

Santa Monica Democratic Club

2024 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. Only registered Democrats are eligible for our consideration. 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.

Please send the completed questionnaire to smdemocrats@gmail.com by 11:59pm on May 18, 2024. Interview appointment times with our Executive Committee will be scheduled on a first come first served basis for the weekend of May 25/26 as the questionnaires are returned.

None of these questions shall be construed as litmus tests. There are no questions that must be answered a certain way to be considered for our endorsement.

General Information

Candidate Name: *Ellis Raskin*

Email Address: *ellis@electellis.org*

Candidate's Current Occupation: *Attorney*

Candidate's Employer: *Hanson Bridgett LLP*

Campaign Contact Person (if other than candidate): *Ellis Raskin (ellis@electellis.org) or Kay Ambriz (kay@electellis.org)*

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

My track record of success as public advocate and civil leader, as well as my expertise in housing and land use policy, make me uniquely qualified to serve on the Santa Monica City Council.

I serve as the Chair of the Santa Monica Planning Commission, and in my day job, I work as an environmental/land use attorney. I have been recognized as an expert in California housing and land use laws. I advise public agencies and other stakeholders in a broad range of matters involving land use, community development, and long-range planning. 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.

Here in Santa Monica, I have played a key role in shaping our city's land use policies for the 6th Housing Element Cycle. I have stood up to fight evictions, and I have been a steadfast advocate for renters' rights. I have stood on the front lines to support union workers, and I have been a leading voice in promoting sustainability. I serve on the Steering Committee of Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, and I am an elected member of the Executive Committee of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter.

2. Why are you running?

I am running because our city needs bold, progressive leadership to address ongoing challenges. Our city has many issues that must be addressed in the next four years, including (among other things), the affordability crisis, climate crisis, housing shortage, homelessness, our city's budget, threats to rent control, and our need to build a more equitable and inclusive community. And perhaps most significantly, we need leaders with integrity who will take this job seriously and put in the hard work.

We need leaders who have the skills and experience to make an impact beginning with their first day on the job. I will be able to hit the ground running on day one. 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.

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

Here are three of my key goals for the next 2-4 years:

i. Housing, cost of living, and sustainability:

We must do everything in our power to address skyrocketing housing prices and the out-of-control cost of living in Santa Monica. We must fight for the strongest possible protections for renters, including new rent subsidies and emergency rent relief programs. Likewise, we need to create new housing opportunities, especially deed-restricted affordable housing. Achieving these objectives will help address sustainability and environmental goals, which are another key priority for me.

We also need to make sure our leaders are implementing strategies that will meaningfully help our city's unhoused population; we need to ensure that our frontline responders can connect individuals experiencing homelessness with effective social services.

ii. Securing a sound financial future:

We need to ensure that all Santa Monicans are on sound financial footing. We need to restore trust in public government and ensure that Santa Monica remains an attractive destination for businesses and tourists. This will require our public leaders to support labor peace at our hotels, and we need to support creative entrepreneurship across our city. We also need to address long-term structural issues, such as our city's pension liability.

Counterintuitively, hiring more city staff can actually save money in the long run by cutting costs that occur through outsourcing. In the city attorney's office, for example, work done in-house is roughly half the cost of outside legal counsel.

We also need to carefully collaborate with regional, state, and national partners to leverage all available public financing. This will be especially important as we upgrade public infrastructure in advance of the 2028 Olympics.

iii. Decorum and good governance:

We need to restore public trust and a sense of public decorum in city government. We need leaders who will work collaboratively with their colleagues to advance our shared goals. I pledge to lead by example and to prioritize civility as a leader. I also promise to introduce an ethics code during my first term to keep our leaders accountable to the public.

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

My campaign has received support from a broad range of current and former elected and appointed Santa Monica officials, including (but not limited to):

Note that titles are for identification purposes only

*Gleam Davis, Santa Monica Councilmember
Caroline Torosis, Santa Monica Councilmember
Jesse Zwick, Santa Monica Councilmember
Michael Feinstein, Former Santa Monica Mayor
Sue Himmelrich, Former Santa Monica Mayor
Kevin McKeown, Former Santa Monica Mayor
Paul Rosenstein, Former Santa Monica Mayor
Denny Zane, Former Santa Monica Mayor
Anastasia Foster, Santa Monica Rent Board Commissioner
Danny Ivanov, Santa Monica Rent Board Commissioner
Sion Roy, Santa Monica College Trustee
Barry Snell, Santa Monica College Trustee
Patricia Hoffman, Former SMMUSD Board Chair
Jennifer Kennedy, Former SM Rent Board Commissioner and Former Planning Commissioner
Nina Fresco, Santa Monica Planning Commissioner
Leslie Lambert, Santa Monica Planning Commissioner
Shawn Landres, Santa Monica Planning Commissioner
Jim Ries, Santa Monica Planning Commissioner
Kay Ambriz, Former Santa Monica Social Services Commissioner
Natalya Zernitskaya, Former Santa Monica Audit Subcommittee Member
Dan Hall, Santa Monica Pier Board Member
Gerda Newbold, Former Santa Monica Planning Commission Chair
Grace Phillips, Former Santa Monica Urban Forest Task Force Chair*

5. How long have you lived in Santa Monica? Where else have you lived?

I have lived as a renter in the Pico Neighborhood since 2015. I moved here after attending law and graduate school in San Francisco, California. Before that, I lived in the Eagle Rock area of

Los Angeles, where I attended college (at Occidental College). I spent most of my school-age years in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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

Yes.

Campaign Finance

1. How much money have you raised for your campaign to date?

As of the time of submission of this questionnaire, my campaign has raised \$20,470.

2. How much do you intend to raise by Election Day 2024?

Our goal is to raise at least \$80,000.

3. Candidates for local office often choose not to take campaign contributions from particular types of organizations or industries. Are there any such sources from which you would decline donations? If so, which?

I have not and will not accept donations from individuals or organizations that conduct activities that are antithetical to social or environmental justice. For example, I will not accept donations from the oil and gas companies that have a history of causing pollution. I do not intend to accept contributions from individuals, organizations, or any other entities that do not align with my values.

Party / Activism

1. 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.

2. 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. Since 2019, I have served as a member of the Political Committee of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter. As a member of the Political Committee, I have helped the Sierra Club endorse hundreds of progressive environmental champions.

As many of you know, I ran for a seat on the Santa Monica City Council in 2022. While we came close, my campaign fell just short of winning. In addition to promoting my own campaign, I

supported a variety of other progressive candidates and measures in the 2022 election (including, among other things, Measures GS, RC and EM).

In 2021, 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. And in 2020, I supported progressive candidates and measures both in Santa Monica, the broader LA region, and in the nationwide effort to elect Joe Biden.

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.

3. Which political candidates have you endorsed or supported publicly in the past? Please list as many as possible, especially where you endorsed during a contested primary.

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 Gavin Newsom, Rob Bonta, Eleni Kounalakis, Ricardo Lara, and others, including Santa Monica’s own Ben Allen and our representative in the Assembly, Rick Chavez Zbur. I have supported a range of other candidates around the Los Angeles Area, including Lindsey Horvath, Holly Mitchell, and others.

I have been a proud supporter of progressive congressional candidates in contested districts, such as Christy Smith, George Whitesides, Rudy Salas, and others. In this year’s primary election, I was proud to be an early supporter of Laura Friedman in her congressional campaign.

I have supported a number of Santa Monica City Council candidates, including incumbents in the 2020 election and my progressive co-candidates in 2022. I supported Caroline Torosis and Anastasia Foster for the Rent Board in 2020, and I supported Ericka Lesley, Kurt Gonska, and Danny Ivanov in 2022. I also supported the prevailing candidates in the College Board and School Board races in 2020 and 2022.

4. 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.

I have never signed a recall petition, though my law firm represents proponents of recall petitions from time to time (that being said, I don’t believe we have represented any recall campaigns involving statewide officeholders or officeholders in Los Angeles County).

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

My leadership positions have included, among other things (see list on following page):

Santa Monica Appointed Positions:

- i. Santa Monica Planning Commission (Member 2020-present; Vice Chair 2022-2024; Chair 2024-present)*
- ii. Santa Monica Urban Forest Task Force (Member 2017-2020)*

Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights Appointed and Elected Positions:

- iii. Santa Monicans for Renters Rights Steering Committee (Elected to a two-year term in 2023 following an appointment to an unscheduled vacancy earlier in 2023)*

Sierra Club Appointed and Elected Positions:

- iv. Sierra Club Angeles Chapter Executive Committee (Elected November 2023 for a term beginning in January 2024)*
- v. Sierra Club Angeles Chapter Political Committee (2019-Present)*

6. Please confirm that you have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform, as found below. List any items in the CDP Platform with which you disagree. <https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FinalPlatform2024.pdf>

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.*

City Governance

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

We have faced innumerable challenges of the past few years, and I am disappointed by decisions made by certain councilmembers that have been out-of-step with community values, contrary to established facts, and antithetical to the public interest. To give just a few examples of these mis-steps:

- *The decision to kill the investigation into leaks from confidential closed session City Council meetings.*
- *Attempts to silence free speech and public expression through what would have been draconian amendments to the city's noise ordinance (which were targeted at workers exercising their First Amendment rights).*
- *The backlash against inclusive gender-neutral restroom facilities.*
- *Policy decisions to criminalize homelessness.*
- *Opposition to life-saving bicycle and pedestrian protections, as well as other policy decisions that prioritize cars above resident interests and common-sense urbanism.*
- *Attempts to block a science-based, life-saving needle exchange program.*
- *A failed attempt to block nighttime public access to the beach (I helped stop this in coordination with Coastal Commission staff).*
- *Attempts to attack rent control.*

I am especially disappointed by the acrimony that has emerged in public discourse and the lack of decorum that certain councilmembers have demonstrated. I am hopeful that we will make a renewed commitment to civility and good governance in the future.

2. Do you believe we should keep the current system of seven at-large council seats? Why or why not? If not, how would you change this system?

I am ambivalent, but any change needs to occur through a public process with the support of the voters. In fact, I do not believe that the City Council has authority to unilaterally change the electoral process without a vote of the electorate (i.e., through a Charter amendment).

My personal preference is for ranked-choice voting.

3. What other type of changes to our City Charter would you be interested in exploring to make the City government more democratic?

I support all measures that promote maximal transparency and open government. I promise to introduce an ethics code during my first term to keep our leaders accountable to the public. If we are able to adopt an ethics code, we should also appoint an ethics commission that is empowered to provide independent oversight of potential ethical violations.

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). I am also interested in studying whether we should establish an empowered, directly-elected mayoral position, but we would need to carefully balance the Mayor's authority with other appointed top-level City administrators.

4. Should each City Council member have their own paid staffer? Should Council be a full time job?

Yes, see prior response.

5. What changes, if any, should be made to the current structure of boards and commissions in terms of how they are empowered or how members are selected?

First and foremost, we need to ensure that our boards and commissions are staffed with the most qualified candidates; appointment should not be made as political favors. We need to proactively recruit commissioners from marginalized communities with diverse backgrounds to ensure that our city's future leaders reflect the full range of city residents' lived experiences and perspectives.

Transparency and public participation have been challenges for many boards and commissions. We need to create a better record of commission meetings (I have been a leading advocate for securing additional funding to allow for the preparation of long-overdue commission minutes). We need to ensure that there are, at the very least, recordings of all commission meetings, and the city should ensure that members of the public can attend and comment at meetings through remote means.

Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

1. In what concrete ways would you support the City of Santa Monica following through on the promise of the Black Apology?

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.

We need to back up our words with actions. I have been a steadfast proponent of restorative justice programs. I have called for payment of reparations to families that were displaced by the Civic Center and the I-10 freeway. I have also advocated for the removal of the freeway entirely; the land should be returned to displaced families and their descendants. On the Planning Commission, I insisted on including programs in the Housing Element that give priority on affordable housing waitlists to the descendants of families that were displaced by the Civic Center and the I-10 freeway.

Our City's leaders need to listen to marginalized communities, and our leaders need to foster meaningful connections with the leaders of the Santa Monica Black Agenda and other key stakeholders. We also need to make concerted efforts to recruit more Black members of City boards and commissions, and we need to ensure that Black members of our City's professional staff are properly supported.

2. In what form, if any, should reparations be considered for racist wrongs from our city's past? Are there specific examples in our city where you believe this would be an appropriate response?

See the prior response. We should consider all forms of potential reparations, and we should make meaningful efforts to address and compensate, in whatever way we can, the theft of generational wealth from our city's residents. Specifically, I support monetary compensation for

Silas White's family and other families who sadly had homes, businesses, and lives stolen from them by our city.

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.

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.

3. In what ways can the City of Santa Monica 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.

4. 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.

Conning jobs and housing will be crucial. We need to drastically cut our city's carbon emissions by developing meaningful new housing opportunities for workers in our city who often commute several hours each day to support our city's economy.

We need to build safe and inclusive streets where bicyclists and pedestrians are free from traffic violence (it's important to remember that more people die from traffic violence than gun violence in LA County). And we also need to support Big Blue Bus and regional public transit; I ride the bus to and from Planning Commission meetings, and I ride the Metro E Line to my job in Downtown Los Angeles.

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 housing policies and 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 also 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.

5. 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

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

We aren't going to solve homelessness and housing insecurity if we don't build more housing. Data shows that most people experiencing homelessness come from our local community. But we need to direct resources toward shelters, transitional housing, deed-restricted affordable housing with complimentary social services, and other similar housing resources.

Transitional and supportive housing is most effective if it is coupled with additional resources to individuals experiencing homelessness. To give just one example, 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). We need to ensure that we support transitional housing and temporary housing services that are directed at providing resources and health interventions for this vulnerable population. But this is just one part of a much larger puzzle. I will also 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.

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.

Data shows (and I can vouch for this through my personal experience working as a tenants' rights advocate) that one of the most effective methods of combatting homelessness is keeping people in their homes. We need to support programs that provide a right to counsel for residents who are fighting unlawful detainer proceedings, and we need to support funding for emergency rental assistance programs. Programs like Preserving Our Diversity (POD) also help prevent homelessness and displacement.

2. 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?

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. 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.

In order to meet our RHNA goals, we need to do everything possible to incentivize affordable housing production. Inclusionary housing programs are one tool that was included in the 6th Cycle Housing Element for facilitating affordable housing production, but realistically speaking, I don't think inclusionary programs alone will get us the affordable housing numbers that have been assigned to Santa Monica for the 6th Cycle Housing Element. In fact, in the latest report regarding Santa Monica's housing production pipeline (which shows numbers as of November 2023), Santa Monica is well ahead of the number of required market rate units, but it has fallen below the number of required below-market-rate units.

The following chart is from a November 15, 2023 Planning Commission staff report, showing our progress toward meeting 6th Cycle Housing Element goals:

	Approved	Pending	In construction* (count towards 6th Cycle)	RHNA	Remaining
Above Moderate	1,831	2,353	589	2,727	(2,046)
VLI	283	198	128	2,794	2,185
LI	152	80	28	1,672	1,412
Moderate	112	32	68	1,702	1,490
Total # of Units	2,378	2,663	813	8,895	3,041
5,854 Units Expected to Count Towards 6th Cycle HE					

**building permits obtained after April 1, 2021
Excludes projects submitted under Builder's Remedy*

As I noted in the response to the prior question, the simple fact of the matter is that we won't solve our local housing crisis if we don't build more housing at all affordability levels. This will require careful and coordinated land use planning that will necessarily require denser and higher development in some places. Environmentalists universally agree that development standards should facilitate dense urban infill development near transit centers. But as noted above, we won't get the affordable units we need through inclusionary programs alone. We need to leverage public funding sources (e.g., funding created through Measure GS) and other public resources (e.g., public land) to develop the deed-restricted affordable housing we desperately need in our community.

Per state law, we cannot require greater than 15% inclusionary housing ratios without justifying stricter requirements with an economic feasibility analysis. I think we should revisit our previous economic feasibility analyses halfway through the 6th Housing Element cycle, but we should also leverage all available resources (including public funding and public land) to develop meaningful new opportunities for deed-restricted affordable housing in our city. We also need to partner with regional, state, and national leaders to direct new funding resources toward affordable housing production.

I have already taken a leading role in meeting with community stakeholders to ensure that the public understands and participates in our long-term land use planning process. The councilmembers who are elected in 2024 will be the leaders who plan for the upcoming 7th Housing Element Cycle. We need leaders who will ensure that the public has a meaningful opportunity to participate in long-term planning processes, including the upcoming Housing Element Cycle, the next LUCE update, the finalization of our Local Coastal Program, and other long-term planning efforts.

3. 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, though the data shown in the prior response shows that the inclusionary housing programs have not produced the amount of affordable housing we need.

Environmentalists universally agree that development standards should facilitate dense urban infill development near transit centers. Accordingly, we should maximize new housing opportunities in close proximity to E Line stations and along transit-rich boulevards.

4. What should the balance be between state and local control of zoning?

Statewide housing streamlining laws (including SB 330, SB 35, the Housing Accountability Act, Permit Streamlining Act, ADU streamlining measures, and others) have proven necessary to remediate housing shortfalls in recalcitrant local jurisdictions that have failed to produce sufficient housing opportunities. Santa Monica has historically been a leader in producing affordable housing, but these statewide laws are nevertheless necessary to address a critical statewide problem.

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

Rent Control is a crucial measure for protecting community stability and preserving our community's diversity. Like many renters, I would not be here today were it not for rent control.

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.

I have stood on the front lines to protect rent control and renters' rights. One of my first battles as a local activist was to fight the eviction and demolition of 19 rent-controlled units at 21st and Virginia in the Pico Neighborhood. Despite years of threats from property owners, those units are still standing today. My early activism eventually connected me to other leaders in the renters' rights movement, and I am now a member of the Steering Committee of Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights.

When rent control was under attack in 2022, I spoke out at city council meetings (and stayed until 4:30 in the morning) to show our councilmembers that the eyes of the public were watching their moves. And as a planning commissioner, I have supported a broad range of policies that protect renters across Santa Monica.

Santa Monica's system of government is carefully designed to ensure that the city council (and city manager, and city attorney) cannot interfere in the operation of the Rent Control Board. However, I promise to be the strongest possible ally and supporter of the fair and equitable enforcement of our rent control laws. I also look forward to supporting statewide legislation that will help support renters in Santa Monica, such as the Justice for Renters Act.

6. How would you enhance or change tenant protections for renters?

The rent control law is within the jurisdiction of the electorate and their representatives on the Rent Control Board. But we can continue to improve and refine our laws to protect renters. To give you just a few examples, we should adopt a local "right to counsel" ordinance for tenants who are subject to unlawful detainer proceedings, and we should identify new ways to implement emergency rental assistance programs. We also need to strengthen laws that protect tenants from harassment and unsafe living conditions.

7. What is your history of involvement with 2022 Santa Monica Measure GS?

Measure GS is a critically important measure that provides desperately needed funds for affordable housing and education. In 2022, I was out on the front lines advocating for its approval.

For all the reasons discussed above, inclusionary housing programs aren't getting us the affordable housing that we desperately need. Santa Monica needs public revenue streams to bridge the funding gap for affordable housing development. GS helps bridge that gap.

Public Safety

1. 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?

We need to think creatively about how to create just and equitable community policing and public safety. I, for one, support greater attention toward roadway safety. We have seen too

many pedestrian and bicyclists harmed on our streets. In a county where more people die from traffic violence than gun violence, we need to prioritize public safety on our streets.

By embracing equitable 21st Century public safety strategies, which will require careful integration of new technologies, I am confident that we can address our public safety needs within the scope of existing budget allocations (though, of course, the strategies identified above for enhancing city-wide revenues will allow for further expenditures across all city departments).

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.

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

As noted above, I am confident that we can address our public safety needs within the scope of existing budget allocations (though, of course, the strategies identified above for enhancing city-wide revenues will allow for further expenditures across all city departments). We should continue to think holistically about how we can accomplish our public safety objectives in a manner that promotes equity and inclusion.

I understand that as of mid- 2023, there were as many as 50 retirements that were expected within the Police Department within the next few years. These waves of retirements our cyclical, and I understand our city has experienced similar waves of retirements in the past. Our budget process will need to account for this and ensure that we are maximizing forward-thinking 21st Century models of equitable policing.

3. Do you support the LA County Department of Health's needle exchange program as it is currently constructed? What changes, if any, would you suggest for this program?

I support the program, and I spoke out against attempts to stop this program. Evidence has shown that it is an effective, life-saving program. I am not opposed to moving the distribution to another location within Reed Park (perhaps inside the Miles Playhouse), but it is crucial to bring this critical health intervention to where it is most needed.

4. Do you support or oppose the re-election of District Attorney George Gascón? Do you support DA Gascón's special directives on restorative justice? If not, what approach should be taken?

Yes, I support DA Gascon's re-election, and I support his efforts to implement restorative justice programs.

5. Do you support the Public Safety Reform and Oversight Commission's proposal to adopt the same policy on pretextual stops as the LAPD in Santa Monica? Why or why not?

Yes, it is crucial for our community to have meaningful data about pretextual stops so that we can understand the broader implications of whether such stops are disproportionately targeted toward racial minorities or other disadvantaged communities. The public will benefit from daylight and further transparency on this subject.

6. Four years after the start of the pandemic, what is your assessment of the health of the Third Street Promenade? Do you support DTSM Inc's decision to replace the downtown ambassadors with private security? If not, how would you change the current agreement?

We need to work with community partners to continue our ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic (and to prepare for the 2028 Olympics) by ensuring that businesses can thrive downtown and on the Third Street Promenade. We need to proactively address false narratives about crime in Santa Monica, and we need to work with property owners to resolve long-term leasing constraints that have led to downtown vacancies.

We also need to promote labor peace in our city, especially within the local hospitality industry. I was excited to see that the remaining Santa Monica hotels have now reached an agreement with our hotel workers.

I am generally not in support of delegating public safety responsibilities or obligations to private corporations that are not accountable to city government. I also generally do not support the replacement of public-facing ambassadors with private contractors who are either armed or give the impression that they are carrying weapons. For these reasons, I do not support the replacement of the downtown ambassador program.

Mobility

1. 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. There are a broad range of common-sense safety measures we should implement to make our streets safer for pedestrians that don't necessarily involve complete street closures, including installation of speed bumps or other traffic calming measures.

2. What changes should be made to promote safety for bike riders, pedestrians, and other alternate modes of transportation?

There are many things we need to be doing here. We live in a county where more people die from traffic violence than gun violence. There are some simple, cost-effective (and data-driven) strategies to address this. Bike lanes and pedestrian protections (i.e., bulb outs/curb extensions) are obvious examples, but we need to do much more to reduce car dependence in our community. We need to build more homes in Santa Monica so that folks don't need to commute

from far away communities. We need to expand our public transit network, and we need to enhance opportunities for last-mile transit options and micromobility uses.

3. 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 to support extending the Wilshire subway all the way to the ocean (ideally with a connection to the E Line). We also need additional north-south transit connections, and additional access in the southernmost parts of the City.

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

Strongly encouraged. We need to use every tool available to get people out of cars, and micromobility has proven to be an effective tool for accomplishing this goal.

5. Should the overall amount of street parking in Santa Monica be reduced in order to encourage 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 reimaging downtown streets and public villas and public paseos.

Ballot Measures

Do you support the Justice For Renters Act?

Yes! And I have volunteered for the Justice for Renters Act campaign.

Do you support the repeal of Article 34?

Definitely. Article 34 is a vestige of California's racist past. It has frustrated and prevented the construction of desperately-needed affordable housing projects. It needs to be repealed.

Do you support the initiative to require new local taxes to pass by a two-thirds vote?

No, and I am confident the California Supreme Court will issue a ruling on this before it gets to the ballot. Requiring a 2/3 vote is contrary to participatory democracy, and it would undermine crucial funding sources for affordable housing and other important programs.

Do you support the potential measure to amend Prop 47?

I do not support the proposed measure, though I am not entirely opposed to future reasonable refinements to our criminal statutes that meaningfully align public safety with equity. Proposition 47 has proven to effectively reduce prison populations and recidivism, and it has helped ensure that our criminal justice system is implemented in a more just and equitable manner. There are many complex reasons for retail theft and other crimes in California (lack of economic opportunity and lack of affordable housing are some factors that have been discussed by experts), but to solely blame Proposition 47 is misguided.

Do you support the proposed amendments to Measure GS to exempt multifamily housing?

No. I do not support this measure, and it looks like it did not receive the required number of signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Measure GS provides a critical funding source for essential public programs. For all the reasons discussed above, inclusionary housing programs aren't getting us the affordable housing that we desperately need. Santa Monica needs public revenue streams to bridge the funding gap for affordable housing development. GS helps bridge that gap.

Additional Questions

1. Do you support Medicare For All single-payer healthcare?

I support universal healthcare. A "Medicare for All" program is one way to achieve this, though there are other systems of universal healthcare that I believe are both economically viable and necessary.

2. Why should union workers in Santa Monica, especially those in the hospitality industry, trust that you will fight for their jobs?

Since July 2024, I have marched and spoken in support of our city's hotel workers in their struggle for labor peace and fair contracts. I have been fighting on the front lines to ensure that hotel workers are paid a living wage here in Santa Monica and in the broader LA region. I have also been a staunch advocate of programs that provide new workforce housing opportunities, and ensuring that workers are not displaced through gentrification and housing discrimination.

I have also supported labor peace in other areas, including with respect to housing and commercial developments. I look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with labor leaders in Santa Monica.

It is simply impossible to live here (much less live comfortably) without fair and competitive wages. But the conversation should not stop with the subject of base pay. We need to ensure that workers are provided benefits that are necessary to live a happy, healthy, and meaningful life. We need to make sure that workers are not forced to work in environments where they are subject to abuse or harassment.

I promise to continue to be the strongest possible advocate for union workers in our city!

3. What do you envision for the future of the Santa Monica Airport?

I support the will of the voters, and I agree with the plan to create a Great Park at the airport. We will never have an opportunity in our lifetime to develop a continuous piece of land of that size into a park. That being said, I support developing new housing in close proximity to the amenities that will be provided by the Great Park.

4. 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.

5. 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. I plan to continue regularly attending SMDC meetings, and I look forward to maintaining open dialogue with SMDC's leaders and members.

6. What is the most important topic that was left off of this questionnaire?

This was a fairly comprehensive questionnaire, though there are a few points that may deserve further attention:

- *The questionnaire did not ask whether candidates support the renewal of the SMMUSD Joint Use Agreement, or how candidates intend to work in collaboration with their elected counterparts on the SMMUSD Board and the College Board. I am in favor of renewing the joint use agreement, and I support working collaboratively with the SMMUSD Board and the College Board to develop new housing opportunities for high school graduates and college students.*
- *The questionnaire also did not ask about how candidates plan to support retail opportunities for low income residents. The closure of the 99 Cent Store in the Pico Neighborhood was a huge blow to neighborhood residents who can't afford to shop at other more expensive stores in the area. We need to do everything in our power to bring a low-cost retailer to the site of the former 99 Cent Store.*
- *The questionnaire did not directly ask if candidates support expanding the POD program. I have been a steadfast advocate for rent subsidies, emergency rent relief programs, and universal basic income. We need to continue to support the POD program, and we need to increase funding for the POD program (and other similar programs).*

There are countless other topics of interest to voters, and if anyone has questions about any of my positions on any issues, I invite readers to reach out to me at ellis@electellis.org or by telephone at (424) 256-8810.