

*This summary of the Bay Meadows Neighborhood Alliance San Mateo City Council candidate night was prepared by Adina Levin, Friends of Caltrain.*

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## **Bay Meadows San Mateo Council Candidate Night - September 25**

On September 25, the Bay Meadows Neighborhood Association held a candidate forum. The mixed use neighborhood at the site of the former race track is still under construction, and new services are starting to open up, with a brew pub and ice cream shop open, and other retail getting ready to open. Residents are interested in topics relating to transit, walking, bicycling, and land use, as well as issues relating to parkland in the neighborhood and wastewater infrastructure that are particularly relevant for Bay Meadows residents.

This writeup of the candidate forum starts with questions about transit, active transportation, and land use that Friends of Caltrain (FoC) is most knowledgeable about. Next, we include the questions about parks and wastewater, and finally, quotes from the candidates' opening statements. The candidates' bios and statements can be found online here: <http://www.cityofsanmateo.org/2352/Meet-the-2017-City-Council-Candidates>

### **Questions about transit, active transportation, and land use**

*Question: Caltrain suffers from fiscal instability. Although it is owned and operated by the Peninsula Joint Powers Board, which consists of representatives from San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara Counties, in what ways do you think the City of San Mateo could actively support investments in system improvement?*

Mark DePaula. "I wouldn't put a nickel of funds into Caltrain or SamTrans, because of news reports of accounting issues under the previous CEO. I went to the FBI and asked the DA to investigate Caltrain/SamTrans. The DA looked and said hmmm, but cleared these people of funny accounting. Now the investigation file is sealed. I would go to the FBI and demand further investigations."

Eric Rodriguez would take a different direction. "The way to alleviate issues is to have a permanent dedicated source of funding for Caltrain. Rodriguez supports SB797, a sales tax that would provide stable funding for Caltrain. We need to work hard to make sure that the region approves it." San Mateo can play a leading role in making sure that these things get passed, & educating even non-riders of the value in reducing traffic

Joe Goethals. SB797 would allow an 1/8 cent sales tax that would make Caltrain financially secure. 100 years ago we were a train town. Then were sold on the idea that we should be a car society, and that has created gridlock. Over the next 100 years, we will need other forms of transportation, we'll need to rely on the train.... We fought hard for the federal funding to electrify Caltrain.... Also, it's important to build safe bike lanes, if we did more we'd see less traffic and be happier.

Charlie Drechsler. 100 years ago people were parking their horses, then they were parking cars. Now we're struggling with wealth and success. If you know a CEO, you want your company to be near your house so you can get to your kids' little league game. We cannot afford to lose our seat at the table in

regional planning. We need to get freight off roads, get electric vehicles, and more electric vehicle charging stations.

Robert Newsom. We should help fund Caltrain, it's a sliver of a penny. We also need to hold Caltrain accountable. Trains are overcrowded and infrequent. We should be doing a better job providing more frequent service so you don't need to wait twenty to thirty minutes for the next train.

Rick Bonilla - We've been great supporters. We've built this neighborhood around Caltrain, and fought long and hard for electrification. City Manager Larry Patterson and I have been working on Caltrain improvements including grade separations since 2001, and this is finally coming to fruition. Definitely we support SB797, the tax to provide stable funding for Caltrain. You can call/write the governor and urge him to sign the bill authorizing the tax to go on the ballot. Bonilla gives a plug to join Friends of Caltrain ((thanks, CM Bonilla!))

Chelsea Bonini - We should support stable funding for Caltrain. Caltrain is operating at a deficit and SamTrans is worse. Without transit, transit-oriented development work ((she's missing Caltrain's increasing farebox recovery which is very strong by US standards)). Also, let's make riding Caltrain more accessible for different income levels. We also need to work together with a citywide vision make it safer to walk and bike, by Caltrain and El Camino.

### **Question about a proposed citywide building moratorium**

*Question: What are your views on the concept of a building moratorium in San Mateo? Specifically, how would you see this affecting Bay Meadows?*

Eric Rodriguez. I don't support that at all. It would be crippling for Bay Meadows which is a planned community, and the plan isn't fully implemented yet. The concerns may come from issues in the area near Highway 92 which is not planned as well. I don't have a problem here [in the Bay Meadows area] where it's well thought out.

Goethals. I don't support a building moratorium. One of the most important things that city councils do is land use. There are other areas we might want to change in San Mateo, for example, do we want to wait twenty-five years to change the abandoned gas station with the chain link fencing on El Camino? The circumstances come along favoring building once in a generation; it took 20 years to pull Bay Meadows together. Please come to planning commission and make your voices heard. We need to work on making transportation more efficient (another unsolicited plug for Friends of Caltrain).

Drechsler. No to a moratorium. Twenty years ago there were a lot of people who did not want to see this beautiful neighborhood built. This neighborhood wouldn't be here if we listened to the naysayers. Mixed use is a thoughtful, reasonable approach. We need to consider the "silver tsunami" - aging baby boomers want to be able to walk to pharmacy, walk with their friends without driving a car.

Newsom. I'm not for a moratorium, but I come from a neighborhood that is concerned about development at 92/Concar. It's now taking a long time to get onto the freeway. When traffic is gridlocked, people can't get home. Before we look at the Rite-Aid site ((with a large underused surface parking lot)) we need to not jump the gun. We should have a short moratorium to see what the impact will be of the new mixed use development.

Bonilla. I live in the original TOD, downtown. I can walk to get coffee, to the theater, my wife walks to do tai chi in the park, and I want more people to be able to do that. Housing is very important. One thing driving the concerns is phenomenal jobs growth without keeping up on housing and transportation. A building moratorium would make the housing crisis worse. El Camino is zoned for taller, denser buildings that will be part of this community as well, with shops you can walk to. We need housing, affordable housing, housing for seniors, housing for people to work near their jobs.

DePaula - Supports a moratorium. An F traffic rating tells us that we need a building moratorium. Bay Meadows reminds me of Disneyland.

Bonini - Housing is a primary issue. We can't have a moratorium, we need housing for teachers and other essential workers. In Bay Meadows we need to finish building the housing near transit (which also helps to reduce the number of cars). I am in favor of halting building office space. It brings people to our community, so we should build less office until we find a traffic solution. I would support retail, not office. ((does she know that offices next to train have drive rate under 40%))

DePaula - I totally object to mixed use - I go up to San Francisco every Sunday, and I don't want that mixed use! We need to wait - there's an upcoming which has 150 housing units of housing ((said with tone of dismay)).

### **Question about safe bicycling and walking**

*Question: Concerns about traffic safety deter many Bay Meadows residents from biking/walking in San Mateo as much as they otherwise would, particularly from Bay Meadows to the restaurants and services on 25th Avenue west of El Camino. How do you propose to resolve problem areas such as that one?*

Drechsler. We need to pay attention to the bike/ped master plan. I am passionate about making neighborhoods safe. I walk here, though I'm tired by the time I try to run here. I have coached or participated in every sport in town...I raised 5 girls here. It is important that we as adults remember what it was like when we were young, teaching kids about traffic safety, and consider what it will be like in 20 years when we are retired. Every project needs to provide the community benefits.

Newsom. Caltrain grade separations will help. I lived in Netherlands which is a bike and train mecca. We need dedicated bike lanes. I was out cycling last week & there were safety challenges - we have to make sure people respect bike lanes. I work for a microtransit company, and would encourage the city to put out an RFP for microtransit services.

Bonilla. It's important to provide safe crossing of the Caltrain tracks, the grade separations will help. We need to look at how they are being built. I looked at the details and I didn't see good infrastructure for cycling. I support looking at the details of bike safety with the grade separations. We have had a bike / ped master plan since 2011. There's a lot of work that hasn't been finished yet and should be

Bonini. There are also small retailers near you that you could get to - for example, at 42nd and 37th, if there was safe infrastructure. We need to look at the plans holistically. This place is transit-oriented.

We should make more places walkable, and calm traffic. In Grand Boulevard conversations we should have a set at the table and say strongly that we want bike safety, because will make businesses thrive.

DePaula. Maybe all of you ride bikes, but only half of 1% of people ride bikes. Riding a bicycle is dangerous, we need more police control. I'd like to see more bike friendly streets; we need to do more studies. But realistically only half of 1% of people ride bicycle, so I don't see it working.

Rodriguez. I live across El Camino Real by Central Park. I thought we were going to be walking downtown and to Central Park all the time. But ECR might as well be a wall. I've had near misses with cars when walking on ECR in recent years. I'd like to see better crosswalks, and bulbouts. If you're not comfortable walking on El Camino, you won't be walking to Caltrain.

Goethals is a prosecutor. "I was in court in the morning, and had a PAL (Police Athletic League) fundraiser. Our public works department is in charge of safe routes to school. Over next 5 years it will get safer - everyone should feel safe walking to a farmers market, walking/biking to 25th for dinner.

### **Question about options for Bay Meadows park**

*Question: In a recent, admittedly unscientific Next Door survey, where about 10% of Bay Meadows residents weighed in, 51% expressed a preference for leaving Bay Meadows Park as an entirely green park, 43% supported construction of a large facility like that envisioned in the city's recreation facility master plan (but perhaps without surface parking), and 6% preferred something else. How do you think these views of Bay Meadows residents should be incorporated into the city's decision-making on recreation facilities, and how would you prefer to see Bay Meadows Park used?*

Bonini. Facilities in the city are old. We need to take a citywide vision. We're also building three gyms at middle school sites. Leaving fields are also a premium. She wants to look at it more.

DePaula - the greener the better, keep it like it is.

Rodriguez. We need more scientific feedback. Since Bay Meadows will deal with the impacts, Bay Meadows should have a seat at the head of table since you will bear the impacts of development. As your representative on council I would want to do what the residents want. There is a void for rec centers in southeast corner of the city, it concerns me that we don't have enough.

Goethals. I have a strong bias toward keeping it a green space. In Bay Meadows we added fifteen acres of green space, and once you build on it, it's gone forever. The process matters. We give our time to hear the community, as do you. We value rec centers. The head of parks has vision to build facilities like the Peninsula Jewish Community Center in Foster City. In San Mateo - the process matters. Hopefully there will be scientific polls.

Drechsler. Keep it green, and add bathrooms. I enjoy walking and bicycling through the area. The spaces are pretty thoroughly planned. Nowhere in the early discussion was a behemoth athletic facility contemplated. It's great for our City Parks director to have a dream ((of recreational facilities)), and I hope we have that somewhere, but this neighborhood has been thoroughly scrutinized and planned, and we should respect the plan.

Newsom. The poll of the neighborhood says 50% want greenspace, and 43% want a rec facility. Newsom would prefer green space. In other parts of the city the recreational facilities are dated, there's still sand in the sandboxes. Ultimately it comes down to what you all want - I would hope it's not a behemoth rec center. Our family uses Beresford, the King center, Park and Rec programs.

Bonilla. My personal opinion is not as important as what the people who live here want, and the citywide park needs, since this land has been deeded to the city. There a planning process - you should make sure that you let them hear from you. Homeowners Associations should seek broad support for a vision. Get together as a group, do outreach to Park and Rec commissioners and Council. People should know what you think and why - it's helpful to bring illustrations. I'm also concerned about traffic and parking on 28th.

**Question about whether Bay Meadows homeowners should be excluded from assessment to fix leaky sewer pipes, since residents already pay a "Mello Roos" property tax assessment for infrastructure, and Bay Meadows pipes aren't leaking**

*Question: Given that (1) Bay Meadows property owners, unlike those in other parts of the city, pay annual Mello-Roos district fees to cover the city's sewer infrastructure; and (2) CEQA documents conclude that Bay Meadows has zero contribution to the city's sewage overflows, what are your thoughts on excluding Bay Meadows from the sewer fee increases associated with leaking sewer pipes?*

Goethals - we are making a once in a generation investment in our sewer system. I'm preparing you for what will be an unpopular opinion. Every neighborhood would have that argument ((to be exempt)). The Shoreview neighborhood made an assessment district for flood protection and levee improvements, and raised \$20M. That neighborhood benefited from their local investment. But overall infrastructure is not possible if we all don't contribute. The city invested in the flood pumps and took Shoreview out of the flood district. Sometimes some neighborhoods will pay more.

Drechsler. I got to go after Dr. Sewer, thank you. I've had a horse pill to swallow. I don't like maintenance assessment districts but my neighborhood is a part of the city. Everybody invested in getting the levee built. I feel like it's water under the bridge. Perhaps we could give you a credit. At the end of the day these pipes will have problems too. I don't support an opt-out. We are, as a city and as a country, feeling the pain of aging infrastructure. We're all in it together.

Newsom. I agree with both of them. It's a hard pill to swallow to be asked to pay when you have a beautiful brand new system but we have a problem citywide and we're one city. People in the hills might not want to pay for flood protection. Also, we have to make sure we are addressing problems with sewer laterals on people's property. We can't wait for housing sales, we should also make sure that remodels include inspection of sewer lines. Perhaps we should have rebates, and work with the plumbers union, and discount inspections to help people make fixes. Then maybe we'll all benefit.

Bonilla. Everybody in the Bay Meadows neighborhood is paying the Mello Roos assessment, 5K per year, including a 30 year assessment for sewer infrastructure, not just to Saratoga but across 101 to the rest of the system in Shoreview. I think the question raised by the Bay Meadows neighborhood should be looked at. Materials in the new system are not like the old concrete and terra cotta pipes that

have problems elsewhere. Soil here is much better engineered in rest of neighborhood, there's no comparison to other neighborhoods. I'm interested in looking at it.

Bonini. The Mello Roos district was negotiated by the developer, and was not a choice of the homeowner. There might be a way to lessen the burden for homeowners in Bay Meadows, perhaps a lower interest rate? I don't know if that's been considered. As far as paying into system. I agree that there's a lifecycle for infrastructure. Maybe there's a way to exempt Bay Meadows for a time period.

DePaula. I try to think of San Mateo as San Mateo. This is a new development with new requirements. It has backup generators, which have nothing to do with plumbing. What you have is up-to-date by leaps and bounds. It should be cut and dried. I'm sorry I need to even say this. It needs more study. This is a golden neighborhood.

Rodriguez. The question is since Mello Roos assessments are being paid, should Bay Meadows be exempt from sewer fees? I would love to say you don't have to pay it, elect me. At Planning Commission, I was not impressed by the staff reports. I would like to know when the citywide assessment is increased, what percent is due to mitigating leaky sewer laterals. It might be reasonable to pay less if you're not contributing to the problem; but then how much would others need to contribute? We'd have to run numbers.

### **Introductory statements**

Rick Bonilla (incumbent) has been involved in San Mateo civic activity since 1995. He served on the Citizens' Advisory Stakeholder Committee which studied 83 acres in the Bay Meadows Area for over 3 years; the plan was approved in 2005. Then he worked on getting the projects in the plan area approved.

Transit-oriented development is a method of not only making life better but cutting greenhouse gas emissions. I realized that we had a housing shortage that had been building over decades; we could have denser development in transit-served areas that would be walkable and bikeable, where people wouldn't need to have a car. Bonilla has served on the Public Works Commission, then Planning Commission, then Council.

Chelsea Bonini. Currently serving on as board president of San Mateo-Foster City (SMFC) School District' Board. She is in-house corporate council for Lundberg Family Farms, a manufacturing and farming company. She cares about community stability, community values, and quality of life. She is mom to two boys, used to be an elementary school teacher, and is currently an attorney. In her role on the school board, she considers what is the best decision we can make to support our students, and what is the best for the most people in our community.

"We need to be brave. Issues of housing, traffic are breaking our community apart, we need to find collaborative solutions to keep community strong, and focus on quality of life."

Mark DePaula describes himself as a "concerned citizen". He has lived in San Mateo for 57 years. His main goal in running for council: "We need a building moratorium. We have traffic gridlock. Emergency services can't get through."

Eric Rodriguez grew up in San Mateo, serves as a tech startup CEO, and has been endorsed by the San Mateo United Homeowners Association. Recently his family was remodeling their home in the Aragon neighborhood, and spent four months living in Park Place at Bay Meadows. “We found ourselves walking more, in the habit of getting to Whole Foods, had a ritual to go to Saratoga Square where the kids would go around in circle on their bikes.”

Joe Goethals (incumbent) grew up in San Mateo and is raising a family in San Mateo. He is a deputy district attorney in San Mateo County after having served in the same role in Alameda County. “It is different from when I grew up and in many ways getting better. I see residents using the train, we have added fifteen acres of new park space in Bay Meadows. We will see residents using the train more, and we can continue to take steps to mitigate traffic.

Charlie Drechsler has been active in the North Shoreview Neighborhood Association, San Mateo United Homeowners Association, Civic Arts Commission, and Planning Commission. He serves as City Arborist for City of Redwood City. From his candidate statement: “I have been focused on for the last several years is maintaining our community’s commitment to the Bridgepoint Ice Rink. I want our City to provide smart growth in a safe community, affordable and workforce housing, and a liveable wage for the men and women who teach, build and maintain the heart of the Peninsula.”

Robert Newsom has lived in San Mateo since 1980, and lives in the Sunnybrae neighborhood with his wife and two school-aged daughters. He sees the Bay Meadows neighborhood as a jewel. His neighborhood is primarily concerned with the pace of growth, though he does not support a building moratorium.