfully as much as possible.