

**POTRERO HILL MAYORAL CANDIDATE FORUM**  
**Tuesday, August 30, 2011**

Questionnaire for candidates for the office of  
**Mayor of the City of San Francisco**

**Candidate/Campaign Information**

Candidate name: John Avalos
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Anticipated budget: \$1,000,000
Funds raised to date: \$135,000 including \$85,000 in donations and \$50,000 in public financing
Percentage of donations \$100 or less: 87%

*Thank you for taking the time to complete the Questionnaire for the Potrero Hill Mayoral Candidates Forum. Note that your responses to this Questionnaire will be used as one of the criteria by which candidates will be invited to participate in the event; completion of the Questionnaire is not a guarantee that you will be invited to participate.*

*Please write a brief response (fewer than 200 words) to each question.*

**1. Why are you running and why should we vote for you?**

I am running for Mayor to put San Francisco's neighborhoods first, and to support our City's unique diversity. Every single one of our neighborhoods deserves safe and clean streets, accessible public transit, parks, culturally competent services and diverse housing opportunities. City Hall needs to prioritize small businesses, which are the engine of our local economy. As Mayor, I will defend neighborhood-serving businesses, revitalize our commercial corridors, and promote community arts.

**2. What sets you apart from your opponents?**

I have the most experience working on a city budget than any of the other candidates currently running; before serving as the Chair of the City's Budget and Finance Committee, I spent several years staffing the then Chair as a Legislative Aide. Additionally, through my work as a community and labor organizer, I have demonstrated wholeheartedly my commitment to social justice. I have a genuine interest in public service and am not driven by ambition, but rather by a higher political calling to improve the lives of everyday people. Lastly, our campaign has already differentiated itself as the most community-based, grassroots campaign in this cycle. Rather than hire a campaign consultant, we opted for a committee of veteran and new organizers and activists, representing key constituencies, all sharing the various campaign responsibilities.

**3. Have you qualified for public financing? If not, do you plan to do so? If you do not plan to seek public financing, why not?**

Public financing is crucial to our grassroots campaign. In just six weeks time, we qualified for public financing, garnering over \$25,000 from the individual donations of 329 San Franciscans.

**4. What do you view as the top three issues facing San Francisco? Please describe your solutions for those issues.**

I believe the most pressing issues facing our City are jobs, affordable housing, health care, violence, education, and public transportation.

Jobs, housing, and education are all critical to keeping our families in San Francisco. As Mayor, I will expand upon the local hiring legislation I crafted, which will not only provide work for the many San Franciscans who need it, it will ensure that our dollars are spent in our local stores, and serve our local tax base. As Supervisor I have secured tens of millions of dollars for the development of affordable housing in San Francisco, and as Mayor I will put the full weight of my office behind more creative solutions to the budget crisis, like the real estate transfer-tax I championed, which has brought in more than \$40 million in new revenue already this year.

If elected, I aim to ensure greater opportunity, access, and support for working families; affordable housing; economic justice and workers' rights; a commitment to public health, transit, recreation and parks; and protecting our safety net through an equitable budget.

**5. What are some specific public safety strategies currently being implemented in San Francisco that you agree or disagree with? With these strategies in mind, what do you intend to do about public safety if elected mayor?**

I was opposed to Prop L, last year's Sit/Lie measure; and now it has become clear that the city is spending precious resources to apply this new vagrancy law that many in the Police Department find difficult, if not impossible, to implement. Instead of creating new laws targeting low-income people who have little alternative to the streets, San Francisco can implement community-policing programs that are based upon relationship building with merchants and residents – including youth – and people who are on our streets and sidewalks.

As Supervisor, I have responded to neighborhood crime and violence by bringing neighbors together sponsoring neighborhood watch groups, and conducting forums with the Police Department and residents, including youth. I am in favor of more engaged beat patrols, and as Mayor I would make sure there are sufficient standards in place as to how they interact with merchants and residents; they should all be on a first-name basis.

**6. What does the term "affordable housing" mean to you? What, if anything, will you do to increase the quantity of affordable housing in San Francisco?**

To me, "affordable housing" means the preservation of our City's economic, cultural, and racial diversity. This is why affordable housing has been one of my top priorities during my years as Supervisor; I worked to secure \$30 million for new affordable housing opportunities, drafted the first effort to create a sustained funding source for affordable housing, and created the City's Rental Subsidy Program for Low-Income Families, which provides rental assistance for those struggling to stay in their homes.

During my four years as Legislative Assistant in the District 6 Supervisor's office, I shared in green-lighting more development than anyone else in a similar period, while ensuring that an unprecedented level of community benefits would be included in the development agreements. My support of the various development projects was based on the Community Benefits Agreement negotiated by labor and other community groups. This is the development philosophy I would carry into the Mayor's Office.

This November, I plan on introducing a bond measure to fund affordable housing. Over the past 15 years, a stagnating economic climate and a lack of availability of funds has contributed to fewer and fewer San Francisco renters and a decrease in development in affordable housing; the last time an affordable housing bond measure was approved by voters was Prop A in 1996. My proposal will include an acquisition and rehabilitation fund that allows organizations to buy existing multi-family buildings and transform them into permanent affordable rental housing or limited equity co-ops, with an emphasis on maintaining existing tenants. This fund will also provide assistance to low-to-moderate income families hoping to buy a home for the first time – including an added incentive for those purchasing homes in need of rehabilitation – as well as to those families facing foreclosure. This bond measure would not simply supplement existing funding programs; if approved by voters, it would be a realistic, progressive approach to permanent funding for the rehabilitation and redevelopment of affordable housing in San Francisco.

**7. In the 2000 census, San Francisco was the second most racially diverse county in California. In the 2010 census, we were twelfth. What issues do you see in the changing demographics of the City, and how as mayor do you plan to support racial, economic and cultural diversity?**

Over the past ten years, San Francisco has lost thousands of families due to rising housing costs and lack of accessible and affordable health care and education, which has contributed greatly to the narrowing of our City's diversity. I have always prioritized the preservation of neighborhood character and community, a philosophy that was proven when I championed the "community-action" grants program, which supports projects such as community gardens, murals, and issue summits to empower neighborhoods, when I organized "art walk" events in my district, or when I created the Ocean Ave Community Benefits District, which focuses on local business retention and neighborhood beautification.

As Mayor, I would put the full weight of the office behind keeping those departing families here, through expanding local hiring, green-lighting affordable housing developments that maintain community, and exploring innovative solutions to generating revenue, such as the voter-approved Real Estate Transfer Tax mentioned above, as well as my affordable housing bond measure I plan on introducing on the November 2011 ballot.

**8. What is your position regarding privatization of the public sector, i.e., contracting out public land and services to for-profit or private entities? Please explain with specific examples.**

I do not support the privatization of essential government services, or the outsourcing of public and private sector jobs. In fact, I sponsored Parks for the People, which will be on the November ballot; recently we have been paying too much for the creation and the renovation of new parks and subsequently we've had less access to existing parks because they are being leased out to private entities. If elected I would throw the full weight of the Mayor's office behind opposing new entrance fees to public goods, such as those being proposed for the Botanical Garden in Golden Gate Park. Lastly, I'm of the impression that our healthcare system should be about public health, not profit, and I'm against our jailhouse services being contracted out to the private sector; our government has the opportunity to set the standard for the private sector to follow regarding wages, benefits, and accountability.

**9. Do you support reforming the 1932 Refuse Collection and Disposal Ordinance to allow the City to contract out its garbage services through competitive bidding?**

I absolutely support reforming the 1932 Refuse Collection and Disposal Ordinance; the current system is outdated and has been reduced to a monopoly. I advocate establishing a competitive bidding system for our garbage collection and transfer services, which would contain commercial rates for the first time, as well as generate a substantial franchise fee and provide as much as \$40-50 million a year to the General Fund.

**10. Do you believe that San Francisco should be a Sanctuary City, and will you remove San Francisco from the Secure Communities Program?**

During these times of economic crisis, we need to do everything we can to support our immigrant communities, not just those from outside the country, but from anywhere in the United States. I will honor our status as a Sanctuary City, and ensure San Francisco can serve, protect, and provide for our immigrant population.

I consider the Secure Communities Initiative an indication that the country needs comprehensive immigration reform; the nation is passing laws that stand at odds with our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Our Police Department already has an effective system in place for reporting individuals charged with serious crimes to the ICE, and although there are many obstacles that stand in the way of opting out of the Secure Communities Program, I will undoubtedly plan on looking into what removal options are available.

**11. What will you do as mayor to fulfill the promise of Hope SF and improve substandard public housing conditions? What changes, if any, would you make to the San Francisco Housing Authority?**

As I mentioned above, I am introducing an affordable housing bond measure on the November ballot to provide sustainable, permanent funding for the development and rehabilitation of affordable housing in San Francisco. I have a proven record of ensuring under-served communities and neighborhoods received their fair share of services and investment from the City, and I will champion this bond measure, which focuses in large part on the redevelopment of public housing projects, in the months to come.

As Mayor, I would want to appoint new commissioners who will create greater access to the Housing Authority, and hold it to a greater standard regarding their community members. Commissioners ought to be advocates for the agency to provide higher level of habitability of housing under their authority.

**12. Complaining about Muni is a local pastime. That said, we have seen repeated decreases in service while the City has approved plans to substantially increase the population of zip code 94107 over the next 20 years. What, as mayor, will you do to fulfill the City's Transit First Policy for today's San Franciscans? How will you prepare for tomorrow's Muni riders?**

Public transit has been a continual priority for me during my years of public service, having been a supporter of Proposition 1 for High Speed Rail, and MUNI would most certainly be front and center in my Mayoral administration. Immediately I will collaborate with Supervisor David Campos to pass his Charter Amendment for comprehensive MUNI reform, and will be able to follow through on Supervisor Mirkarimi's proposal to increase the parking tax or another commuter tax to generate revenue.

I support smart transportation projects, like both of MUNI's bus rapid transit proposals and the Transbay Transit Center, and as Mayor I will build on efforts to reduce conflict created by automobile use, by expanding car-free Market Street and implementing the Transportation Authority's congestion pricing proposal for downtown San Francisco. MUNI service also needs to be expanded to those neighborhoods whose populations are growing and therefore need it most; with these revenue reform proposals I plan on ensuring that every community benefits from accessible and convenient public transportation.

I am also an avid cyclist, and in that spirit, I have unapologetically pushed our City's Transit First Policy, advocating the use of bicycles as an alternative

to automobile use. As Mayor I will undoubtedly accelerate the implementation and expansion of the city's bike plan.

**13. Likewise, the San Francisco Unified School District provides an often-cited reason for families to leave the City and is a source of stress for those choosing to remain. What are the biggest issues related to public education in the City, and what factors contributed to these issues? What will you do in your term as mayor to improve education in the City?**

My wife Karen is a school teacher at SF Community School in the Excelsior Neighborhood and has been an SFUSD teacher for the past 15 years; therefore quality education is an issue close to my family's heart. Funding is the biggest issue; if elected I would seek creative solutions to our cash flow problem and ensure that our City's schools receive their fair share of funding, through proposals such as my aforementioned Real-Estate Transfer Tax. I have always believed that early childhood education is instrumental in enabling children to become successful lifelong learners, and therefore I have been a supporter of both childcare and afterschool programs. As Mayor, I would seek to expand universal childcare and after school programs in our public schools.

I believe that, ultimately, the most important person in a child's education outside of their immediate family is their schoolteacher. It is critical that public school teachers be supported as professionals and that they have the support they need to do the important job of educating our children. I plan to work closely with the teacher's union and the administration of the San Francisco school district to broker relationships and be a collaborator in finding solutions to the fiscal crisis in which our schools find themselves. Continuing to find revenue for the rainy day fund as well as building relationships between city departments that serve youth and the school district are initiatives that I will work on.

**14. How, as Mayor, would you facilitate better dialogue and collaboration between City departments, such as SFMTA or Recreation and Parks, and neighborhood organizations?**

As Mayor, I would create greater transparency of the budgets and policies of the City department, and create meaningful ways for citizens to participate and provide input into how these departments function. I also plan on holding biannual forums for the SFMTA and Recreation & Parks, since these are two departments that have the greatest connection to the widest diversity of San Franciscans, and need to have the flexibility and accountability to meet the needs of our neighborhoods and residences throughout our City.

**15. Please review the policies and programs you have advocated in your responses to the questions above. Given forecasts of difficult budgets for the next several years, how do you propose that we fund the aforementioned policies and programs while maintaining other vital City services and programs?**

We are currently facing a \$9.6 billion deficit; whoever is sitting the Mayor's seat must be comfortable making the difficult choices of cutting programs. As Budget Chair, I worked with partners in labor and the community to minimize budget cuts, in particular to health and human services, recreation and parks, and community services. My budget philosophy has always been to more evenly share the pain and to chop from the top, rather than gutting the line services.

Of all the candidates currently seeking the office of Mayor, I have the most experience negotiating a city's budget. I served as the Chair of the Budget and Finance Committee for fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, each of which were years where the country was crippled by recession and the City faced a half billion dollar budget shortfall.

In collaboration with my administration, community groups, and local businesses, I intend to champion many more creative solutions to our revenue problems. As proven by my 2010 voter-approved Real-Estate Transfer tax on downtown commercial buildings, which has already generated tens of millions of dollars, I have experience not only in maintaining funding for vital city services and community programs during difficult times, but also in securing funding for community-led improvement projects and developments that are invaluable to our City's cultural and economic health. Making sure downtown pays their fair share, eliminating the sales tax loophole for online travel businesses, reforming our garbage collection system, and streamlining certain city services are all instrumental in ensuring our tax dollars and General Fund are allocated wisely and appropriately during a budget crisis.

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*Please return your responses to this Questionnaire by **Thursday, July 7, 2011**, to [contact\\_us@phdemclub.org](mailto:contact_us@phdemclub.org). Thank you again for your participation.*