

**BANKERS HILL COMMUNITY GROUP
MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES**

Monday, September 16, 2019
Bankers Hill Clubhouse, 3030 Front St.

BHCG Vice Chair Nancy Moors called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. The following Steering Committee members were present: Chair Amie Hayes, Vice Chair Moors, Treasurer Jeanne Rawlings, Secretary John Lamb, Ben Baltic, Ann Garwood, Jim Frost, Becky Veen, Char Lou Benedict, John Percy and Peter Raymond. There were approximately 109 people in attendance.

Moors welcomed attendees and urged them to attend the group's monthly Steering Committee meetings. She also asked for volunteers for upcoming lunch services at the Bankers Hill Clubhouse on Oct. 27, Nov. 24 and Dec. 22.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

Doug Scott, board member of the Uptown Community Parking District, announced that there are two Bankers Hill seats open in the upcoming election, one representing residents and another representing businesses. He said he and Tom Fox are up for re-election to those two seats.

Bob Leyh, programs manager for San Diego Pride, presented the BHCG with a check for \$1,500 for the community group's cleanup efforts during this year's Pride festivities, which he described as the biggest ever. He praised the relationship with BHCG and promised more temporary trash boxes and bags for next year.

San Diego Mayoral Candidates Forum

Donna Bartlett-May of the non-partisan League of Women Voters, San Diego chapter, went over the rules for the forum and introduced the attending candidates, Rich Riel, Todd Gloria and Barbara Bry. (Candidate Beatrice Marion would arrive later.) Cards for questions were handed out to attendees and submitted to LWV question screeners who grouped queries into categories to make sure the most important topics for the community were covered. Bartlett-May said she was impressed with the turnout. "Some neighborhoods are more active than others," she said. "It's nice to see."

Each candidate provided a two-minute opening statement. Riel said he ran for mayor 35 years ago, believing an election is a "marketplace of ideas." The person with the best ideas, he reasoned, will get the most votes. Back then, Riel said he had two ideas: term limits at all political levels. Four years later, we had term limits, he said. The other idea is much more difficult: stopping the sale of city-owned land. Objected to use of eminent domain to take land downtown for Horton Plaza.

Gloria thanked the BHCG for the opportunity and LWV for leading. He said he's running for mayor because "as a third-generation San Diegan, I know where we've been as a city." A son of a hotel maid and a gardener, he said he appreciates how hard it is to make ends meet in San Diego. He said he has "a vision where I want to take us." He said San Diego's central problem is "we are a big city that often acts like a small town." The neighboring airport and a nearby trolley line that still do not connect is one example, he said. Small-town thinking creates the traffic we all experience every day. "We don't have a world-class transportation system despite being the second-largest city in California," he said. San Diego, the eighth-largest city in the nation, has the country's fourth-largest homeless population. He said the city must do all it can to end chronic homelessness. Other cities are doing this, why can't San Diego? The answer, he said, is we can. On housing affordability, he said there are plenty of homes for people "with a million bucks or more." But for working and middle-class people, the opportunities are dwindling. He said the slogan "America's Finest City" sets the bar too low. "We must dare to be a great city."

Bry thanked the BHCG and LWV, of which she's a member. Ran for public office four years ago for the first time. Bry said she never imagined running for mayor. But what she found at City Hall when she became a councilmember was "a mess" that "didn't get there overnight." Poor decisions were made regarding homelessness, housing and community planning, she said. Instead, Bry wants San Diego to be "a model for equity," economically, socially and environmentally. Politics as usual will not get us there, she said. Said she has spent her life challenging the status quo, standing up for others, and getting things done. Said she was the first to: oppose the SoccerCity proposal for the Mission Valley stadium site; demand an independent audit of the city's Water Department; and question why a building the city paid \$72 million for at 101 Ash St. remained vacant almost three years later. We can do better, she said. We let things overtake us, noting the rise of AirBnBs and scooters. We are not in control, she said. "They are running rampant over our communities, destroying our neighborhoods," Bry said. The choice in the race is clear, she said: more of the same or a "change agent with a track record of success."

Question #1: *How would you implement rent control in San Diego?*

Riel said he wouldn't. He said the mayor's office has nothing to do with rent control. Riel then described why San Diego has a mayor and previously relied on a city manager to run the city dating back to the 1900s. He said now, the mayor is responsible for the budget and for the apportionment of money. Riel said the mayor's job is not "social engineering." "The mayor's job is to make sure that the money is spent wisely," he said, adding he'd "solve the pension problem."

Gloria said there's a California law called Costa Hawkins that prohibits cities from enacting rent control, so the answer would be not. He said his colleagues on the state Assembly just passed a bill, AB 1482, on Governor Newsom's desk for consideration, that would provide a rent cap. Might be a role for the city to assure that tenants are being treated justly. Most important thing a city can do, he said, is make sure code enforcement is implemented aggressively.

Bry noted Gloria's comments regarding AB 1482, but added "it won't produce one ounce of new housing." She said recent approvals of community plan updates will add 45,000 housing units to the city's housing stock along transit corridors. Adding more housing "is one of the most important things we can do" to make housing more affordable, Bry said. Council also recently approved an inclusionary housing measure to spur more affordable-home construction.

Question #2: *Would you support public input and design review for all new projects in Balboa Park? Do you support developing a hotel property at the south end of the park?*

Riel said he does, but added it's important to focus on what the mayor can do. "The ability to change zoning," he added, "is the ability to create millionaires." He said the focus should be on how the city handles increased parking and height restrictions.

Gloria said he does not support the commercialization of Balboa Park. Plans for a makeover of Inspiration Point should not include a hotel or "other kinds of private enrichment." He called the park "the soul of our city" and said work should focus on "upgrading facilities that we have" and adding more public amenities. To the question about design review, Gloria said, "Of course." He added he was proud to help get \$8 million in state funds to help renovate the Botanical Garden building. He also said he would seek out public-private partnerships.

Bry also said she opposes the commercialization of Balboa Park, but noted that unlike Gloria, she did not support the "Jacobs parking garage" nor paid parking in the park. "Balboa Park is for all of us," she said. Has visited park "over 500 times" over 40 years.

Question #3: *What are your specific plans to make major improvements for the safety of pedestrians and scooter riders?*

Riel said as mayor he would have no power to make changes in that area. Said he will focus on budget and how money is spent.

Gloria said the scooter issue is a perfect example of the city's small-town behavior. Scooters were allowed to operate without local regulations for about a year and a half. "That's backwards," he said. Said he worked on state legislation that provided "some" safety measures, but "the city really needs to take some more steps." Scooter companies need to pay their fair share for needed enforcement and maintenance. City is also slow to implement plans for new bike lanes that would help.

Bry said when scooters first appeared in the city, she asked mayor for an immediate moratorium "until we could get our act together." She said she voted for "terrible" city regulations because it was "better than nothing." Criticized state legislation supported by Gloria that didn't require scooter riders to wear a helmet. As mayor, she would work to get that legislation overturned and make sure cities retain control of streets and sidewalks.

Question #4: *Do you believe zoning should be controlled by the state government? And what would you do to protect designated open spaces the city doesn't currently own?*

Bry called herself a "big believer in local land-use control." Opposed numerous state bills that would have determined what happens in our neighborhoods. "I value local community planning and that will continue if I am mayor," she said. The City Council has updated six community plans since she became a member. "It's the way it should be done in San Diego," she said.

Gloria called local community planning groups "fantastic" and said he relied on them when he served as a councilmember and as interim mayor. "I believe I will continue to do that as mayor," he said. Regarding zoning, "obviously the best decisions are held at the local level." He said "San Diego is building a lot," noting construction downtown, in Bankers Hill and Mission Valley. But across the state, that's not necessarily the case, he said. "There are city councils that have not shown the courage to take on their fair share," he explained, "and I want to make sure that San Diego is not solving the entirety of the state's housing crisis. It's a statewide problem, and every community must do its fair share." Also worked in past to get "1,000s of acres of San Diego's land dedicated as permanent open space" and will continue that process, he said.

Riel wondered how the mayor gets scooters off the street. He said the mayor doesn't have the power to do that. City Council can do it.

Candidate Marion, arriving late, offered her two-minute opening statement. She said she once attended a political rally where the Rev. Jesse Jackson was speaking. He said there are two types of people: jelly makers and tree shakers. Marion said she's a tree shaker. She then repeated the words "I can't breathe" 10 times. "Then Eric Garner was dead," she said, referring to the 2014 New York police chokehold death that led to police-brutality protests. As mayor, Marion said she would restructure the San Diego Police Department.

Question #5: *Do you support extending San Diego's protected bikeway network by at least 10 miles? What is your position on the proposed Olive Street Park and whether it should contain an AIDS memorial?*

Marion said she doesn't have a position on the Olive Street Park. On the bikeways, she said she lives in Hillcrest without a car. She said she rarely sees bicycles in the paths in Hillcrest. Said she's not sure the bike paths are worth the money spent.

Bry had no opinion on Olive Street Park but would be willing to speak with folks about it. On bikeways, we need to build out the system to make the city more bike-accessible, she said. Wants to make sure, through data, that paths are built where people will use them and minimize impinging on pedestrians.

Gloria said he does support placing the AIDS memorial in Olive Street Park. He said it was a viable solution where for many years the city didn't have one. "I hope it gets accomplished," he said. "It's past time." On bike lanes, he said he thinks 10 miles is "too low a mark." City has a bicycle master plan, a downtown mobility plan and an Uptown/Mid-City bike plan. Still not implemented. He agreed that lanes are not used as much as he'd like, but he thinks that will change when they become fully protected lanes. The network also needs to expand beyond the downtown/Uptown area, he said, so everyone feels safe while riding.

Riel said the mayor can't do anything about bike lanes.

Question #6: *Do you support limiting short-term vacation rentals to owner-occupied properties? What would you do to release the many single-family homes, condos and apartments that are currently being rented out short term to tourists?*

Riel repeated that the mayor has no power to do anything about that. The only promise he said he'll make is "I'll watch your money."

Gloria said the City Council twice voted on motions directing the mayor to regulate the industry, "and he ignored those." Gloria said he supported Bry's legislation because it is "past time" to regulate this industry. Other cities have successfully regulated short-term rentals but we continue to work in this "small-town fashion." "Whatever we do," he added, "it must be enforceable."

Bry said the City Attorney has determined that short-term rentals are illegal, and as mayor she would enforce existing city code. The mayor has that authority, she said, "and that's what I would do." Currently, up to 16,000 single-family homes have been taken off the market at a time we have a housing shortage to be used as short-term rentals. "I will start closing them down on day one," she said. Some companies are now doing the same with apartments. She said she will stop the practice.

Marion agreed with Bry. Our neighborhoods are supposed to be safe havens for families, so why turn it into a hotel, she said. "Weird" people stay in hotels, and sometimes they stay in AirBnBs, she said. Should not be allowed in neighborhoods, she said.

Question #7: *If a community opposes a project in their community, how would you handle that? Specifics to provide more affordable housing in Bankers Hill?*

Marion referred to Bankers Hill residents who attended a recent City Council in opposition to a proposed high-rise at Sixth and Olive. Some apartments would have swimming pools, she said. All city negotiated for was four low-income apartments in that building. She said the city needs much more low-income and moderate housing.

Bry said the need for affordable housing is a statewide concern. Developers pay from \$50,000 to \$100,000 per unit in fees. She said the state should pick up the tab for those fees and will examine the issue further in the October budget deliberations. If the state is going to require cities to build more density, she said, the state "has to help us financially."

Gloria said the housing crisis is "certainly the biggest problem in our city." People being priced out of our city "will not make for a great city" but just a city for the very wealthy and those who have been here a long time. Housing needs to go near public transit where it's needed and infrastructure already exists. In last 10 years, city has permitted 27,000 homes for very high-income people, 4,400 homes for very low-income people and only 33 homes for the middle class in the last decade. The housing needed has to be focused and priced for the working middle class of this city, he said.

Riel said he has experience in building homes, 15,000 to 20,000 units throughout San Diego and Southern California. The City Council will direct the mayor to develop a policy. That's how it works.

Question #8: *Are you aware of any specific federal or state homeless programs San Diego is not using, and what would you do differently to address the homeless issue, and specifically Balboa Park?*

Riel said we have to focus on what the mayor can do. The homeless problem will always be there, he said, and as mayor he said he would talk to churches and social groups to develop a way to deal with homelessness. He said 60 percent of people who are homeless have mental problems. What do we do with people who can't function? Mayor can't solve the problem.

Gloria said our objective should be nothing less than ending homelessness in San Diego. Other cities are seeing tremendous progress on this issue. "We sadly are not," he said. Why? The money being spent is being poorly spent, he said. He criticized the city purchase of the former indoor-skydiving facility in East Village for \$7 million that will not house any homeless. "That's the kind of dumb stuff the city is doing, which explains why we're spending more than we ever have on this problem. And yet we're seeing no progress," he said. His focus, he said, will be on permanent supportive housing and targeted outreach.

Bry said she would not make "false promises that I can't keep." She said the city can reduce chronic homelessness in the city in the next three to five years "if we have a coordinated plan." She said she has been unable to get full data on how much the city is spending on homelessness. Bry said there's a growing population of homeless with drug, alcohol and mental-health problems, "and just providing housing will not solve that issue."

Marion said she asked the San Diego Housing Commission for a list of HUD-funded city housing and breakdown by race of those who occupy those homes. She was told that information could be available in six months, which she said was "far too long" and seemed a tactic not to reveal that information.

Question #9: *What would you do about the mentally ill homeless who refuse services?*

Marion said she would take them off the streets using a "triage system" to determine who needs help "right away." She said she would also immediately get amputees off the streets. The city also needs a hospital for the mentally ill, she said.

Bry said even if the city got everyone who is homeless off the street today, "there would be new homeless tomorrow." She said the city needs more diversion programs, which are a county responsibility, and more transitional housing. "We need to be able to offer everyone on the street an option," she said. If they refuse, "we can do something called compassionate enforcement." She said she believes the city within five years can reduce chronic homelessness by 50 percent in the downtown area.

Gloria agreed that more options are necessary. Often, he said, a bed is not available for people who want to get off the street. Another problem is a lack of coordination, he said. He pointed to the county and the millions it is sitting on and said as mayor he would "do all that I can" to force the county to spend that money to provide much-needed mental-health services.

Riel said he has asked Mayor Kevin Faulconer where funds targeted at homelessness are being spent, and he refused. "He has his own agenda," he said. "The mayor is the keeper of the documents."

Question #10: *Do you support SANDAG's proposed transit plan, and what new proposals would you bring to SANDAG?*

Riel said San Diego was built for cars, and congestion will continue to get worse. Despite a commitment to an improved transit system, "it still doesn't work," he said. Riel said transit spending should be diverted "to build more freeways, and in fact you could build homeless housing over the freeways." He said as mayor, he would tell SANDAG, "I don't believe in public transportation. I believe in cars."

Gloria said his transportation vision is to have "multiple choices how you get from A to B." He said we can't build enough highways to solve congestion. He supported state legislation that in essence put the San Diego mayor in charge of SANDAG. "Our current mayor doesn't choose to use that authority. He gives it to the mayor of Poway," he said. "I will use that authority to make sure San Diego gets its fair share of transportation dollars."

Bry said the trolley extension to the UTC area will be a good opportunity to see whether a "bold vision" for public transportation will be successful and maximize usage.

Marion said she either walks or takes public transit, but she's not sure if more public transportation is the answer. She said she will only wear "grubby clothes" on transit and rarely takes public transportation at night.

Question #11: *What would you do to expand the police force or retain police officers? Why report stolen property when the crime is reduced from a felony to a misdemeanor? Position on "smart" streetlights that record audio and video?*

Marion said she can't answer that in one minute. She said she would like to "totally restructure" the police department. Racist police officers can't be eliminated merely through training, she said. "You cannot train hatred out of people," she said. She envisions a "two-tier" police department that will minimize brutality by police.

Bry said the City Council awarded major pay raises to police officers that went into effect last July. That's allowed the city to hire and retain more officers. During the recession, officers didn't get pay raises and some departed for other, better-paying agencies. She said she has "major concerns" about the data being collected by the streetlights.

Gloria said the first responsibility of government is to keep people safe. He opposed the pay freeze during the recession, which he said increased the hiring and retention problem. Officers must continue to be paid competitively. He said enforcement of misdemeanor crimes is important and would be emphasized in his administration. He said he's "extremely concerned" about surveillance issues with streetlights and other law-enforcement devices like license-plate readers and cell-phone readers. Privacy needs to be respected, he said.

Riel said the important focus should be on who is chosen as police chief. "I'm not pleased" with current choices made, he said. Regarding cameras, what can the mayor do, he asked. He will focus on the budget and the performance of the police chief.

Question #12: *What role do you see for community planning groups, and what recourse do you recommend when their wishes aren't met?*

Riel said a charter amendment prohibiting the sale of city-owned land would help.

Gloria said community planning groups play a very important role in the city, providing advisory opinions. "That opinion should be looked at very strongly," he said. Councilmembers must weigh those opinions with other factors, including staff and stakeholder recommendations. Planning groups should be transparent, hold fair elections and be representative of the communities they serve.

Bry said community planning groups are “true, grassroots participation” that play an important advisory role to the City Council. More often than not, the City Council sides with planning groups but not always. Mission Valley was a good example of that participation, she said, and in the end recommended adding 28,000 more housing units to the area. “No state law could have done a better job,” she said.

Marion said planning groups are a “good exercise in democracy” and should continue. It’s a hard job, she said.

Question #13: *Would you support a citywide historic preservation plan and if so when?*

Marion said she hadn’t given it any thought.

Bry said she would like to know more information about the plan before offering an opinion. “I’m a big believer in doing research and asking questions and listening,” she said.

Gloria said as a councilman, he worked to establish multiple historic districts, which he called “important and valuable.” The city’s Historic Resources Board, he said, has not had adequate membership in the past. He said those vacancies need to be filled with experienced people. He said while on the City Council, he helped preserve single-family historic homes in North Park and received an award for doing so.

Riel didn’t address a proposed plan but reiterated the need to build more freeways.

Question #14: *What are you going to do to assure San Diego complies with climate-action goals?*

Riel said he remembers being told in school back in the 1960s that the worry was another Ice Age. “And they were wrong,” he said, adding that predicting where weather patterns will develop in five years is impossible.

Gloria said climate change is real, “and we have to do something about it.” When he “served as mayor” for eight months after Bob Filner’s departure, Gloria co-authored the city’s Climate Action Plan that was approved with bipartisan support five years ago. He said he doesn’t just want to be “the guy who wrote the plan” but “the guy who implements it.” The city, he said, hasn’t done nearly enough since its adoption.

Bry said she agrees that climate change is real. She said the Climate Action Plan that was passed “isn’t impressive enough to meet the goals we need to achieve.” Won’t meet goals if 16,000 homes are being used as short-term rentals or if we think scooters will solve the “last-mile” transit issue or we continue demolishing SROs downtown. Scripps Institution of Oceanography should advise the city going forward, she added.

Marion said the Green New Deal is a vast undertaking but wondered how it would be paid for. She said she didn’t see any mention of caring for the poor or elderly, which would be a crucial part of any plan. Supports what city is doing regarding the climate issue, she said.

Question #15: *What general experience outside of politics do you bring, and do you have any experience in budgeting? Would you set funding for the city’s pension plan a priority when the money comes under review?*

Marion said she’s worked as a stock broker, a federal auditor, and a construction superintendent. She called the stock market “very sketchy.” “It’s really gambling, folks,” she said. She said she thinks the pension plan “puts the entire city at risk.”

Bry said an independent pension board manages the plan and sets the contribution figure every year, and city makes that payment on July 1. She recounted her experience as a journalist, 30 years in the technology world, her MBA from Harvard and her work with non-profits.

Gloria said he's passionate about San Diego. It's why he's focused his career on serving his community. Worked for six years at the County of San Diego, for eight years with U.S. Rep. Susan Davis. Served for several years on the San Diego Housing Commission. Eight years on the San Diego City Council, including two terms as council president. Eight months as "mayor." Last three years served on the state Assembly. He said his experience is "perfect for the role as mayor of San Diego." Chaired city's Budget Committee for six years.

Riel said he was a financial specialist with the San Diego Housing Commission and chief financial officer for a construction company. Solution to pension problem is to "shut down the pension program that is paying politicians" and "go to Social Security."

Question #16: *Do you support a revote on the People's Ordinance and why?*

Riel said he didn't know what the People's Ordinance is. When informed, he said trash collection was where corruption occurred decades ago when ordinance was approved. But policy comes from the City Council.

Gloria said trash-pickup inequity "probably needs to be addressed." City also needs a robust recycling and composting program to move city toward its "zero-waste" goals. Ultimately, any changes to ordinance would have to be something the people propose.

Bry said "a lot of education" would have to occur before any attempts to repeal the People's Ordinance.

Marion said she doesn't know anything about the city's waste program.

Closing statements were then made.

Marion said San Diego's mayor should be well versed in a variety of things, not just a professional politician. She said she would be a great mayor because she could identify with San Diego's diverse population. "I know what they're going through, what struggles they have," she said. She said her bachelor's degree in urban studies from the University of Colorado would be useful to the position as well.

Bry said a lot of issues were discussed tonight: homelessness, housing, transit, climate. She said she's a mom, a grandmother, a small-business owner, headed up organizations that empower women, served on non-profit boards, including Planned Parenthood. Formerly a journalist, learned to ask questions, to do research, to listen and then be relentless about getting the story. "I believe the diversity of my life experiences has qualified me to be your next mayor," she said. "I'm a problem solver, not a career politician." Local government should be transparent and accountable to residents. "Every neighborhood deserves what is unique to it," she said.

Gloria thanked the LWV and community members in attendance. He said he's running for mayor because "I'm concerned about the direction of our city." He wants to make sure that anyone who works hard and plays by the rules has a future in San Diego. Look at candidates for what they have done. "I have worked on some of the most landmark legislation during my time on the City Council," he said, including passing the Climate Action Plan that's now being replicated elsewhere and a minimum-wage hike. Took on gun lobby in Sacramento and worked for more money in our neighborhoods. "You have seen me do this job in the past," Gloria said.

Riel thanks the BHCG and LWV. "You care about San Diego, and that's why I'm here," he said. The difference with other candidates, he said, is he is not a career politician. He would serve two terms "and then I'm done. I'll never run for another public office again."

The audience showed its appreciation for the forum.

Meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by John Lamb, Secretary.