



Santa Monica Democratic Club

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City Council Candidate

Responses for Endorsement

Due 5/18/24 at 11:59PM

5/18/2024

Marcus Owens

1. What qualifications do you bring to this office?

I bring over a decade of experience in corporate retail and hospitality communications, community organizing and advocacy, with a strong focus on social justice, housing affordability, and environmental sustainability. As a long time resident of not only Santa Monica but LA County, I have a deep understanding of our community's unique challenges and opportunities. My background in personal development and hospitality, coupled with living in the immediate downtown Santa Monica area over the past several years, provides me a particular perspective on issues of engagements, safety, & inclusion. I've successfully led multiple initiatives to improve local policies and have built strong relationships with various community stakeholders. Ultimately what I bring to the table are solutions that aren't biased by means but are researched, calculated, and carefully analyzed and thought out.

2. Why are you running?

I am running for City Council to ensure that Santa Monica remains a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community for all its residents. I believe in proactive governance that addresses pressing issues like housing affordability, public safety, and climate change. I want to bring fresh ideas and a collaborative approach to the council to better serve our diverse population.

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

The top issues of my campaign are:

- **Housing Affordability:** I will advocate for increased affordable housing development, stronger tenant protections, and innovative solutions to homelessness.
- **Public Safety:** I will work to improve community policing efforts and ensure our public safety resources are allocated effectively.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** I will push for policies that promote clean energy, reduce waste, and protect our natural resources.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** I will champion initiatives that ensure equitable access to city resources and opportunities for all residents.

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

N/A

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

I have lived in Santa Monica for a little over six years. I have also lived in other parts of LA County for over a decade..

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

Yes, I pledge to serve my entire four-year term on the City Council.

Campaign Finance

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

Not applicable

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

Our platform and team are focused on fostering connections to raise awareness and address major issues affecting our city and neighboring communities. By building relationships with community members and organizations, we aim to create equitable, sustainable, and inclusive communities.

There is vital work to be done that can't be achieved through donations alone. We wish the best to any candidate who believes that real change can be bought or endorsed.

Our commitment lies in hard work and genuine engagement, and letting that work speak for itself.

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 will not accept campaign contributions from developers, fossil fuel companies, or any entities that have a vested interest in policies that could harm our community or environment.

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 am not affiliated with any political party. I am participating in this endorsement process to outline my plans for serving on the city council. My priority is to serve the entire community, addressing the needs of all residents rather than focusing on any singular group or organization.

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 support political activism by empowering others with the information they need to take care of their bodies and minds. I encourage positive change and inspire individuals to take action in their own lives. My activism focuses on promoting holistic well-being and fostering a healthier, more informed community.

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.

Not applicable. I support the community in any which way I can, rarely does that include endorsing a particular candidate.

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.

To the best of my knowledge, I have not signed or publicly supported efforts to recall a public official.

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

I am a member of Insight Seminars, a globally known non profit that provides a wide range of personal development activities and programs for youths and adults of all ages. - Providing support to experienced facilitators, equipping teens and adults with the tools they need to overcome obstacles and thrive in their endeavors. ❤️

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.

Yes, I have read the latest version of the California Democratic Party Platform. I generally agree with its principles and policies, provided they support positive change within our communities. I do not have any significant disagreements at this time.

City Governance

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

Santa Monica City Council has made strides in several areas but has also faced challenges in addressing critical issues like housing affordability and public safety. While there have been successes, there is room for improvement in transparency, community engagement, and proactive policymaking.

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 believe the at-large system has its benefits, but it can also dilute representation for certain neighborhoods.

Exploring a hybrid system that includes both at-large and district-specific seats could enhance accountability and ensure all areas of Santa Monica have strong representation.

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

I would be interested in exploring ranked-choice voting to ensure more equitable and representative election outcomes. Additionally, enhancing public participation in decision-making processes through more accessible and transparent forums is crucial.

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

Each City Council member having a paid staffer could improve efficiency and responsiveness to constituents. However, whether the council should be a full-time job requires careful consideration of the financial implications and workload balance.

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?*

Boards and commissions should have clearer mandates and increased autonomy to make meaningful recommendations. The selection process should be more transparent and inclusive, ensuring diverse community representation.

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?

I would support initiatives that address historical injustices, such as targeted economic development programs, equitable housing policies, and educational opportunities for the Black community. Additionally, creating a dedicated task force to oversee the implementation of these initiatives would be essential.

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?

Reparations should be considered in forms such as direct financial compensation, investment in Black-owned businesses, and funding for community programs. Specific examples include addressing past discriminatory housing practices and ensuring equitable development in historically marginalized neighborhoods.

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

The city can protect undocumented residents by ensuring access to legal aid, safeguarding against discrimination, and providing sanctuary policies that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. Additionally, supporting community organizations that offer resources and assistance to undocumented residents is crucial.

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

Significant environmental justice issues include air and water quality, access to green spaces, and the impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. I will address these by advocating to expand on environmental regulations, promoting sustainable development, and investing in green infrastructure.

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?

I aim to implement mandatory diversity training for all city staff, establish a diversity task force, and create a mentorship program for underrepresented groups. To achieve this, I will collaborate closely with the City Manager to ensure these policies are integrated into the city's strategic plan, providing necessary resources, and setting clear metrics for success.

Housing / Development

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

Propose increasing funding for mental health and substance abuse services, expanding affordable housing units, and enhancing partnerships with non-profits and neighboring cities to create a regional approach.

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?

Santa Monica has struggled with zoning restrictions and insufficient affordable housing development. I would advocate for upzoning in certain areas, streamline the permitting process for affordable housing, and push for policies that encourage mixed-use developments.

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

Development should balance growth with maintaining community character. I support smart growth principles that include mixed-use, transit-oriented development, and ensuring new developments include affordable housing components.

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

Local control is crucial for addressing unique community needs, but state oversight can ensure regional consistency and address broader housing shortages. I advocate for collaborative approaches where local plans meet state goals.

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

It provides protection against excessive rent increases and displacement.

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

It is essential for the well being of the entire community to expand on tenant protection laws, I would support this endeavor by working side by side with regional LA county providers to broaden the scope of eviction protections, creating a rental assistance fund, and ensuring legal support for tenants facing eviction.

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

Measure GS, has tremendous potential to generate funding for housing and educational initiatives, and I would gladly advocate for its effective implementation.

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?

Increase community policing efforts, enhance mental health crisis response teams, and invest in youth engagement programs. Additional funding could come from reallocating existing budget priorities or pursuing state and federal grants.

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

The SMPD's funding should be evaluated based on current needs and efficiency. If additional officers are required, budget adjustments or reallocation from non-essential areas should be considered.

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 harm reduction programs but advocate for integrated services, such as connecting participants with addiction treatment and mental health services.

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?

My stance on DA Gascón and his policies would be based on his performance in balancing justice and public safety. I support restorative justice but also emphasize the need for accountability for serious offenses.

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?

I support the policy, as it can reduce racial profiling and build community trust, but it must be accompanied by comprehensive training and oversight to ensure effective implementation.

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?

The Promenade's economic recovery is ongoing. I believe community ambassadors should complement private security to maintain a welcoming environment, adjusting agreements as necessary to meet evolving needs.

Mobility

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

I support more pedestrian-only streets, potentially expanding to areas like Main Street or parts of Montana Avenue, creating vibrant, walkable spaces.

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

Implement protected bike lanes, enhance crosswalk safety measures, and expand bike-sharing programs.

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?

I support additional Metro rail lines, especially those connecting to underserved areas, to improve connectivity and reduce traffic congestion.

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

These devices should be encouraged with proper regulation to ensure safety and reduce clutter, integrating them into the city's transportation plan.

5. Should the overall amount of street parking in Santa Monica be reduced in order to encourage other modes of transportation?

Reducing street parking can promote alternative transportation, but it should be done thoughtfully, ensuring adequate infrastructure for bikes and public transit.

Ballot Measures

Do you support the Justice For Renters Act?

Support, as it would provide greater housing security for renters

Do you support the repeal of Article 34?

Support, to eliminate barriers to affordable housing development.

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

Oppose, as it could hinder the city's ability to raise necessary funds for critical services.

Do you support the potential measure to amend Prop 47?

Support as it addresses public safety concerns

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

Support exempting multifamily housing to avoid discouraging much-needed housing development.

Additional Questions

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

I strongly advocate for health care to be provided for those that are in need of it, even if they're not able to afford to pay for services. It is essential to ensure that everyone receives the proper treatment, when they need it, regardless of cost, and promptly.

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

First and foremost, I know what it means to work in hospitality. I've done so for many years and find it to be very rewarding. I am all for any advancements toward an equitable and inclusive work place practices. That is why I am glad to collaborate with many organizations, from the National Council for Well Being and Headspace, to Thrive Global and Insight Seminars. Second thing, I trust that in order for work to work for us, there needs to be comprehensive programs available to encourage and incentivize hospitality industry employees and alike to participate and engage in activities that enrich not only the workplace and its environment but also the personal lives and home spaces for all employees.

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

I envision an equitable, engaging, and environmentally friendly space that is sustainable and inclusive. — Including a wide range of activities, housing, and parks.

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

I look forward to expanding on this in person, but I believe SMDC and other political organizations serve a purpose to encourage voter protections, education, and accountability. Ultimately, we all deserve to have a fair idea of what is going on within our communities regarding important topics, issues, and decision making.

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 am not certain. However, I can say that I am very much interested in participating with many organizations from an unbiased standpoint and to include input from everyone, every resident, every stakeholder, every concerned party. One thing I've learned in life is that when someone voices their opinion or concern, it is because they care enough to share that with you. Our goal, as city council, at the end of the day is to listen to all sides, research, ask questions, but most importantly, to get involved, and provide solutions. That's exactly what I intend to do.

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

I think the most important topic left off this questionnaire is: What is your favorite way to unwind after a long day?

For me, it's taking a leisurely jog or walk along the Santa Monica coast with pup 🐶, enjoying the sunset, and maybe grabbing a scoop of my favorite ice cream flavor. How about you? 😊

I trust that the work of your organization will continue to encourage a more well rounded and inclusive community.

Thank you so much for your time!

Please feel free to reach our office with any inquiries
or information at Info@marcusowens.org

Office of Santa Monica City Council
Candidate, Marcus Owens
2801 Ocean Park Blvd
Santa Monica, CA 90405

