

# Santa Monica Democratic Club

## 2022 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in the Santa Monica Democratic Club endorsement. Candidates seeking the endorsement of our Club must complete and return the following questionnaire.

Note that only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration.

Please send the completed questionnaire to [smdemocrats@gmail.com](mailto:smdemocrats@gmail.com) by 11:59pm on August 26, 2022. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis as the questionnaires are returned.

Submitting this questionnaire constitutes acknowledgment that its contents are now part of the public record and may be reproduced and distributed by the Santa Monica Democratic Club.

### General Information

Candidate Name: *Ellis Raskin*

Email Address: [ellis@electellis.org](mailto:ellis@electellis.org)

Phone Number: (424) 256-8810

Candidate's Current Occupation: *Attorney*

Candidate's Employer: *Hanson Bridgett LLP*

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate): *Aaron Spradlin (aaron@i77strategies.com)*

What qualifications do you bring to this office?

*My professional experience as an environmental attorney and City of Santa Monica Commissioner make me uniquely qualified to serve on the Santa Monica City Council. I currently serve as Vice Chair of the Santa Monica Planning Commission, and I previously served on the Santa Monica Urban Forest Task Force. In those positions, I have worked collaboratively with current (and former) City Councilmembers and officials from a broad range of City departments to address challenges affecting our City. I have been fighting on the front lines to protect renters and to fight evictions and displacement, especially in the Pico Neighborhood (where I live as a renter). I have also been a steadfast advocate for common-sense solutions to address homelessness and sustainability.*

*In my work as an attorney, I regularly advise public agencies and other stakeholders in a broad range of matters. I currently serve as Special Counsel for the City of Millbrae, where I advise the City on matters involving land use, community development, and long-range planning. I also represent other public agencies (including, for example, transit agencies and water districts) in various matters involving community development, urban planning, and public transparency laws. My work has helped save critically-threatened habitat in the Santa Monica Mountains, I have protected coastal access, and I have helped secure new affordable housing opportunities for disadvantaged Californians.*

Why are you running?

*I am running because our city needs bold, progressive leadership to address ongoing challenges. Between the climate crisis, homelessness, and existential threats to rent control, we need leaders who have the skills and experience to make an impact beginning with their first day on the job. I have been fighting on the front lines to defend our city's renters and to protect progressive values, and I will use my position as a City Councilmember to help build a sustainable, progressive, and inclusive city.*

What are the top issues of your campaign? How do you plan to address those issues once elected?

- 1. Fight for the strongest possible protections for renters, including new rent subsidies and emergency rent relief programs.*
- 2. Implement common-sense programs to address homelessness by (a) ensuring that our first responders have the resources they need to provide services to individuals experiencing mental health crises and (b) coordinating with regional partners to address systematic, region-wide causes of the ongoing homelessness crisis.*
- 3. Ensure that our City is prepared to address climate change and our ongoing drought through comprehensive sustainability programs.*

Please list all of your individual and/or organizational endorsements.

- 1. Sue Himmelrich, Santa Monica Mayor (Note: titles are for identification purposes only)*
- 2. Denny Zane, Former Santa Monica Mayor and Co-Chair of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights*
- 3. Patricia Hoffman, Former President of Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education and Former Co-Chair of Santa Monicans for Renters Rights*

How long have you lived in Santa Monica? Where else have you lived, and why did you live there?

*I have lived as a renter in the Pico Neighborhood since 2015. I moved here after attending law school in San Francisco, California.*

Will you pledge to serve on City Council for your entire four year term?

Yes.

## **Party / Activism**

How long have you been a registered Democrat? Have you ever been registered as a member of another political party, or as Decline To State? If so, which party and why?

*I registered as a Democrat in 2020. Prior to 2020, I was not registered to vote with any party. I described myself as an independent progressive democrat, much like Bernie Sanders. That being said, I have always supported progressive values and policies, and I almost always voted for candidates who were Democrats. When I did not vote for Democrats, I voted for Green Party candidates.*

What is your experience with political activism? Have you ever volunteered or worked for a political campaign other than your own, and if so, in what capacity were you involved?

*I have been a life-long activist for progressive causes, and I have worked on a number of campaigns, both as an attorney and as a community activist. Most recently, I volunteered for the campaign to vote "no" on the attempted recall of Governor Newsom (I knocked on doors here in Santa Monica). I have also phone banked with the Westside Democratic HQ. I have volunteered for a range of other progressive causes, and I have worked on ballot measures in other*

*communities that have protected coastal access and promoted environmental disclosure laws. For example, in 2017, I worked alongside various stakeholders in Redondo Beach to campaign for a voter initiative (Measure C) that protected coastal parkland from being converted into a shopping mall.*

Which political candidates have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible.

*I have supported and endorsed a broad range of progressive candidates. On a national level, I have endorsed and supported Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Ted Lieu, Jamie Raskin, and others. Here in California, I have supported and endorsed Gavin Newsom, Rob Bonta, Eleni Kounalakis, Ricardo Lara, and others, including Santa Monica's own Ben Allen.*

*I have supported a number of Santa Monica City Council candidates, including incumbents in the 2020 election. In that same election, I supported Caroline Torosis and Anastasia Foster for the Rent Board. I also supported the prevailing candidates in the School Board race.*

Have you ever signed for or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official from office? If so, please list the name(s) of the officials and why you felt they should be recalled.

*No.*

Please list any organizations with which you are a member, including any leadership position you have held in each organization.

*Vice Chair, Santa Monica Planning Commission  
Chair, Santa Monica Alliance for the Future  
Member, Political Committee, Sierra Club Angeles Chapter*

Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found here:

<https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CDP-Platform-2022-FINAL-1-1.pdf>

List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree. (This is in no way a litmus test for our endorsement; however, because the party delegates have worked so hard on every word of this platform document, we believe it will be a helpful guide to comprehend the policy differences between each candidate.)

*I have read the Platform and I agree with almost all items, though I'm sure further debate may arise as to how to best implement some of the goals. My minor quibbles include:*

- *“Support the design and implementation of a single, environmentally-sound technology system that will collect and distribute fees for the use of roads, parking, and transit that is both economically fair and convenient and protects user privacy and the interests of low-income users.”*
  - *First of all, we need to work toward a car-free future. But that being said, aside from universally applicable surge pricing and universal tolls, I do not believe that road users should be able to pay for the special privilege of traveling in express lanes.*
- *“Work to ensure that freeway expansion projects are subordinate to more sustainable alternatives that will result in more jobs and more economic growth.”*

- *I do not support any freeway expansion projects.*

## **Campaign Finance**

Please indicate Yes or No to the following statements:

1. I pledge not to take contributions from oil, gas, and coal industry executives, lobbyists, and PACs.

*I have not and will not accept donations from individuals or organizations that conduct activities that are antithetical to social or environmental justice, or organizations that do not align with my progressive values. For example, I will not accept donations from the oil and gas companies that have a history of causing pollution (or their executives, lobbyists, PACs, etc.).*

2. I pledge not to take contributions from police or law enforcement unions, lobbyists, and PACs.

*See the prior response. I have not and will not accept donations from law enforcement agencies or organizations (or their officers, lobbyists, etc.) that do not align with my progressive values.*

3. I pledge not to take contributions from development firms, lobbyists, and PACs.

*See the responses above. I have not and will not accept donations from individuals or organizations that conduct activities that are antithetical to social or environmental justice, or organizations that do not align with my progressive values. This includes development firms and their lobbyists, PACs, etc.*

If you answered No to any of the above contribution questions, please explain here:

*See above.*

## **City Governance**

What is your brief assessment of how City Council has functioned over the past two years?

*We have faced innumerable challenges of the past two years, and I am disappointed by the acrimony that has emerged in public discourse. I am also disappointed that some of our leaders have not been advocates for progressive values. I am hopeful that we will make a renewed commitment to civility and good governance in the future.*

Do you believe we should keep the current system of seven at-large council seats? What other type of representation would you be interested in exploring?

*I am ambivalent, but any change needs to occur through a public process with the support of the voters. My personal preference is for ranked-choice voting.*

Do you support the elimination of the City Manager position and/or the creation of an empowered, directly elected Mayor of Santa Monica?

*I support the creation of an empowered, directly-elected mayoral position, but we would need to carefully balance the Mayor's authority with other appointed top-level City administrators.*

*Oakland's system of City Government, for example, is one model that may be effective in Santa Monica.*

Do you favor any changes to our City Charter as a means to make the city government more democratic?

*I support all measures that promote maximal transparency and open government. I also support institutional reforms that make City Council positions a full-time job (or, at the very least, give City Councilmembers full-time support staff).*

Are top city staffers' salaries too high, and is this a potential source for balancing the City budget?

*No. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit top-level talent to City jobs. We need to offer competitive salaries to ensure that our City is appropriately staffed.*

Should each City Council member have their own paid staffer, and/or should Council be a full time job?

*Yes, see above.*

## **Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion**

In what ways can the City of Santa Monica ensure that, in a real, practical sense, Black Lives Matter in our community?

*We need to address the institutional and structural bases of racism in our community, and we need to confront our racist past. We need to ensure that the Black community is empowered and appropriately represented in City government. We need to listen to Black voices, and we need to make a serious commitment to providing reparations to Black families that were displaced from our City.*

In what ways can the City of Santa Monica better protect its undocumented residents?

*We need to ensure that all residents, regardless of immigration status, are protected from discrimination and have a meaningful opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, and secure environment. Local law enforcement should not enforce immigration policies that tear apart families or displace longtime residents, unless there is an overriding public safety concern.*

How do you plan to (in the moment) counteract any and all observed possible acts of microaggressions towards Women, African Americans, Hispanics, LGBTQ and others of marginalized communities from your fellow Councilmembers or members of the public? What is your experience in dealing with these situations?

*We need to address the institutional and structural bases of discrimination in our community, and we need to confront the history of discrimination in our community. I am committed to being an anti-racist in all my endeavors, and I will continue to learn and listen.*

What are the most significant environmental justice issues in Santa Monica, and how will you address them?

*Climate change and climate-related conflicts will cause millions (if not billions) of deaths and it may devastate the global economy. We need to do everything we can on a local level to support sustainability, and we need to insulate ourselves from the global impacts of this climate crisis.*

*As a member of the Planning Commission, I have already started the long process of working with my colleagues and other stakeholders in Santa Monica to conduct a comprehensive review of building code provisions that will need to be updated to align with local, regional, and statewide sustainability goals. We need to use all tools in our tool belt to address climate change. We will likely need to undertake a massive overhaul of citywide energy infrastructure over the next decade, so we need to begin the planning process immediately.*

*Climate change requires comprehensive solutions. We need to get people off the road, which means providing new workforce housing opportunities in the city, and we need to minimize GHG impacts associated with imported water.*

What specific initiatives to increase diversity and promote inclusion among City staff are you interested in pursuing, and how will you work with the City Manager to implement these policies?

*We need to make a concerted effort to recruit BIPOC and other minority staff members at all levels of City government. We need to empower women and working mothers. And as noted above, we need to address the institutional and structural bases of discrimination in our community, and we need to confront the history of discrimination in our community.*

## **Housing / Development**

What steps would you propose to address the homelessness crisis in the City of Santa Monica?

*We need to provide additional resources to individuals experiencing homelessness. Approximately 75% of homeless individuals in Santa Monica experience some form of mental illness or addiction (which is closely associated with co-occurring mental health issues). I will ensure that our City allocates the resources that are necessary to staff our police and fire departments with trained mental health professionals who can proactively reach out to individuals experiencing homelessness to get them the treatment they need. Santa Monica is not alone in its struggle to fill the ranks of its police department, and we need to invest in the services of specialized recruiters who will help us fill our ranks with mental health professionals. The City also needs enter into reciprocal relationships with public health agencies (ideally through a public-private partnership and/or a joint powers arrangement with neighboring jurisdictions) to ensure that individuals get the help they need, rather than simply being released back onto the streets with no assistance.*

*We also need to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness are provided safe and appropriate emergency shelter space. We will also need to work with regional partners to ensure the availability of longer-term housing solutions (including permanent supportive housing) and other social services.*

What is your philosophy on the appropriate scope of development that should be approved in Santa Monica?

*The housing crisis is a statewide and regional issue. Santa Monica needs to comply with California's Housing Element Law, and we need to zone for the affordable units assigned to us through the latest RHNA allocation. There are strict consequences for noncompliance. The 6th Cycle Housing Element, which I helped draft as a Planning Commissioner, provides a pathway for meeting our RHNA goals during this Housing Element Cycle. But we also need to carefully protect against development strategies that will cause further gentrification and displacement.*

In what specific ways has Santa Monica failed to address the housing affordability crisis? What concrete steps would you take on Council to better address the crisis?

*Santa Monica has been a historical leader in developing affordable housing, but we need to continue to ensure that families are not priced out of Santa Monica (as so many have been in recent years), and we need to provide new workforce housing opportunities.*

*We need to ensure that we zone for sufficient capacity to meet our RHNA allocations. We should prioritize development along transit-rich corridors and in proximity to Expo Line stations. But in doing so, we need to ensure that we are also facilitating the production of the affordable housing units that have been assigned to Santa Monica per our RHNA allocation.*

How can the City of Santa Monica meet its next RHNA cycle goal of 6,153 new deed restricted affordable housing units for low and moderate income households and 2,721 new market rate housing units?

*The 6th Cycle Housing Element, which I helped draft as a Planning Commissioner, provides a pathway for meeting our RHNA goals during this Housing Element Cycle. We will need to work with partners at the regional and statewide level to leverage all possible funding opportunities (including, but not limited to, surplus funds from the state budget). Realistically, we will not be able to use these alternative strategies to replace the funds that would be generated by Measure GS.*

What is your assessment of the 2022 Housing Element proposed by City Council?

*As noted above, the 6th Cycle Housing Element, which I helped draft as a Planning Commissioner, provides a pathway for meeting our RHNA goals during this Housing Element Cycle.*

The Rent Board and its staff have committed to hosting a discussion about the city's rent control law with the community at large. The City has always complemented the Rent Charter's mission in the areas of the City's jurisdiction, including: Tenant Harassment, Code Enforcement, Land Use (AirBnb & corporate rentals laws) and Tenant Relocation Benefits. How would you enhance or change these areas of tenant protections on City Council?

*We need to continue to enforce strict rent protections, including those referenced above. I would not change them, but I would like to expand these programs and expand funding for enforcement of violations.*

What do you see as the mission or purpose of Rent Control in a city where 70% of the population are renters?

*By enshrining the Rent Control Board's authority in the City Charter, the voters who adopted the Rent Control Law ensured that the law cannot be changed unless it is the will of the electorate to do so. We must continue to work to protect the Rent Control Board's independent authority.*

## **Public Safety**

What is your assessment of the role of the Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission in Santa Monica?

*The PSROC is an important forum for dialogue, feedback, and public reflection. It should engage with public safety officers in a collaborative manner.*

What is your assessment of the OCR Report regarding the police response on May 31, 2020, and what changes to City and SMPD policy should be implemented in light of its findings?

*The report highlights the importance of clear leadership structures, as well as the importance of clearly established policies for handling similar events in the future. We, as a community, need to empower our first responders to be able to work collaboratively with the community to build a safe, strong, and inclusive city.*

What steps do you think need to be taken in the next two years to reduce crime in the City? If this requires additional funding, how should it be funded?

*As noted above, I will ensure that our City allocates existing resources from our general fund that are necessary to staff our police and fire departments with trained mental health professionals who can proactively reach out to individuals experiencing homelessness to get them the treatment they need. Santa Monica is not alone in its struggle to fill the ranks of its police department, and we need to invest in the services of specialized recruiters who will help us fill our ranks with mental health professionals. The City also needs enter into reciprocal relationships with public health agencies (ideally through a public-private partnership and/or a joint powers arrangement with neighboring jurisdictions) to ensure that individuals get the help they need, rather than simply being released back onto the streets with no assistance.*

Is the Santa Monica Police Department presently well funded? Should more or less of the City budget be allocated to hiring SMPD officers?

*See the prior response. Existing resources can be directed toward ensuring that our first responders have the resources they need.*

Do you support efforts to promote investment of general fund monies previously allocated toward armed police response to instead go toward mental health services and other unarmed departments when appropriate?

*Yes, see the prior responses.*

Do you support or oppose efforts to recall District Attorney George Gascón? Do you support DA Gascón's special directives on restorative justice? If not, what approach should be taken?

*I do not support the recall of DA Gascón, and I support his goal of implementing restorative justice policies.*

Was the City Council justified in choosing *not* to implement an indoor vaccine mandate during the omicron surge in January/February 2022? What was your position at the time?

*The mandate should have been implemented.*

## **Mobility**

Should Santa Monica encourage more pedestrian-only streets like the Third Street Promenade? If so, on which streets would you consider this?

*Yes, I think Main Street should be considered as a candidate, and perhaps Ocean Avenue. I am also in favor of partial (e.g., weekend) closures and the statewide slow streets initiatives.*

Do you support additional Metro rail lines being built in Santa Monica, and if so, which potential projects do you support? Which regions of the City would you like to see serviced?

*Yes. We need additional north-south transit connections, and additional access in the southernmost parts of the City.*

Should shared mobility devices and apps (eg, scooters, e-bikes) be encouraged or discouraged in Santa Monica?

*They should be encouraged. We need to create realistic and viable programs that direct users and residents toward public transit, bicycle, micro-mobility, and shared-mobility programs.*

Should the overall amount of street parking in Santa Monica be reduced in order to encourage a shift away from cars toward other modes of transportation?

*Yes. Getting people out of cars will require a range of strategies, and it will require careful collaboration with partners at the local and statewide level. My long term vision involves a substantial reinvestment in our streetscape to make our streets and public spaces inviting and accessible to non-automobile users. Some of those streetscape improvements have already proven successful, including the ongoing work on 17th Street and the Colorado Blvd. bikeways. I would like to implement strategies that have been successful across the globe, including potentially reimagining downtown streets and public villas and public paseos.*

## **Ballot Measures**

Do you support California Proposition 1? Yes

Do you support the citizens initiative ballot measure which would tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue for affordable housing, rent subsidy, and SMMUSD? Why/why not? *Yes. This is a critically important measure, and I have been out on the front lines advocating for its approval.*

Do you support the competing council-approved ballot measure which would tax real estate transactions over \$8M and provide revenue into the general fund? Why/why not? *No. That's not to say that I wouldn't want additional funding for parks, libraries, etc. But we cannot risk undermining Measure GS' chances of success. Prior to the July 26 City Council meeting, I*

*proposed an alternative form of Measure DT that would have re-cast Measure DT as a parcel tax (thus, it would not have competed with Measure GS). Unfortunately, that alternative proposal did not receive support from a majority of councilmembers.*

Do you support the rent control ballot measure which would permanently lower the rent control General Adjustment cap from 6% down to 3%? Yes

Do you support the SMC bond measure? Yes

Do you support the 1% transient occupancy tax ballot measure? Yes

Do you support the cannabis business tax ballot measure? Yes

## **Federal Legislation**

Do you support the **Inflation Reduction Act of 2022** which just passed Congress? It compromises on many of the important provisions included in the previous Build Back Better Act. Do you think it's good enough?

*Yes, I support it. It's much better than the alternative (i.e., no legislation). The compromises are a tough pill to swallow, but all things considered, I support it.*

What do you think of legislation proposed since Roe v Wade was struck down – designed to protect other previously assumed fundamental freedoms? Notably: the **Right to Contraception Act** (HR 8373) and the **Respect for Marriage Act** (HR 8404) which would codify into federal law the rights for access to contraception and same-sex and interracial marriage.

*I support the legislation, though I don't think we should back down from the fundamental principle that these rights are enshrined in our constitution. That said, we need to do everything possible to protect reproductive freedom and marriage equality.*

Do you think we need the **Protecting Access to Medication Abortion Act** (S 4467)? It defends access to medication abortion in states where the right to an abortion is still protected.

*I support the legislation, though I don't think we should back down from the fundamental principle that the right to bodily autonomy is enshrined in our constitution.*

Do you support the **Medicare For All Act** (HR 1976)?

Yes.

Whether you support that bill or not, how can we ensure universal, single payer health care coverage for all Santa Monicans?

*We can provide subsidies for certain medical expenses, and we can help bring down the cost of living (including rent burdens) citywide.*

## **Additional Questions**

What steps must Santa Monica take to enact a Green New Deal in our own city, if any?

*We need to support businesses that are engaged in the green economy, and we need to work with local, regional, and statewide partners to implement sustainability programs locally.*

*As noted above, as a member of the Planning Commission, I have already started the long process of working with my colleagues and other stakeholders in Santa Monica to conduct a comprehensive review of building code provisions that will need to be updated to align with local, regional, and statewide sustainability goals. We need to use all tools in our tool belt to address climate change. We will likely need to undertake a massive overhaul of citywide energy infrastructure over the next decade, so we need to begin the planning process immediately.*

Although marijuana is legal in California for recreational use, there are currently no dispensaries operating in Santa Monica. Why is this the case, and should that be changed? If dispensaries are allowed in Santa Monica, what processes would govern the business approval process to ensure equity?

*Regulatory burdens have prevented dispensaries from opening. We need to implement an equitable, just, and transparent process that allows dispensaries to open their doors in Santa Monica without unnecessary regulatory red tape.*

What role do you believe the Santa Monica Democratic Club should have in our City?

*It should continue to be a leading voice for protecting and promoting progressive values and civil discourse in our community.*

If elected, how would you attempt to interact with the Santa Monica Democratic Club and other political organizations to ensure community buy-in on new proposals?

*I will work collaboratively to ensure that we can successfully achieve shared goals and objectives.*