

City Council Candidates Address Food Security in our Questionnaire

by freshprince - Tuesday, October 06, 2020

<http://lbfresh.org/news/candidatesonfood/>

Local food policy council, [Long Beach Fresh](#), recently sent a questionnaire to Long Beach City Council candidates to find out their positions on local food issues. The effort hopes to inform the public of their knowledge of solutions to create long-term food security in Long Beach.

“The ability to eat healthy is imperative in Long Beach, where [inequities in food and health were prevalent even before this pandemic](#)” explained Co-Director Tony Damico.

“We hope that voters will take into consideration candidates’ preparedness to support good food procurement, economic inclusion, and environmental regeneration at all levels of government programs, policies, and services as our City seeks food security for its residents.”

Long Beach Fresh is supported by The California Endowment and sponsored by Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs. They work with over 50 local food organizations and businesses to expand the city’s local food economy and infrastructure.

All six runoff candidates in the districts with contested elections (districts two, six, and eight) were sent the questionnaire 21 days prior to the survey closing via the email address listed on the City Clerk’s website. Reminders were sent 10 days out, and 24 hours before the survey closed. Three candidates completed the survey, while incumbents Dee Andrews of the 6th District and Al Austin of the 8th District, and candidate Cindy Allen in the 2nd District did not respond to the invitation.

Below are the 8 questions posed, background on the questions, and the candidates’ complete responses.

Question #1

There’s no doubt that Long Beach’s diverse array of eateries are struggling during Covid-19. What is our city doing well to support these businesses, and what could we do better?

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

“The City of Long Beach is providing permits to build parklets, extend street closures, and outdoor expansion for eateries and restaurants. However, many of the eateries and restaurants in the 6th districts are not utilizing these opportunities to sustain their business and I think we could do better to support and assist them to do so.”

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

The City has made parklets for restaurants, (but made them pay for them out of their non-existent budget) The City Closed off Pine Ave, but that move destroyed adjacent shops that were not eateries. I would suggest we reach out to community first before we do anything. Also we should have given re-location assistance to those businesses that were to be negatively impacted. I believe the single most important thing the City needs to do is get its message straight. We have Bob Foster and some business men making decisions on business re openings. I appreciate their service, but I think we need to listen to our health department instead. Let's make plans for after the Health Department says it is safe to re-open, and I will support the business group, but I add that they should have included our local small business leaders in that group. Large corporations have no idea what we are suffering here on the ground. I would suggest #1 remove the Broadway Road Diet. (We have lost over 30 businesses due to this horrible design) Reduce the business license fee to \$200.00. Reduce the Health permitting fee to \$50.00 and reduce the zoning fee to \$50.00. We have to invest in the future, not worry about an "income stream" for City Hall \$300,000.00 salaries. We need to add parking to every business corridor so customers have a place to park. I want to hire a parking manager to coordinate all parking solutions across the City. Diagonal Parking increases parking by 40% Preferential Parking increases parking on average by 10%. Just striping the car spaces adds 7% more parking. Simple easy solutions that will assist our eateries and neighborhoods to weather this storm. We need to hire a business ombudsman to help our small businesses navigate the complex rules of our departments. For safety we need to remove e-scooter lanes from dining opportunities. It is dangerous. We can survive a little inconvenience if only to safeguard our people.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

I applaud leadership provided by Council members Rex Richardson, Jeannine Pearce, Roberto Uranga and Mary Zendejas to put forth a comprehensive relief package that took a necessary first step to help small businesses. By creating an emergency micro-enterprise loan program, small businesses will be able to access \$10,000 loans, with easy terms, no fees, and up to seven months with no payments. Our city needs to apply our most reliable tools and resources to help our small businesses to stay afloat. Why? Because shuttering operations for even a few days could lead to a business running out of cash. The average small business has only 27 days of money, while food businesses average a mere 13 days. The city has helped businesses adapt by allowing outdoor dining but we also need to help those eateries that are suffering because of lack of food traffic. First, bring all departments together that interact with small businesses to determine what fees can be waived, deferred, or negotiated. These policies could mean a deferral of city taxes, occupational taxes, business licensing fees, and utility payments. Second, mobilize a COVID-19 council of large and active employers to coordinate a rapid re-employment program for those in need of immediate work. Many small businesses will inevitably need to lay off workers, and some may not qualify for unemployment. Those companies and industries experiencing an upswing need help to connect with workers in our city. Third, collect data to understand the magnitude of the problem and the potential damage to local small businesses. In partnership with philanthropy, city government can host a call for data to assess the impact and identify market gaps that federal and state aid won't address. With this information, solution-oriented programs can be designed based on informed data sources. Fourth, I would start a citywide Long Beach Dines Out at Home campaign that encourages residents to purchase take-out or gift certificates. It could go a long way in making sure some of our favorite spots survive when it is safe to dine out again. We must, as a city, show our loyalty to these businesses.

Question #2: Why does food insecurity persist, what's being done about it, and what should we be

doing in the future?

Background: The most recent data (before Covid-19) shows that 38% of Long Beach residents in lower income neighborhoods experience food insecurity. Put simply, they just cannot afford to eat every day of the month. This has likely worsened in the Pandemic. Moreover, nutrition insecurity poses additional challenges – since food security mostly concerns calories, folks who may receive free and inexpensive food through charities may not be getting the fresh, healthy foods they need to thrive.

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

There are a variety of reasons why food insecurity exists and that is access and affordability. Low income neighborhoods are less likely to have groceries stores that provides healthy fresh foods and options, as well as farmer’s market within walking distance. Currently, there is no farmer’s market in the 6th district. I would like to increase the number of farmer’s markets in various parts of the 6th district as a way residents can access healthy food.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

I am an advocate for community vegetable gardens. The City penalizes vacant lots to the tune of \$464.00 per quarter. We should have parks and Rec help us in rototilling the soils, make partnerships with the owner of the land, and create moderate sized gardens for individuals with cooperative rules. We are in a desert climate, yet California is considered the breadbasket of America. Water is the key. We sit between two major rivers, and have never used the water (which is not good for drinking) to water our gardens and desert like spaces. I believe we have a tremendous amount of underutilized land for the growing of food. It is good for people to know how food is produced

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

Wages have not kept up with the cost of living for decades, forcing families to make tough choices with how to spend the little they have. Too many families live one missed paycheck away from crisis. They rely on the federal SNAP program or school meal programs for food security. The COVID-19 health crisis has put more families in a tough position to make ends meet. I have volunteered with labor and civic organizations to hand out food to our community members who need support. It is critical that we ensure that residents have access to economic opportunity. As the second largest City in the County of Los Angeles, it’s time that Long Beach moved to a \$15 minimum wage sooner than the state of California. Providing families with a modest increase in wages can go a long way in helping families afford the high cost of housing, transportation and healthcare, which often leaves little room for food. An increased wage and strategies to enhancing the development of affordable housing will be critical to families being able to afford food in these times.

Question #3: Should the city require that all farmers markets accept EBT, as Los Angeles has done?

Background: Farmers markets have been a critical lifeline during Covid-19 for locals who want to safely access fresh produce. We are lucky to have a farmers market nearly every day of the week. Unfortunately, EBT / CalFresh / SNAP benefits are only accepted in locations managed by Harbor Area Farmers

Markets, leaving several without much needed benefits.

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

Yes, we can contribute to decreasing food insecurity if farmers markets accept EBT.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate?

I would support this inclusion of EBT etc. In housing we cannot discriminate due to the source of funding, and I think the same principle applies here.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

Yes. I agree our city should require EBT to be accepted at our farmers markets.

Question #4: What can we do to better support a city that grows local?

Background: Urban Agriculture, consisting of urban farms and community gardens, has been an emerging area of opportunity to boost the environment, nutrition security, education, and social cohesion over the past decade. Still, barriers remain. Locals often rally against urban agriculture projects, property owners are either reluctant or non-responsive to requests to consider the City's tax incentive for vacant lots, Long Beach Parks fell short of their goal to have gardens in all large parks by 2020, and funding build-out costs of 20-50k per project have stifled community organizations in moving urban agriculture forward. If you've supported specific projects in the past, please give specific examples of how you've shown your support.

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

I agree that we can do better to support local growers. As well as increasing the number of urban farms and community gardens. The Long Beach Health Department of Health and Human Services (LBDHHS) PEACE GARDEN in MLK JR Park is the only community garden in the 6th district. I am committed to working to increase the number of community gardens in the 6th district and supporting the existing ones.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

We need to really get going on Parks and Rec. I would demand that we do our garden expansion now. We are heading into a serious Depression and the people will feel the brunt of it within a year. We have only that time to get it together. I have a vegetable garden in front of my house, and I encourage everyone to do the same. I grow green beans, yellow squash, zucchini, Watermelon, various tomatoes, Arugula, lettuce, radishes and various eggplants. The City has a free mulch program, but that is about chips. What we need is a free compost program. The City needs to start building a REAL compost area with all the tons of organic debris we have. Starting a garden depending upon Home Depot is too expensive. We need free organic soil and free mulch for every citizen who wants to have a vegetable garden. I also want to support community creation of individual garden. (just like we do community clean ups) Let's help each other weed our front yards, and install raised planting beds. A source of free wood would also be great. I see a whole minor industry in this City to support community vegetable gardening. I would be a way of self sufficiency and also a way of feeling hope.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

Yes, activating underutilized lots and spaces for growing and for farmers market is the kind of out of the box thinking that we need to create vibrancy on the corridors in the north part of the district. I would absolutely consider local city tax incentives and other financial incentives for property owners that were willing to extend lease opportunities to farmer's markets and/or growing urban farms.

Question #5: Should Long Beach City Council consider a city-wide set of standards for food procurement, as several others have in passing the Good Food Purchasing ordinances? If so, what program or institution would you start with?

Background: Food procurement practices of large institutions, from hospitals to our municipal jail, affect our local economy, regional environment, workforce, and health. Meanwhile, for many low-income youth and older adults, the meals they receive for free from LBUSD, Long Beach Parks, faith-based charities can be a crucial source of nutrition if good standards are in place.

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

I am interested in learning more about what the current set of standards are for food procurement and how it can be improved by learning more about the Good Food Purchasing ordinance.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

I support a universal standard for food. I was a chef for 20 years. No one should have to eat moldy food in school. That is disgusting. We have to have good standards for everyone's health. I am presuming you realize with Covid-19 we are all becoming more aware of our health. Healthy foodstuffs are critical to fight disease. Covid may not be the last pandemic we face what with global warming and ocean level rise.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

This is an excellent suggestion and consistent with the work and "idea lab" thinking I brought to the discussion as the co-chair of the Everyone In: Economic Inclusion Initiative in Long Beach. I specifically held several meetings with local Long Beach anchor institutions such as the school district, LB Transit and the Port, for example, to consider, hear and learn more about the Good Food Purchasing ordinances. As Councilwoman, I would continue to champion the need for large food purchases to come together in our City and leverage that collective spend to source "good food" from key producers, farms, etc to build our local economy and to ensure that those in food desert areas are able to gain choice.

Question #6:

Long Beach Fresh recently released our [equity framework](#) of the local and regional food system. What piece of this framework is most in alignment with your approach to creating equity in our city? Are there any aspects that you disagree with?

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

I think it is great that Long Beach Fresh developed an equity framework. As someone who is dedicated to equity and ending systemic racism, I am in alignment with your framework.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

Read your whole treatise. I am sure all the points are valid, but I want to talk about practical things we can do now. I don't think anyone is immediately going to give the land of the Native Americans back to them. It is great that we had a win in Oklahoma, but for the most part, people don't believe they stole anything. They bought and paid for it. (it is hard for folks to think about history let alone learn anything about history) Nonetheless, the protection of what Native American land there is at this point is a huge concern for me. I totally support Native rights and restoration of their sovereignty. As for food. You pointed out the issue of diabetes, obesity, etc. which hit minority communities disproportionately. That is because we sell junk food for cheap. Every community has to realign its culture to be more sustainable. Cultural differences are important, but changing bad habits is hard. I encourage everyone to find out what their ancestral food diets were, and try following those paths. We become what we eat. For thousands of years people of the earth have developed into the cultures they are with the food they ate. This is why Greeks have a lower incidence of high blood pressure. Does it work for every culture NO. So we need to find our roots and find out what our people ate, and why and when. I am doing that exploration and it is a difficult as it is exciting. Most people don't realize we didn't have potatoes in Europe until the conquest of the Incas. Tomatoes, squash, corn are all Native American Plants. Eggplant is asian, Onion is almost universal but grains are specific. Millet= Europe. etc. Finding original diets for our varied peoples would help to shift their health towards better outcomes. I believe in education and study. The more we know, the better equip we are for change (and with climate change, we are going to have a lot) I believe in food cooperatives. In my youth I lived in Nottingham Coop in Madison Wisconsin, and we had cooperative threads clothing stores, Cooperative groceries, We even had cooperative bulk food products warehouses. I was a chef, so I cooked for the people. On Sunday everyone from all the other coops came to Nottingham for my spectacular vegetarian brunch. I wrote the vegetarian menu for the University of Wisconsin Madison. I was brought up on herbs and natural healing. My sister is a practitioner, so I guess I have always been in this movement. Taking pride in our past, and bringing forth equity in the present is an exciting and rewarding journey.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

I am pleased to see the food equity framework and believe it is a critical component in our city's work toward racial justice. I co-chaired the Everyone In Economic Inclusion initiative where we hosted discussions and pursued strategies that would help create a more inclusive economy in our city. I look forward to continuing this work as a City Councilwoman and look forward to including the food equity framework in our comprehensive plans for equity.

Question #7:

Would you consider permits for Home Kitchens? Are other actions our city could take to create more opportunities for micro-businesses?

Background: From Gusto Bread to LB Creamery and We-Op, micro-businesses are a great stepping stone

for supporting an inclusive economy, especially when our entire food business ecosystem is struggling due to Covid-19. Cottage Food Law has led to dozens of Long Beach bakers, many of which have expanded gradually as they've built strong followings and stayed in tune with what locals want. The new Micro-Enterprise Home Kitchens Act expands what can be sold out of home kitchens, but requires City Council to pass an ordinance directing LBDHHS to create the permits.

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

I believe that micro-business owners are entrepreneurs. They are not given the proper attention, support, and credit it deserves in contributing to our local economy and food innovations and trends. I am very committed to exploring as many opportunities possible to support and assist micro-business to expand and grow.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

I love the idea of Home Kitchens. They could be licensed by the health department, but as things stand today, you couldn't get our permitting nor health department to budge on that. It will take some real negotiations to get that idea off the floor. I think it is good, because we could produce a small business out of our kitchens. The only problem I see is continual sanitation and oversight inspections. I remember making tons of cinnamon rolls at our church kitchen and selling them to the parishioners. Easy recipe and delicious. I look forward to working with you all on this idea. It will take a lot of support to get this through City Council.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

Yes, you name off some of my favorite Long Beach businesses that started from their homes. I would be proud to champion the ordinance that directs LBDHHS to create the necessary path toward development a permit program. At this moment in the age of COVID 19, we have countless potential, budding and seasoned businesses that must now operate safer at home. Given that is the case instead of limiting our food choice outlets, I would want to consider the urgency of such an ordinance and ask the staff to get to working on it was soon as possible.

Question #8:

What is the significance of Food Policy Councils (such as Long Beach Fresh, San Diego Food System Alliance, Los Angeles Food Policy Council) in supporting long-term food security? How can City Council and City staff better utilize and sustain the efforts of Food Policy Councils?

Suely Saro, 6th District Candidate:

I think it is important to have advocates such as Food Policy Councils such as Long Beach Fresh support and fight for long-term food security. I think there are opportunities for engagement and partnership to work with Long Beach Fresh to explore and find solutions to food equity – reducing and removing systemic barriers to affordable and accessible fresh and healthy food options.

Robert Fox, 2nd District Candidate

The first thing is we have to get the Council Members to listen. That is not as easy as it seems. Remember there is a lot of money opposing you. The big bucks always go to the politicians to keep their profit

margins high. If it were perceived that success for the Food Councils were on the table at last, money would pour in from Wendy's, Jack in the Box, etc. So we have to really do a huge job of education to fellow council members so that they can withstand the onslaught of money being thrown at them to vote against you. We have to make this a "peoples" issue. It will take a complete reverse in course for City Staff to support you. I am a reform candidate and I am committed to correcting the path of the City to support the people. Creative, healthy, well thought out policies as you have described are very exciting to me. (I admit some of the languaging will put off some people, so we have to be cooperative, and use another turn of phrase to reach the goal. As long as we stay true to the purity of the concept I will do my best to forward this in the City. I enjoy how well thought out your platform is. I am looking forward to working with you on organics, self gardening, fresh foods, and healthy food choices along with equal distribution to our people.

Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, 8th District Candidate:

Food Policy Councils are critical partners in helping to shape the good food movement for the communities in which they serve. As Councilwoman, I would love to set up a Food Policy Taskforce to explore several key concepts including a city-wide policy that could be used to incentive use of vacant property and/or vacant lots to be utilized for growing good food. And I believe hearing directly from food policy advocates about the need to process food alternatives by informing the policy that will surround home health care matters.

For more information on the candidates, and where and how to vote, visit the [Long Beach City Clerk website](#).