

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors District 3 Candidate Q&A

Earlier this year, local faith-based advocacy organization [Sacramento ACT](#) hosted a candidates forum prior to the 2020 Sacramento County District 3 Board of Supervisors primary election. Gregg Fishman and Rich Desmond emerged from the primary as the top two candidates set to face off in the general election this November. Since then, Sacramento CORE (Collaborative Organizing for Racial Equity), a part of [Jesuits West CORE](#), and Sacramento ACT caught up with Fishman and Desmond to get their take on issues facing the county that have arisen since the last candidate forum in January 2020. Topics addressed include inclusionary affordable housing, rising homelessness, COVID-19 relief funding, racism, and oversight of the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office's policing practices and budget. The questions and the candidates' unedited answers can be read below.

Questions and Answers

1. In 2005, Sacramento County put in place an inclusionary zoning policy that instantly became a national model. It encouraged development of mixed-income communities, required 15 percent of all new housing units be affordable to low-income families, and went further to require developers to create housing for "extremely low income" families. It was instantly fought in the courts and politically by the big development companies. Five years ago, the County Board bowed to that pressure and repealed its ordinance. In the first year after that change, which followed a similar move by the City of Sacramento, construction of affordable units in our region dropped by 56 percent. And we have seen the stratospheric rise of rent and housing prices, followed closely by evictions and growing homelessness, that has followed.

Inclusionary zoning means that we leverage our hot housing market to make it easier for low-income residents and people of color to afford to live here. It also leads to more integrated communities, where the poor and the wealthy are less separated by distance and access to resources. **Will you support the reinstatement of a strong inclusionary housing ordinance based upon national models and best practices?**

Gregg Fishman: First, I think it is worth noting that I was hoping to be able to answer these questions in a live candidate forum (over zoom) with you and your members. My understanding is that my opponent was unwilling to engage in that live discussion. I think that's a shame. This is the second time he has ducked one of your candidate forums.

Yes, there should be some level of affordable housing in large, new housing projects. I also believe we should provide incentives to develop the type of housing projects we want in the county. I envision a matrix of positive attributes and the potential incentives the project could qualify for, based on the positive attributes it includes. For example, projects that are infill, transit oriented, mixed-use, all electric, affordable housing inclusive, could qualify for incentives that could include waived, reduced or financed impact fees, priority in permitting and inspections, increased density. So, yes, let's require some affordable units in a large new project, and also let's provide incentives to make doing so more attractive.

Rich Desmond: The cost of housing in California has become unbearable for many families, especially those out of work. I am proud that District 3 has such a high number of affordable and low income housing units, but we need to do better. The challenge with strong inclusionary housing mandates is that they can deter development of the very housing options they seek to promote. One of the reasons the Board repealed the inclusionary housing ordinance is that it was not as effective as expected.

Instead of creating mandates that have not always proven successful in California, I support creating incentives, fee waivers, streamlining, and partnerships that will result in more affordable and low income housing options. I support an approach to inclusionary housing that involves input from housing advocates, infill developers, and other stakeholders to make sure we strike the right balance. The Board of Supervisors will be discussing an updated Housing Element in the General Plan that will include many innovative measures to attract and streamline more affordable housing. I support this approach.

2. West Arden Arcade, right here in District 3, is the neighborhood with the lowest median income in Sacramento County. Residents of the 95821 ZIP code have lower life expectancy and much higher chronic disease mortality for heart disease, stroke, and other conditions. Children and youth in this neighborhood also show a higher

burden of disease, including asthma, dental disease, assault, and mental health issues. Deteriorating housing conditions and lack of enough affordable housing are a major factor in the higher burden of disease for people of color in West Arden Arcade.

At the same time, communities like West Arden Arcade are almost completely built-out and have limited potential for new development. Policies and plans should therefore focus on housing conditions and housing affordability. **What is your plan to create more housing and increase access to affordable housing in a built-out area like Arden Arcade?**

Gregg Fishman: There are some open parcels in Arden Arcade that could be used for the type of project I described above. Hurley Way at Morse Avenue, is one example. The right incentives could jumpstart housing projects on many of those parcels. We also need to look at some of the empty retail and commercial spaces, and determine if they can be repurposed or redeveloped into mixed-use space that includes housing. We may need to change zoning to allow for that. We know we need more housing. I will work to remove the barriers and increase the incentives to build the kind of housing projects we need.

Rich Desmond: For far too long, our underprivileged communities in District 3 have been overlooked. I will focus on reducing the number of disproportionate black child deaths in the communities of Arden Arcade, North Highlands, and Foothill Farms. We must devote more resources towards our First Five Commission, and I will work towards establishing Birth & Beyond Family Resource Centers in the areas of District 3 that truly need them. We must work towards prevention to make positive changes for the future. Income should not dictate access to living a healthy life. I have met with representatives from the Black Child Legacy Campaign and other local community advocates, and I have participated in forums hosted by Impact Sac and the NAACP to hear about issues they are facing. But this is only a start. I commit to engaging with underprivileged communities in District 3 and forging productive relationships with community leaders and advocates while working to bring about meaningful change. Although I will never be able to fully understand the hardships that people of color face, I can listen, create opportunities, and fight to improve conditions in their communities every day.

When it comes to housing, I support projects that reshape our commercial areas into viable mixed residential/commercial spaces and convert vacant retail properties into housing that will attract young families to the area. I will partner with strategic commercial planners to modernize our blighted areas and attract quality businesses so we can strengthen our local economy. I will maximize density incentives to increase housing along transportation corridors and work to streamline residential development that makes sense for the community. I will work to make housing more affordable by reducing unnecessary fees, regulations, and delays. I will work closely with local nonprofit organizations like the Carmichael Homeless Assistance Resource Team, Mercy Housing, and Sacramento Self Help Housing to provide shelter and transitional housing for our homeless.

As a member of the Carmichael/Old Foothill Farms Planning and Advisory Council, I support the inclusion of an Environmental Justice component in the County's

General Plan to identify and attract better land use, housing, and commercial opportunities in underprivileged communities in Sacramento County.

3. Sacramento ACT and its Housing and Homelessness Committee have worked for years to push the County to draft a comprehensive plan to make homelessness a rare and brief experience in Sacramento. This plan would coordinate services and prioritize transitional and permanent housing options in order to end homelessness. Three years ago, we organized an Action meeting where the Mayor of Sacramento, the Chair of the Board of Supervisors, and the Executive Director of Sacramento Steps Forward all signed a pledge to make progress on a plan. The County Grand Jury has also called out the need for the County and Continuum of Care to develop a plan. In late 2018 the County formally adopted a plan in order to be eligible for state No Place Like Home funding. While useful in providing direction for improving housing and services, the plan was not based on quantitative analysis of needs or required levels of funding.

Will you commit to achieving a countywide comprehensive plan to end homelessness based on quantitative analysis of capacity expansion needs and funding requirements in the first two years of your term as Supervisor?

Gregg Fishman: Yes, I will. We absolutely need to collaborate more closely with the City of Sacramento and the other cities in the county to make sure we are coordinating our approach to homelessness, and providing a seamless “continuum of care” that can move people off the streets and into progressively more independent and sustainable living situations. Much has changed since 2018. We need to take another look at how to make the most of the dollars available for homelessness. There has been discussion in the past about creating a Joint Powers Authority to provide coordination and collaboration. I was initially unsure that was needed, but I am increasingly willing to reevaluate that position and consider the possibility. The coordination we need is not happening as well as it could be. A JPA could provide the structure to make it happen.

Rich Desmond: Absolutely. The number of people living on our streets has more than doubled in the last few years despite increased public funding to address it. We need a humane and compassionate approach to this problem that begins with the basic premise that no one should have to sleep outdoors on our streets or open spaces. We must work collaboratively with the City of Sacramento and the State to address this problem.

I support the creation of safe sleeping centers and shelters in areas close to services. I support affordable housing programs to help get families off the streets and into homes. Many people experiencing homelessness suffer from mental illness and/or addiction, and we need to have more resources and tools to get them help. I support increasing efforts at the state and local level to target resources toward these individuals to get them into treatment. Finally, I believe our public assistance for individuals experiencing homelessness should be balanced with support for law enforcement efforts to make sure homelessness does not become a license to harm others or damage property.

The State budget allocated over \$2 billion to address homelessness and low-income housing in last year’s budget. We have a lot of resources to keep people from becoming homeless and get them placed into housing and services, but there is a confusing and inconsistent patchwork of services across jurisdictional boundaries. We need more coordination and collaboration to get people connected to services that work.

4. It is often said, truthfully, that our County’s largest public housing project, and our largest mental health provider, are our jails. After a community outcry, the County Board recently decided to cancel an \$89 million jail

expansion project that would have devastated many other crucial services, including homelessness and Child Protective Services, and locked the County into decades of high operating costs and destructive outcomes for County residents. We now have the opportunity to change how our County approaches crime, poverty, housing, and mental health, and to move toward a more just and more effective system.

Will you commit today to directing more funding to housing, mental health care, and schools rather than more incarceration?

Gregg Fishman: There is strong evidence that shows society is poorly served by incarcerating the mentally ill, people with substance use disorder and young people. It costs more than treatment and the outcomes are far worse. At the same time, under public safety realignment, counties are now incarcerating people who have been convicted of more serious crimes. Most of them will be released at some point. So the issue is, we need to find a way to transition to treatment programs for many people who are currently incarcerated, while still maintaining the capacity to incarcerate serious criminals—and provide the programming and treatment that can reduce their likelihood of re-offending when released. This is not an easy task. We have to find a way to do it. It will save money in the long run by preventing more crimes and reducing incarceration.

Rich Desmond: It is a travesty that the jails are the largest mental health provider in our state. I truly believe further funding towards mental health will help alleviate our increasing jail population and our homeless population. However, I disagree with the characterization of the funds intended to improve our county jails. These funds are not for an expansion in capacity to incarcerate more people. They are required to make our aged custodial facilities comply with accessibility standards and ensure they can provide better mental health and medical care for those who interact with the criminal justice system.

I will always advocate for proper funding for health care and housing needs, but I will also advocate for funding to make sure everyone incarcerated in our local facilities receives proper behavioral and medical care, education opportunities, and job training they need to become healthy and prosperous members of our community when they are released. I will support the expansion of re-entry programs and partnerships with local organizations that help reduce the recidivism rates within our communities. While I will not sacrifice our community safety by reducing public safety resources, I will commit to make funding for housing, mental health care, and schools a priority while working to make sure each program has the proper funding to meet the needs of our community.

5. Immediately, at the beginning of the Pandemic, Sacramento ACT organized a listening campaign where we heard the voices of over 300 families in the County. Families who were exacerbated financially, emotionally, and physically from the COVID-19 pandemic. We listened and we helped ninety percent of those families with rent assistance and we continue to hear stories of families who are struggling to pay rent and keep food on the table. In August the County Board of Supervisors were given the responsibility and opportunity to help our most vulnerable and essential workers in the county. Instead, \$104 million of the \$181 million from the CARES ACT was moved to the budget of Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones. Another \$21.5 million went to the payroll and benefits of probations officers and park rangers. As people of Faith we believe the budget is a moral document where we explicitly define what is important to us. It became clear that law enforcement is important to the County when it misspent the community's money.

How will you ensure that the budget and any future relief money is truly reflective of the needs in our community and see that none of it is spent on Law enforcement?

Gregg Fishman: I will ensure that any future federal funding for COVID-19 is spent appropriately, on testing, contact tracing, treatment, PPE, housing assistance, small-business assistance, and other

Rich Desmond: It was irresponsible and insensitive for the County to swap such a large portion CARES ACT funds for general fund dollars through the Sheriff's budget. Although the County was attempting to

programs that slow the spread of COVID-19 and help restart the economy. The Board of Supervisors should have heard from the public and their own department heads in an open meeting setting, rather than give the authority to allocate CARES Act funding to the County Executive Officer. I will never abdicate my responsibility like that. The CEO's decision to allocate \$125.5 million those funds to salaries and benefits was a "swap" to exchange the highly-restricted CARES act funds for more flexible general fund dollars. It's an OK concept, but it was executed so poorly and with so little communication, it eroded public trust in the process and, in fact, the County Health Department did not know that there were general fund dollars available to keep testing sites and labs open and operating. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, public health will be one of my top priorities.

maximize flexibility to use CARES ACT funds for essential County services, it was a poor decision to make it appear as if these funds were being added to the Sheriff's Department. The Supervisors initially abdicated their oversight role in handling these relief funds, but I am happy to see they ultimately came to an agreement to provide funding for public health and other much needed areas.

As we move forward into the coming budget years, my first priority is making sure Sacramento County keeps residents safe by making decisions using the best science available. That means basing our actions on the science and setting clear expectations and measures that will keep residents, students, and businesses safe. I will make sure the County clearly and regularly communicates with residents about how to protect themselves from the virus. There are many different communities in District 3, some with greater needs than others, and I will work with community groups and local leaders to understand their needs and concerns. I will also coordinate with nonprofit efforts to get services to those in need and isolated. I believe any relief funding must first address this issue.

The County will need to make difficult decisions about funding programs and services in the next few years as we emerge from the pandemic. While my first priority will be to keep people and businesses safe, I will also work to make sure we leverage state and federal funds to get resources to working families and businesses hardest hit by the pandemic. As Supervisor, I will listen to all groups involved before making budget decisions.

6. Some have criticized the Sheriff for a reluctance to address abuses of power by his officers and an unwillingness to have his department audited by outside entities. Additionally, our District Attorney has not brought charges against officers even when these officers shoot and kill unarmed civilians. **With this in mind, what Policy or County Charters would you consider proposing to create better oversight and accountability to the sheriff's department given the Sheriff's history?**

Gregg Fishman: I will join Supervisor Patrick Kennedy in calling for a Citizens Review Board that not only has the authority to review critical incidents involving the Sheriff's Department, but also helps the Department reach out to the diverse communities it serves to establish better relationships. The goal should be to prevent those incidents from happening as much as possible, and then reviewing them when they do occur to see if they were handled appropriately, and if not, what needs to change. I will also insist that the Sheriff, this one, and those in the future, abide by the Memorandum of Understanding that was put in place about a year ago between the new Inspector General,

Rich Desmond: There are many things we can do to create better oversight and accountability in the Sheriff's Department. I think it is important to keep in mind that the ultimate accountability measure is the ability for our citizens to elect the Sheriff and hold them accountable through the democratic process of voting. Residents in the City of Sacramento do not have this privilege with their Police Chief. I support the new Inspector General agreement between the County and the Sheriff. I am pleased the agreement has provisions for resolving disagreements. I am also pleased the Board recently approved body cameras for our sheriff's deputies, park rangers and probation officers. These

the Board and the Sheriff. I am gratified to see that the Board and Sheriff have agreed to obtain body-cams for the Department. I want to make sure that the policy governing their use and the release of pertinent recordings is fair, open and transparent. Finally, I strongly support moving the Sheriff and DA elections to Presidential years, when a larger percentage of people vote.

are measures that will improve accountability and transparency, and I look forward to working with the Board and the Sheriff on efforts to increase community input and involvement in our local law enforcement efforts. I am also pleased at some recent legislation signed by the Governor. These include a statute requiring the Attorney General to conduct independent review of certain law enforcement shootings and a new law providing county supervisors with more oversight authority over elected sheriffs.

I am proud of my career in public service as a peace officer, and I will use my background and experience to make sure our local law enforcement serves our community with fairness, respect, and compassion. As the California Highway Patrol's legislative liaison for nearly 5 years, I was directly involved with criminal justice reform advocates, law enforcement labor organizations, legislators, and the Governor's Office on legislation and public policies that have dramatically improved law enforcement practices in California. I helped shape legislation that requires all peace officers to receive training on crisis intervention with people suffering from mental illness, better data collection, and more transparency with personnel records. These were meaningful legislative reforms, and I will bring this experience to the Board of Supervisors to make sure our Sheriff's Department continues to evolve and improve.

7. Would you support a reallocation of funding that goes to militarizing the police force to instead be spent on increasing funding for mental health services and community outreach programs in our communities?

Gregg Fishman: I believe the Sheriff's Department has to have the resources it needs to do a difficult and demanding job. But the community should have some input into determining what the scope of that job should be. Even Sheriff Scott Jones has said he would like to explore having homelessness, mental illness and other non-violent calls for service related to social issues handled by someone other than his deputies. We have to fund those services and still maintain a sheriff's budget that provides the resources needed. These are not mutually exclusive goals. We can do both. We must do both. The Sheriff's Department and Social Services should work together more to de-escalate situations where possible, to divert the homeless, mentally-ill and addicted out of incarceration and into housing, triage, and treatment. Evidence-based programs in many jurisdictions are working to divert many non-violent people out of the justice system and into the health care system for people suffering from mental illness and

Rich Desmond: I oppose defunding of our local law enforcement. A decrease in funding will result in less patrol services and proactive programs in District 3. Some of these programs, like the Homeless Outreach Team and Crisis Response Team, already involve close coordination with service providers in Sacramento County. However, as a former law enforcement officer who spent several years working on police reform at the State Capitol, I know there are innovative and effective models for more collaboration between law enforcement agencies and mental health providers, drug addiction counselors, and social workers. I also believe that the lack of trust in law enforcement in the Black community is a fundamental failure that must be repaired.

addiction. This works better and costs less. Simply locking these people up serves no one, because eventually, they will be released. Without the right treatment, they are sure to reoffend again.