

Candidate Justin Cummings
Responses to the Nonprofit Questionnaire
5/24/2022

3rd and 4th District Supervisor Forum
May 25, 2022

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

RESPONSE:

Since responding to the needs of low-income county residents is one of paramount importance to me, there are a number of priorities I plan to accomplish during my first term. These include increasing the County affordable housing requirement for new housing development to 20%, securing significant additional funding for the County's community programs, expanding the County's Thrive by Three and Nurse Family Partnership program, aggressively pursuing additional state and federal grant funding for services to low-income residents, and increasing the coordination with the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville to provide better services to our unhoused population throughout the County.

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?

RESPONSE:

As a City Council member, Vice Mayor, and during my time as Mayor during 2020, my priorities have been to ensure that resources are available to support residents who are struggling in our community. I have aggressively pushed for just cause eviction measures and eviction protections during the pandemic, pushed for tenant assistance programs and rental assistance, worked with churches to ensure food pantries were able to get assistance to members of the community during the pandemic among many others. Many families are still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic and moving past the pandemic, it is clear that the General Fund support for the CORE programs needs to increase. However, since County discretionary funding is so limited, it will also be one of my priorities to work with our state and federal legislators as well as County staff to secure additional funding for the programs that will strengthen the County's safety net.

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?

RESPONSE:

With inflation increasing the cost of medication and housing in our community, it is critical that we are working to ensure that seniors on fixed incomes are able to meet their needs. This is personal, because after my father beat cancer, I watched him struggle to meet his needs on a fixed income before he passed in 2014. We must not neglect our elders and as County Supervisor, I will work closely with the County's Area Agency on Aging, Senior Citizens Legal Services, the Seniors Commission, County staff, and our state and federal representatives to improve and expand services to our senior population. We have a tremendous opportunity right now with the establishment of the State's Master Plan on Aging and significantly increased funding for essential senior programs, after decades of disinvestment. County and Area Agency on Aging staff and elected leaders are working with community partners to develop our local Master Plan Playbook.

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

RESPONSE:

The County has established a process for evaluating the provision of services by community programs (CORE). Initially, my intention is to: 1) significantly expand funding for these programs; and 2) use the existing process to set funding priorities. I will work with the Human Care Alliance and community program directors to evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of the CORE process to ensure that vital nonprofit programs receive the support they need to serve our community. I will also work with the Rise Together group and other nonprofits in the community to see how we can work to also help rising nonprofits that serve underserved communities establish and thrive in our community. In addition to that, I would like to work with nonprofits in the community to determine whether the process we have been using isn't overburdensome, which could exclude some nonprofits from consideration.

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?

RESPONSE:

Increasing affordable housing in the County is one of my highest priorities. As mentioned above I plan to increase the County's affordable housing requirements on market rate developments to 20%. Obviously, though, this will not be enough. We need more 100% affordable housing projects. The County is now in the process of adopting a major amendment

to its General Plan called the Sustainability Policy and Regulatory Update. This plan provides for significant increases in housing densities along the Soquel Drive corridor. My intention is to designate as many affordable housing sites as possible in this plan. We also need to create workforce housing for our workforce. In terms of transportation, I strongly support retaining the rail corridor for public transportation while continuing to build the trail along the tracks, and oppose Measure D and would like to move forward with bringing the electric bike share program to the entire county.

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?

RESPONSE:

Having created two nonprofits in the community, I know first hand how hard nonprofit workers struggle to live in the community and essential services. Since 2020, I have been a member of the Rise Together group, which is comprised of BIPOC nonprofit and community leaders who are working to support the lives of BIPOC community members. Collectively we have been working to find new ways to secure and distribute funding to help support and promote the work of nonprofits that support communities of color. The only way to increase wages without reducing services to people in need is to increase funding to the community programs and my intention is to support significant increases in this funding. We will need to work together to advocate at the state and federal level for more resources, especially since we are still helping many of our low income residents recover from the pandemic.

7. 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.

RESPONSE:

My intention is to work with the Human Care Alliance and directly with the EDs of community programs to evaluate the CORE process in order to evaluate whether revisions to the process are needed to more effectively involve the community nonprofits in the funding of the vital community services they provide. During my time as Mayor of the City of Santa Cruz, and in my 3.5 years on the City Council, I have found that when we bring the people who are impacted by decision making to the table we are able to incorporate their needs in the decision making process.