

College Democrats at UCSC
Santa Cruz City Council Candidate Questionnaire

All questionnaires will be published publicly on the UCSCDems.com website
Must be completed and submitted by August 30th, 2020
Send completed, by email, to BlueSlugs@gmail.com

1. CANDIDATE IDENTIFICATION

- Elected Office You Seek: Santa Cruz City Council
- Candidate Name: Kayla Kumar
- Occupation/Profession: Nonprofit Executive
- Email address (this is our preferred manner of communication unless you specify otherwise):
- Home/Office Phone:
- Cell Phone: 208-891-4348
- Incumbent: _____ Yes No
- Former campaigns for elected office, and their outcomes:

N/A

- Appointed offices currently/formerly appointed to:
I'm appointed to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission of Santa Cruz County.
- Organizations you are a member of:
"Food, What?!" (Employer)
Santa Cruz for Bernie (Member)
Santa Cruz Community Ventures (Board)
Salud Para La Gente (Board)

2. DEMOCRATIC AFFILIATION

- Approximate number of years as a registered Democrat? 7 Santa Cruz County
13 Elsewhere
- Describe your involvement with the Democratic Party at the Local, State or National level over the last few years.

I have been a Democrat my entire life. I have volunteered on four democratic campaigns ranging from local, state and national races.

3. INFORMATIONAL QUESTIONS

General Questions

1. What are your main campaign priorities?

An equitable COVID-19 recovery. I will work hard for a recovery that never loses sight of our collective well-being and takes special care to support people who have been hanging on by their fingertips throughout the long-standing crises of racism and poverty.

Transformations in public safety. My background and experience calls me to commit deeply to the development a public safety model that acknowledges the way our current approach has harmed marginalized people, upholds the sanctity of life and institutionalizes community care. We want our resources reinvested into mental health, supportive housing and economic services that meet our expressed needs.

Creation of real, safe and affordable housing. I will work hard for real, affordable housing, the kinda that does not rely on the failed logic of Republican trickle down economics, but rather has a democratic people-first approach. The profit-obsessed approach to housing has displaced too many of our community members -- those of us who are low-income, are people of color, and younger people being the most impacted.

Strong dedication to environmental justice. I am ready to work with you to honor the sacredness of our green and blue public spaces. This community's well-being is inextricably linked with the well-being of our environment and the stability of our climate. In order to take science seriously, we must make deeper, bolder forward-thinking decisions on how we create green infrastructure and preserve these enriching spaces from community-displacing and climate destabilizing profit-seekers.

2. What specific policy changes will you prioritize should you be elected?

An equitable COVID-19 recovery.

- Maintain an eviction moratorium until the crisis has stabilized
- Put forward rental payback plans that support the financial well-being of tenants while doing what we can to make whole local landlords.
- Put forward a rental freeze, if necessary, to respond to rental price gouging that has popped up here and there locally.
- Refund and recalibrate the City's fund and capital flows. For instance, we must be sure to advocate for State and Federal resources and guide these resources to rental assistance programs and microloan capital programs for small businesses. Each financial apparatus must have a clear anti-racist and deep-equity North Star.
- Leverage relationship with local banks to ease impact of crisis on homeowners and advocate for payback plans for mortgages.

Transformations in public safety.

- A deep, third party audit of SCPD by a non-law enforcement-affiliated organization that specializes in Community-Based Participatory Research, including a review of the 911

calls and patrol logs, a categorization of the needs requested by the community in these calls or situations, and a mapping of community resources that can better meet these needs that are non-police responses.

- After a thorough review of community needs vis a vis the data- and community-rooted process above, I will put forward policy pathways that reallocate resources from mass policing activities into community-based services that address social problems at the root and with compassion.
- There are a number of reform-minded policies I would support as we undergo this transformation. These include demilitarizing the police force, advocating against qualified immunity and reducing the calls routed to police in general.

Creation of real, safe and affordable housing.

- Maintain the 20% Inclusionary Zoning ordinance, which will likely be on the chopping block if a pro-developer majority remains on the Council.
- I would like to direct staff to investigate the feasibility of the City's purchasing struggling hotels to meet very low, low and moderate housing needs as well as supportive housing for those struggling to access sustained shelter.
- Reallocate general funds currently funding non-essential mass policing activities to the City's Housing Trust, thereby increasing our resources for developing deed-restricted affordable housing.

Strong dedication to environmental justice.

Affordable Housing

1. Scenario: As a council member, a housing development is being proposed that would create 100 new housing units. The development meets the minimum affordable housing requirement, but less than your desired number of affordable units.
 - Would you approve the housing development even if it does not meet your personal preference for the number of affordable units created? Please elaborate.

The City's current trajectory relies on supply-side, neoliberal solutions to our housing crisis. In general, this line of thinking asks the public to believe that the creation of enough market-rate housing will somehow lower the price of housing. The fact is, this approach has been long debunked by sound analysis of "trickle-down" economic approaches of the 80's. In fact, we now know these are the very policy approaches that created our crisis in the first place.

Instead, progressive housing policies provide a real antidote to the current housing crisis. That is, we must have a strong backbone in demanding the City has laser-focus in creating the conditions that lead to the development of deed-restricted affordable housing that can be accessed in the long-term for very low, low, and moderate income levels.

Local government has an obligation to shape the market in a way that centers the well-being and needs of our community. If folks want to make their livelihood in the housing development field, that's great, but they cannot earn their profits at the great expense of our people. That is the position I will hold strongly on the Council.

This decade, the levers at local jurisdiction's disposals in protecting the hyper-profiteering in our community have been severely weakened by State legislation. The pro-housing legislation from the State had a sound purpose in setting out to create the conditions that lend itself to the development of much needed housing and I'm supportive of that spirit. As a Council person, my job will be to do everything in my power to make sure the type of housing built brings about the highest public benefit, not just luxury condos at market-rate levels.

With that said, in this scenario, I'll share that I do not hold an ideology that would call me to vote against a project just because it is not 100% affordable. I understand that the City must allow such development if it meets the requirements of the General Plan and other zoning ordinances. To vote against projects as a general rule could lead to unnecessary lawsuits that the taxpayers must pay -- I'm not interested in that one bit. What I will say is that I will use the relationships, tools and resources at my disposal to try to create the best possible project no matter what. That means advocating for the highest amount of affordable housing possible, a sound game plan for traffic and infrastructure impacts, and opportunities for community engagement that will let community members center their needs, concerns and wisdom in these projects as much as possible.

2. What strategies and policies will you champion to increase affordable housing?

I shared a little bit about my philosophy when it comes to housing above. I'll share that I've come to this position not only as a community member who has seen my friends and family displaced by the wrong kind of development, but also as a result of my graduate degree training in economics.

I believe one winning and compassionate strategy a City Council must take on is using its time, energy and resources to use City land for the development of 100% affordable housing that contains a mix of housing types. The development can be done in partnership with non-profit developers who can access financing without having to be so limited by the business profit model.

I shared a few specific policies above in General Questions - Question 2.

3. How will you balance approving new housing developments with maximizing affordable units?

I will seek this balance by focusing my energy as a public official in ensuring that public projects yield the highest public good. In Santa Cruz, the RHNA numbers reveal that the City has a need

criminal justice system which itself has serious and racist flaws. What's more, approximately 80% of the calls to 911 were related to homelessness. Again, we must dig deeper into the details of these calls, but it seems the case that directly addressing homelessness -- housing, services, funding -- would greatly diminish the role of mass policing even as an admittedly ineffective bandaid to homelessness. Even the SCPD has mentioned the willingness to cut their budget in the interest of actually addressing homelessness.

In terms of where I believe funds will likely be called to based on the expressed needs of the community (again, we need a deep, nuanced and data-driven process to identify these needs):

- **Mental Health:**

Healthcare and/or social workers that can assess, de-escalate and connect members of our community experiencing situations of conflict as a result of a mental health disorder. Conflict resolution specialists that are trained to de-escalate community conflict that involves interpersonal conflict amongst family and/or community members.

- **Substance Abuse Disorders:**

There are currently only 26 beds for residential treatment for alcohol or drug dependency in our entire County. We need to invest or incentivize more beds.

Only 10 residential treatment beds for youth.

Only 16 residential treatment beds for adults.

Having mobile units that can meet community situations where harm or conflict is generated by substances. These teams might include social workers, drug treatment specialists and other harm reduction services.

- **MCIS (Mobile Crisis Intervention Service)**

A crisis response team would include a variety of mental health, conflict resolution, homeless navigation and other relevant social services could address a large portion (based on the 2015 audit I mentioned) of the calls received by 911 and cost 1/3 of what we currently invest in policing responses.

- If no, what other reforms would you like to see enacted in the Santa Cruz Police Department?

2. What specific changes would you like to see enacted for the Santa Cruz Police Department?

I would like our public funds to be reallocated to services that meet the community needs that are currently allocated but are not being well met by mass policing. I do believe we must reduce the negative impact of mass policing by reducing the use of policing as a response to social issues.

Absolutely. ABSOLUTELY! Seriously, everything from the data to the testimonials I'm hearing from the community points to a major eviction cliff looming until the crisis stabilizes -- either because COVID-19 is contained or the Federal government finally decides to show some leadership. Until that time, we **cannot** fail to protect tenants in this way.

2. Do you support or oppose erasing compounded rent debt accumulated through the COVID-19 pandemic? Please elaborate.

Check one: Support _____ Oppose _____

Yes, the corporate interests making money on struggling tenants will find no respite with me when I am on council. As a Board Member of Santa Cruz Community Ventures, I'm kept well-informed about predatory lending and things we can do as a community to curtail the practice. I'll be sure to use this background to dive deeper into this policy.

3. Do you support or oppose canceling rent during the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic? Please elaborate.

Check one: Support _____ Oppose _____

This one is tough -- I am partial to eliminating back-rent, even if it's just in part, but I've been told that it might be beyond the legal authority of the City Council. Be sure I'll be vetting this policy tool thoroughly as someone that is certainly aware of the way it could improve countless lives in our City.

4. What specific COVID relief policies/packages to students are you in support of?

From the student body I've connected with, the suite of housing stabilization policies I've listed would be at the top of the list for most supportive. I'd also like to understand how the City could support efforts to address the extreme levels of food instability experienced by the student body.

5. What policies and assistance do you support to expand our healthcare capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic?

On a Federal level, having a single payer healthcare system would be the single most impactful policy in expanding the equity, capacity and reach of healthcare throughout the country. In missing the countless opportunities to convert to such a system, we are seeing the serious limits of our current approach in times of crisis. Also, the passage of the HEROES Act would generate much needed funding to health workers directly, but also getting funding to community members will help them purchase health services given that we still operate in a for-profit system.

On the County level, the investment of \$1 million of CARES funds into building testing capacity with UCSC is a necessary but frustrating necessity. If there was a monocolm of leadership at the Federal level, we would not be in a place where our local jurisdictions need to design testing capacity and compete for testing resources. But since there is no such leadership, we do need to support County-level policies to invest in building testing capacity, which is one of the biggest needs for our healthcare abilities at the moment.

On the local level, we can supplement the County's approach to investing in healthcare infrastructure by having a more targeted funding approach focused on local healthcare organizations through our general fund. Given the intersectional crisis we're experiencing, this too would be a more responsive use of our General Fund, rather than mass policing activities that we're seeing are not improving the well-being of our community.

6. How will you support community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent budget austerity?

The City is on the right track to preventing needless austerity by making the sound fiscal decision to use our reserves to keep pumping resources into our community and circumventing a type of economic contraction that will most certainly impact a broad array of our community, but be most sharply felt by those who were hanging on by their fingertips prior to this crisis -- those who rely on the loosely woven safety net we have managed to put together locally.

When I call for an equitable COVID-19 recovery, I do so understanding that some budgetary contractions are and will continue to take place for the next several years. We will need a City Council that understands the historic and essential role of public funding of social services that reach the most vulnerable community members and will do everything in their power to ensure those programs are not broken up, especially when there are high priced consultants and high level management that can bare the brunt of cuts easier than those who are at the lower income levels and our vulnerable community members. I also want to mention that this is a somber topic -- one that I do not take lightly. However, I believe I am someone we need in that decision-making positions because I know first hand what it is like to experience poverty, homelessness and racism and I will bring that understanding to how the City decides who needs the greatest support during this crisis.

Homelessness

1. What specific policy changes will you pursue to protect unhoused folks, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An incredible infrastructure of shelter and services has popped up as a result of the COVID-19 crises. We can see that when our local community has the resources it needs to act, innovate, evaluate and adapt, we are in fact capable of doing so. While we certainly have much room to grow, this crisis has pointed out that it is, in fact, possible to offer real solutions to homelessness.

I would like to focus on funding the continuance of these shelters. I'd also like to create the conditions for the development of 100% supportive housing in Santa Cruz. The City can offer land, funding and partnership to this endeavor.

I'm really supportive of the local churches who have created community-based processes to set up managed overnight parking programs for our community members experiencing homelessness. The City has done some work to support these endeavors, but I believe these efforts could be deepened through funding and leveraging community relationships.

2. How will you work towards eliminating homelessness in Santa Cruz? What are previous examples of supporting our unhoused population?

I will work towards reducing the negative impact of the City on the homeless population by reducing the unnecessary and damaging contact between SCPD and people experiencing homelessness. I would advocate for social service and crisis intervention teams that can address the social issues that are most profound within the homeless community in its place in an effort to provide root-level solutions to homelessness.

Again, I would advocate strongly for a Housing First approach to addressing homelessness which supports the development of long-term supportive housing that couples shelter with any social services that might be relevant to the lives of those being housed. This would also include the implementation of the three P's when it comes to connecting people to supportive housing: the allowance of pets, partners and possessions.

I have experienced periodic homelessness and sustained housing insecurity during my childhood and adolescence. I left home at 15, which introduced a lot of instability into my life, including not having a stable home for several years. I bring this up to share that my lived experience defines the compassion and dedication I have to those experiencing homelessness.

It's with the lens that I now work with youth in similar situations as I was and lead efforts that address the instability they experience through an empowerment, economic justice, food justice and racial justice model. Specifically, I work to bring economic resources to marginalized youth through my day job and help funnel over \$100,000 yearly to marginalized youth each year. During the crisis, my team and I have supported a handful of homeless youth as they are bounced around emergency shelters. One County

program removed a youth for walking too far from their shelter and we still have not been able to retrieve their belongings. This is the small, but critical support homeless youth need in navigating a huge system that regularly cannot uphold their dignity and rights.

I also have experience re-entering formerly incarcerated members of our community. All too often, these folks have trouble accessing housing because of their record, income level and other re-adjustment issues. These are some of the hardest cases to see through, but my experience is that if you stay positive and continue the search day-by-day, re-entry community members ultimately find housing.

3. Scenario: As a council member, there is a proposal to designate an overnight parking location for unhoused folks living in their vehicles. The location is close to a school and near residential zones, but does not violate any regulations. Some local residents meet with you and oppose the designation.

- What do you tell them?

I believe it's the job of Council people to create ways of engaging the public that meets them where they are at and helps them find their access point to community solutions. Instead of telling the community that they're out of luck, I'll be the kind of City Council member that engages them from the heart, asks them questions about what their concerns are truly about, meet the aspects of their concern that contributes to the maximum public good and find caring, yet value-driven ways to complicate any assumptions, prejudices and trauma they might be utilizing in opposing a community solution that brings about safety, wellbeing and dignity for others. I'm patient, drawn to complexity, willing to listen, willing to work with people from all walks of life, willing to admit when I'm wrong and just find constructive ways to embrace how complicated our City is and move us past old ideas that create division.

- Would you support or oppose the designation? What other factors might you consider? Please elaborate.

I support the designation and would work hard to use the community solution as an opportunity to build solidarity across neighbors. I understand the human emotions that call someone to oppose such an ordinance, even though I don't experience a negative response to the idea of people experiencing homelessness seeking shelter near me. What I do think I share with most is a strong negative response to the existence of homelessness in general -- I want everyone to have stable, safe shelter and I understand some members of my community need an extra layer of community support in order for that to happen.

With that said, I would acknowledge that parking programs such as this do not get to the route of the issue and encourage folks to use this opportunity to think of ways they can

- If you do not, what actions or strategy would you take as a city council member to prevent the growth?

My approach would be to work most centrally with students, faculty and community members. With this model, I see a two-pronged strategy to prevent over-enrollment and under-resourcing by UCSC through their proposed LRDP:

First, I would like to engage the community by collaborating with the Santa Cruz City-County Task Force to Address UCSC Growth Plans and continue to pressure UCSC to adhere to the requirements laid out in Measure U. They have a strong advocacy plan with well-informed staff. Some of their tactics include:

- Leveraging relationships and advocating against UCSC's growth plan with state representatives and UC Regents.
- Attend constituent meetings to educate, organize and activate Santa Cruz residents.
- Distribute their toolkit widely.
- Carry out their various calls to action.

Second, there are specific directives made to the City Council by the voters, as expressed through Measure U:

- Alongside my fellow Council members, I would fully participate in reviewing and commenting on the LRDP's Environmental Impact Report, seeking to ensure full mitigation of all adverse impacts of any proposed UCSC growth on the Santa Cruz community, particularly housing, traffic, public transportation, and public services such as water and public safety impacts,
- Alongside my fellow Council members, I will undertake all necessary actions to ensure that the proposed UCSC LRDP fully complies with the provisions of CEQA. This includes initiating legal action, if necessary, to challenge the EIR, if the Council determines that the EIR is not adequate under the law.

2. If city council elections must transition to district elections, how would you redistrict the UCSC campus? What considerations will you take into account in preparing for this possible future?

I believe there is a dangerous strategy in play with respect to redistricting that seeks to diminish the impact of the vote of UCSC's student body and faculty. If this strategy is carried through, there could be seriously negative repercussions on the health of democracy in Santa Cruz. I am 100% opposed to this non-democratic approach and will be a strong advocate for fair districting.

It will be beyond critical to have a City Council in place that will make sure that the people who draw the districts are fair and impartial. There must be every effort made to avoid gerrymandering or other types of districting that actually compound the racial injustices that are allegedly driving the redistricting in the first place. I would also want to make sure that the neighborhoods with high rates of poverty are not grouped in ways that lower the parity of their vote as well.

Social Justice

1. What policies will you fight for in order to achieve greater racial justice in Santa Cruz?
This issue spans across many issues we have asked about before, so we hope your answer is deep and nuanced as well.

I think anyone who claims commitment to racial justice must have a clear understanding of the racism carried out by our local criminal justice system and take the serious steps to protect people of color from the status quo of mass policing. I have expressed the place I'd be willing to start, but I do believe there are stages of transformation that must follow what I've outlined above. For instance, when we say policing should focus on crimes only, we must also understand that the definition of "crime" and "violence" have been arbitrarily expanded to serve the racist and classist interests of the criminal justice system. So although I'm willing to begin the conversation of right-sizing policing at a clear focus on actual crime (again, 15.5% of the calls made to 911 that were diverted to SCPD in the most recent audit), the next step would be to look at what needs are requested within the category of "crime" that could also be better served by non-police, life-affirming responses. Other priorities of mine include removing SROs from schools, closing our Juvenile Hall and creating more humane responses to violence done by youth, and decriminalizing behavior that does not jeopardize the well-being of our community.

I'd also be pushing for economic development that addresses the vast wealth and income disparities that operate along racial lines in Santa Cruz. Beginning to address this economic injustice can be carried out by stabilizing the cost of living and increasing ability to generate income and secure wealth. In terms of stabilizing cost of living, rent freezes and rental caps can be useful economic tools that achieve equity. In California, the repeal of Costa Hawkins would be a critical step in maximizing the impact of housing stabilization.

In terms of income and wealth, there is reason to focus on minority- and women-owned businesses, particularly collective business models. I received a Master's Degree in Economics from San Jose State. My thesis focused on capital flows from the government to local businesses of color and the way in which tokenization takes hold in the few transactions that do happen between the government and communities of color. As a Council Member, I will not only encourage the City to do all in its power to support

marginalized business, but ask that any capital or resource flows be pumped through a financial apparatus that makes sure capital gets to small businesses that are within communities of color. This is critically important to fulfill the spirit of these types of equity effort. It's not just about making sure people of color are able to access capital and wealth, but that *communities* of color -- which are more likely to be blighted and in need of revitalizing economic activity as brought about by small business.

In terms of income, we must continue to advocate for a living wage locally and regionally. I'd also like to begin work on universal basic income, land exchanges and other reparation approaches to racial and economic justice locally. We are not interested in consistently being placed at the bottom of businesses and organizations, making the lowest wages and turning to public benefits to make up the rest. As people of color, we want the ability to innovate, take leadership roles, be able to serve our community as the assets we are.

2. What policy changes do you support that directly help transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks in Santa Cruz? How will you ensure your campaign is inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming folks?

The way I fight hardest for the well-being of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people is through criminal justice accountability. This group of community members is also disproportionately over-represented in the criminal justice system. A recent study of juvenile halls in California found that 50% of the girls locked up in these facilities identified as LGBT/GNC. That is an absolutely horrifying statistic. At least when working with youth of color who are transgender, we find that many are rendered homeless by families who cannot hold their children's identities and, as a result of being homeless, many must engage in survival behaviors that are criminalized. This particular pathway is one I've worked hard to disrupt by contributing to youth empowerment programming that also provide them with income, supportive and understanding community, and through my work on the Commission, I've advocated for social services that replace incarceration as a way to address youth who have been criminalized.

The strongest way I've ensured my campaign is inclusive of transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people is by having them on my team. My campaign team is powered by two transgender people who are also dear friends of mine. For example, they have helped me design my phone banking sessions in a way that is trans-welcoming by having intros include pronouns and creating non-gendered scripts, FAQs and directions.

3. What policies will you pursue locally to protect our climate? What work have you been involved with previously to protect our environment?

Of the many things we must be doing to take seriously climate chaos, tackling carbon emissions is a core focus. In learning from local experts, the following ideas come to mind in putting forward a strong local effort to reduce the City's carbon footprint:

- Direct public resources into infrastructure that supports modes of transportation that are not automobiles. This would include creation and improvement of protected bike lanes and crosswalks.
- Support policies that integrate multimodal ways of getting around town, such as Slow Streets.
- Continue efforts to convert City gas vehicles to electric vehicles.
- Support funding of local public transportation.
- Preservation of carbon-absorbing green space.
- Double down on efforts to integrate alternative sources of energy such as solar and electric as well as energy conservation efforts on City property/buildings.

Two effort stands out in reducing our contribution to climate disruption:

- *Downtown walkability.* Improved walkability of the downtown area in closing down certain streets. This engenders a culture that leads us away from car dependency because it literally establishes an area where cars are not normalized. This is especially potent as the downtown is one of the most engaged spaces of our City.
- *Slow Streets.* Slow Streets increases the safety of walking and biking along streets in our City that are unsafe yet could be strong arteries for non-car travel. I know this has an impact. Upon moving to Santa Cruz, I didn't have a driver's license, much less a car, because I preferred my bike, my legs and the bus. The nature and culture of Santa Cruz roads made it feel impossible for me to get around safely as my route to work was often across town. Within my first year here, I got a license and a car just to get around. So I know from firsthand experience that the way we create safety on roads has a direct impact on people's ability to live out their low carbon lifestyles.

Generally speaking, I am most drawn to the intersection of environmental and racial justice in Santa Cruz. This plays out in a number of ways:

- Lower income residents-- disproportionately people of color-- are more likely to **have** to use alternate means of transportation, other than a car, to get around the City. Therefore, when we're talking about improving the ability of people to transport without cars, we're talking about directly improving the well-being of people of color and people experiencing poverty as well as the environment and climate.
- The Jessie Street Marsh and the Beach Flat Garden are two examples of green spaces near communities of color that are either in disrepair or have been sold to the highest bidder. When we note the importance of green space as sanctuaries for sensitive ecosystems, we must also note the human well-being brought about the proximity of natural space and why it is that those nearest communities of color are least accessible and maintained.

- Climate chaos and infrastructure decisions have rendered the Beach Flats the first area of the City to flood during a heavy rain and it will certainly be one of the top impacted areas as sea levels rise. When we express much needed concern for the impact of sea level rise on our shores, we must also understand that communities of color are often segregated to flood-prone neighborhoods precisely because they are less valuable due to the precariousness. When we set out to mitigate this impact, we do so also as a means to create racial equity in our City.

Kayla Kumar
Candidate Name

8/29/2020
Date