

Ami Chen-Mills

1. Outline at least one priority you plan to accomplish during your first term that will benefit Santa Cruz County's low-income residents.

I believe the County must *immediately* declare a county-wide Housing Emergency. Then, we must engage the community in a wide-scale discussion toward solutions. This would likely include a county-wide bond measure to build affordable housing and further incentivize and educate landlords to accept Housing Authority vouchers (Section 8). We must also look into possible renter voucher programs through the county if we can secure funding and create more renter protections.

Through the use of pension fund-investors, we can rapidly build "workforce" or "missing middle" housing with strict covenants for affordability, and prioritize occupancy for those who currently live and work here. We must use appropriate county lands, such as the County Building parking lot and the Emeline complex site to build permanent supportive housing post haste. We must pass a recommended county-wide minimum wage of at least \$22/hour.

2. Growing income inequality is placing a burden on the services that form Santa Cruz County's social "safety net?" How do you plan to strengthen those services to keep more families and individuals from "falling through the cracks" if elected?

Your organization and other County nonprofits as well as County Human Services and Health employees are the groups and people most in touch with County needs in terms of services, what is working and what is not to address community needs, beyond those people facing lack and challenges themselves. Post-pandemic period, although the state economy is rebounding, with inflation and gas prices soaring, we face multiple, overlapping crises still, especially regarding housing.

State funds are coming down the pike, and in listening to you about the needs you see as urgent, I will work to direct those funds toward the most essential services, which I see now as: COVID transmission prevention, shelter/housing, food, mental health and employment.

As an executive director of a nonprofit for nearly 10 years, I know funders often do not understand the needs of nonprofits to work without the excess burden of constant fundraising and unnecessary paperwork. The Board must listen to your concerns about how County processes are helping or hindering your work and make every attempt to streamline.

3. What will you do to promote and execute the development of Santa Cruz County's Local Playbook for California's Master Plan for Aging?

I will support mass transit and multi-modal transit, including Rail and Trail, as well as development of affordable senior housing, and building of ADU's and multifamily developments. As noted below, I will work on the Board to pre-plan for zoning along transportation corridors and support innovative, mixed-demographic housing including community housing that includes foster youth, for example, and seniors. I will consult closely with the Seniors Councils and area

CBOs to ensure equity, inclusion, human contact, home-based health care, broadband access and employment and volunteer opportunities for our diverse, aging population. I particularly support home visits for the aging population because it is often difficult for them to travel for services and we must ensure geriatrics-trained medical and other professionals are available in our County at adequate numbers for our population. I will be a “senior” in 2030 too!

4. Community needs always seem to be competing for funding with one another. Organizations that serve various populations can often be caught in the middle. What will be your funding priorities and do you see any ways that funding might be expanded across vulnerable groups and needs?

My priorities will be food, housing and shelter, *employment* (Workforce Innovation), volunteer opportunities and services for low- to no-income individuals and our aging population. Our “poor county” status means limited funding for our population, but, of course, we must secure all the federal and state funding we can, working with nonprofits and CBO’s to be prepared for RFP’s as they emerge. As noted, I support a bond measure to build very low income and permanent supportive housing, as well as a specific-product-related sales tax to support social and health services for seniors and others in such housing. I am also in conversation with local landlords who indicate they would support a new parcel tax toward affordable housing. It is hard to know what the opportunities and landscape will look like in January if I win the Supervisor seat, but I am sure I will be touring the county and consulting with many of you well before then.

5. Housing and transportation are frequently cited as two of Santa Cruz County’s biggest challenges. The relationship between the two is obvious – communities that lack affordable housing contribute to traffic congestion by forcing more of their workforce to commute in. How will you address these two important challenges for Santa Cruz County?

The County must proactively *plan* for affordable housing along transportation corridors--and that includes changing the Housing Element and zoning in the County’s General Plan so that we are “pre-planning,” rather than reacting and “spot planning” for developments that support neighborhood diversity—including income diversity—affordable infill development (multi-family developments, apartments, townhouses) walkability, mass transit and homes for all of us. I support the Rail and Trail and also a dedicated shoulder lane for buses from South to North County and back again. We must ensure we have enough drivers for Metro and that also means housing and making sure current drivers are incentivized to stay on the job.

6. Nonprofit wages have reached a critical low. Many full-time non-profit employees, including those who have lived here for decades while serving their community, must now depend on public assistance themselves in order to survive. What will you do to address the wage and retention crisis that is affecting the nonprofit agencies contracted by the county to provide services so that our community’s nonprofits can continue to recruit and retain staffing to operate our services?

The County cannot enforce its own minimum wage, but we *can* pass a resolution for a recommended minimum wage and encourage all employers who can afford to do so to meet this minimum wage. This resolution (I would hope) would prompt a wide-scale discussion of what we want our community to look like and address the issue of loss of “workforce” (also called human beings) in our area. It might be possible to pass a Living Wage Ordinance with the

nonprofits that contract with the County, but we would need to engage in deep discussions about how that would impact the viability of those nonprofits before doing so, and how those wages would be funded. If we can get the state legislature to change our property tax funding ratios, we should. I know that seems impossible, but I keep wondering about it given how much it would help us all.

Nonprofit organizations are funded by many sources bringing in massive financial resources to the county and making up the 4th largest sector in the state and a primary employer. Yet nonprofits do not always have a seat at the table equivalent to county departments. Given their willingness to step up as first responders in times of crises, what role do you think they need to play in relation to the Board and how would you make this happen.

Given the essential services provided by the nonprofit sector during both the pandemic and CZU wildfires, we must have nonprofit service providers “at the table” with relevant County managers and administrators and with the Board. Under Mimi Hall, it seems progress was made to bring nonprofits more into important discussions with the County, and I would want to see that continue. My job would be to remain in communication with non-profit directors or appointed representatives in order to listen, at the same time as overseeing the work of County departments in Health and Human Services so that we can all be sure nonprofits have adequate input. I would also engage with an organization like the Nonprofit Connection to gain a greater sense of what nonprofit needs and issues are. Real dialogue would be most conducive to strategies for effective and productive collaboration for our community.