

# District 7 Supervisor Candidate Forum

By STEPHEN MARTINPINTO



*District 7 Supervisor Candidates. From left: Joel Engardio, Norman Yee, Ben Matranga, Mike Young, and John Farrell. Photo by Bill Wilson, billwilsonphotos.com*

On October 10, our neighborhood association held a debate between the District 7 supervisor candidates. Ben Matranga, Joel Engardio, Mike Young, John Farrell, and the incumbent Norman Yee all attended. They answered questions from members of the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association board and the audience. All the candidates were given opportunities to make opening statements of 60 seconds, followed by debate questions. Questions ranged from public safety, open park space in the Balboa Reservoir Project, the development of the Monterey Boulevard corridor, tough decisions that they have had to make in their careers and so forth. Candidates were limited to 60 seconds each, and each candidate had an opportunity to answer every question. The debate closed with 2 minute closing statements.

The first question had to do with public safety, and the perception that city government is soft on crime which contributes to the proliferation of crime. Specific concerns cited were the city's sanctuary city policy which led to the death of Kate Steinle, and the unanimous vote by the board of supervisors to have a Mario Woods day. Joel Engardio came out against the Mario Woods day, stating that it was "wrong to politicize this issue." As for sanctuary city policy, he stated that while he supports the good intentions of sanctuary city policy, he admits that there are unintended consequences. However he does support the current policy set in place by Sheriff Vicki Hennessey. Norm Yee admitted that although he did vote for the Mario Woods day, he passed a resolution that same week to increase police services. Ben Matranga criticized Norm Yee, stating that the Police Officers Association did not endorse Norm Yee, due to his consistent voting against public safety. Ben Matranga further stated that he was proud to have earned the first endorsement from the Police Officers Association. He stressed the importance of votes and records, and the effects of how a leader talks about the men and women that are sworn to protect public safety. Mike Young, a former visa officer who worked for the department of state and has intimate knowledge of immigration laws, stated that he supports the original

intent of the sanctuary city policy; that is to say, he supports protection of Central American immigrants who, if returned to their country of origin, would face persecution and death. However, he fully supports local law enforcement cooperating with federal law enforcement. John Farrell concurred with Mike Young's position, saying that had the city cooperated with federal law enforcement, Kate Steinle would not have been murdered, and he further states that the sanctuary city policy has drifted from its original purpose and has gotten out of hand.

The Balboa Reservoir Project was high on everybody's minds. With the largest new development coming to the neighborhood in its history, many are nervous that this development will permanently adversely affect the quality of life here. There is a huge emphasis on open space in this development, and we asked a question about how they would ensure the maximum amount of continuous open space would be available. Norman Yee stated that he slowed down the process of development so that neighbors could have a stake in the development process. By doing so, he has allowed neighborhood organizations as ourselves to have a say in the number of units and the design of the development in this new project. Ben Matranga emphasized the importance of placing the requisite infrastructure first before the development starts. Mike Young stated that it is incumbent not only on city leaders, but local neighborhood organizations to ensure their vision for the project is realized. To do so, they must all remain actively engaged from start to finish. John Farrell echoed concerns about the project that not enough parking spaces are currently available for this project, which could lead to parking spillover in surrounding neighborhoods. He also emphasized his dedication to the neighborhoods and his commitment to addressing the concerns of the neighbors. Joel Engardio made a comparison to the Mission Bay development. He noted that shorter buildings tend to take up more space and that taller, thinner buildings have a smaller footprint which allow for more open space. He favors a tapered development with shorter buildings closer to Westwood Park and taller buildings closer to Phelan Avenue.

Homeless, as always, is a major concern. Joel Engardio emphasized mental health treatment for the approximately 30% of the homeless population that is mentally ill. Without enough bed spaces (which has been decreasing over the last number of years) it will be exceedingly difficult to treat the root cause of homelessness, which for many, is mental illness. Norm Yee concurred, also adding that focusing on preventing homelessness by building affordable housing will also serve to reduce the number of homeless. Ben Matranga added that there needs to be a triage based system to address homelessness and sort individuals according to their needs, and provide assistance based on their needs. He also lamented the immense amount of money (to the tune of 240

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million dollars) that is spent annually without measurable results, and the immense amount of money that is wasted due to lack of coordination between agencies. Mike Young addressed homelessness as a regional issue, and pointed to the city of Palo Alto's complete unwillingness to provide any funds for homelessness, as that city feels that San Francisco will take care of it. John Farrell responded by stating that the homeless facilities such as those in Laguna Honda Hospital are closed and homeless facilities in San Francisco General Hospital are unused due to lack of staffing. He recommended scrutinizing more closely homeless agencies that currently provide for services.

Rent Control was a topic that was also addressed. Ben Matranga supports rent control in its current form and sees it as a way to stabilize communities and keep seniors in their homes. Mike Young concurred that rent control is a good idea, however, stressed that modifications need to be made, such as allowing the annual allowable increase in rent to be 100% of the consumer price index, so that property owners have adequate funds to maintain buildings. He also stated that there are many hundreds of owners who are too reticent to enter the rental market because they feel the laws are too onerous. By allowing landlords to have three year fixed rental contracts, this would help alleviate the rental prices and bring up to 30000 rental units into the market, thereby increasing supply and lowering prices. John Farrell came out against the current rent control policy, claiming that it has gotten out of hand. He pointed to examples of tenants being allowed to bring in as many co-renters into a unit as fire code allows without consent from the landlord. He also stated that rent control has drifted away from its original intention of helping people on limited incomes stay in their homes and how it is now used by workers making several hundred thousand dollars a year. Joel Engardio echoed similar feelings, comparing it to sanctuary city policy as an idea with good intentions that has spiraled out of control. He believes that it also traps

people by forcing them to stay in their apartment, but suggested a voucher system that would allow seniors to move to a similar size apartment yet keep their rent. Norman Yee stated that we must close the loopholes that property owners use to evict tenants using the Ellis Act and limit the number of short term rentals that reduce supply and increase rental prices.

Finally, we asked a question about a decision that these candidates have made that was unpopular even though they knew it was right. Ben Matranga pointed out that in District 7 (arguably the most conservative district in San Francisco) a supervisor will be the sole dissenting vote and that he will be prepared to do that. Mike Young said as an immigration officer, he made tough decisions every day, at times refusing visas even if it meant that families would not be reunited because of it. John Farrell said as an assessor for the city, he would often encounter files that had written on them "Do Not Assess-Too Political". As assessor, he assessed them anyway, even at the risk of consequences. Joel Engardio pointed to example as a member of the Democratic Central Council Committee, when a proposal to endorse a proposition to fund parks arose. He did not endorse this proposition as he felt that the money would disappear into a black hole with no accountability or oversight. Furthermore, it would have been a set aside from the General Fund over which supervisors would not be able to control. Norman Yee, while serving on the school board, made the decision to shut down schools during a period of declining enrollment. This was a highly contentious and hotly debated topic, but Norm Yee said he stood by his decision even though it was unpopular.

The debate lasted approximately 90 minutes and was attended by about 120 people. While this debate coincidentally fell on the same night as the Giants-Cubs wild card playoff and the Scott Wiener-Jane Kim debate, many dedicated residents of Sunnyside still came out and made a strong showing. As part of the neighborhood association, we hoped this debate was informative and we hope to have more in the future! ☼

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## Sunnyside Plants Street Trees



*On September 10, Friends of the Urban Forest sponsored a tree planting event. Over 40 new street trees were planted in Sunnyside. Photo from Stephen Martinpinto.*