

SONOMA COUNTY SUPERVISORIAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE for April 2008

SHARON WRIGHT 3rd District Candidate

1. For nearly a decade Sonoma County has lagged other California communities in economic and income growth. Yet the current and draft 2020 Sonoma County General Plan, unlike many other counties including Napa, does not have an economic development section to address job creation and future location of businesses. Should such an element be included in the plan?

I absolutely support including an economic element to the County General Plan. In fact, when I was on the Santa Rosa City Council I advocated for and lead the formation of the first Economic Development Committee. Those efforts lead to the creation of an Economic Development Department with full-time staff. I'm proud to say that the Santa Rosa General Plan now has an Economic Vitality element.

The Board of Supervisors, through the Economic Development Board, showed great wisdom with the creation of the Sonoma County Innovation Council. This pro-active initiative, I believe, will position the County to be very competitive in a global market. As the Innovation Council identifies ways to address workforce development and to support the needs of our leading business clusters, the County should aggressively adopt goals and policies that will promote economic development and stability.

Do you believe in the following statement? Why?

There needs to be a balance between enhancing a community's economy and protecting the environment. You can enhance both without being detrimental to either

For years I have said that the economy and the environment are not mutually exclusive – we can't have one without the other – A Healthy Environment Depends upon a Healthy Economy.

I believe in creating a balanced master plan through vision and common sense that takes into account all the issues facing us now and into the future. Most experts agree that the solutions to global warming and energy independence will result from massive National investments in new green technologies. Technologies from which, I believe, Sonoma County is uniquely positioned to grow new industry and good paying jobs.

It is incumbent upon us as a Nation, as a state and as a County to sustain a vibrant economy from which may derive the capital to make the investment in these technologies. I will always be mindful of and will always balance economic impacts against conservation opportunities. Conservation of our natural resources will buy us additional time to make the required "green" investments. Our Sonoma County businesses must remain vital and must play a strong role in leading our community in these efforts.

2. Board of Supervisors also serves as the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency. What do you see as the biggest obstacle to securing a sustainable water supply to meet General Plan needs for the County and for the Agency's customers?

Some of the most important Supervisorial responsibilities concern water. No other resource has a bigger impact on our economy, our quality of life, our health and the health of our environment. Currently water

quality, water availability and the continued maintenance of recreational opportunities along the Russian River are issues to be addressed.

Currently, demands for potable water in the service area of the Sonoma County Water Agency are approaching their limits in terms of water rights and physical limits of the transmission system. It's a well known fact that "the biggest obstacle to securing a sustainable water supply..." is one of transmission not of availability. We must come to grips with the fact that we need to build a transmission system (pipeline) that will release our water stored in Lake Sonoma to meet increased future demands. The very real challenge is building such a system is the staggering cost – currently estimated in excess of \$600 million!

3. Sonoma County has the worst rating for quality of County roads in the entire Bay Area, principally due to deferred road maintenance in the unincorporated area of the County. How do you propose to fund repairs, maintenance and improvements of local roads?

As Supervisor, I will focus my efforts on improving our local streets and roads and providing safe, accessible and reliable alternatives to driving alone. We cannot continue to ignore the condition of our streets and roads. We have made significant investments in building that infra-structure and it's our responsibility to maintain it. As stated, Sonoma County is rated as having the worst roads in the Bay area. Being "The Pothole County" is not an enviable honor.

As Mayor of Santa Rosa, I requested an annual "report card" from Public Works that simply rated the current condition of our streets and roads followed by an estimate of the cost if the needed repairs are deferred. The figures were astounding! I contend it's better to spend a dollar today rather than have to spend one hundred dollars tomorrow. This is the kind of information needed to make responsible and informed decisions on allocation of limited funds.

It's clear that there is not adequate money to fund all of the repairs, maintenance and improvements needed for the 1,500 miles of county roads. And, there are no easy answers. Through our Congestion Management Plan, we have learned how to set priorities and leverage funding sources. I believe we need a similar process to evaluate how limited funding will be allocated and, in doing so, engage property owners / stakeholders in setting those priorities.

4. Please state your position on the recent decisions by the County to adjust employee's benefits. How would you address the OPED (Other Post Employment Benefits) issue?

Just as we do in our personal lives, I believe that the County (and all governments, for that matter) must begin to align expenses with income. We cannot continue to spend money we don't have. The issue at hand is the unfunded liability of approximately \$400 million for retiree's health benefits. Two things are clear:

1. *In granting this benefit to employees in the early 1980's, the County erred in not setting funds aside to provide for the benefit.*
2. *This is a shared problem and one that both the administration and the employee groups should address in a collaborative manner.*

My approach to dealing with the issue would be defining a process built around "Interest Based Negotiations" (IBN). While the process can be protracted, it has been my experience that the end result is higher morale, greater commitment for a positive outcome and ownership of the product.

5. The key to Santa Rosa's Economic Health is our ability to implement Redevelopment areas throughout our City. Do you support Santa Rosa Redevelopment efforts?

Redevelopment is certainly a key tool used by cities and counties throughout the country to revitalize blighted and economically disadvantaged areas. Redevelopment provides valuable financing tools and can serve as a catalyst to stimulate private investment. After the devastating earthquake in 1969 that centered in downtown Santa Rosa, we were able to rebuild our downtown and attract major investments in the area. Redevelopment has also given us the financial tools to provide affordable housing opportunities and create many new jobs.

While I was Mayor of Santa Rosa, we looked for ways to revitalize our urban core and thus the Gateway Redevelopment Project began to take form. The plan that includes approximately 1,100 acres along the central business core of the city is an exceedingly aggressive one. It is my belief that there are countless opportunities in moving forward with the Project – opportunities that will result in new investments in Santa Rosa, funds for infra-structure and civic improvements, new jobs and new sales tax dollars to the general fund.

I support the redevelopment efforts and look forward to working with city and county leaders on negotiations that will benefit the greater good.

Please return this questionnaire to the Santa Rosa Chamber, 637 First St. Santa Rosa, CA 95404, attention Mary Ann Barr or email at maryannb@santarosachamber.com.