



# 2022 Mayoral & City Council Elections

## Candidate Questionnaire

### Topic: Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds Lease Extension

Issued by the Friends of the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds

*The candidates elected in the 2022 Petaluma Mayoral and City Council elections will make decisions that have the potential to dramatically impact the future of the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds. The Friends of the Sonoma-Marin Fairgrounds do not endorse candidates, but we believe Petaluma residents deserve to know where candidates stand on the key issues surrounding the future of their Fairgrounds.*

*Please respond thoroughly to each of these questions. When you finish, please send your responses to [friendsofsmfairgrounds@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofsmfairgrounds@gmail.com) by September 5, 2022. Your responses will be shared on our website and with the greater community.*

Candidate Name: John Hanania

District/Seat: 3

#### 1. What does the fairgrounds mean to you and your community?

Our Fairgrounds is the heart of Petaluma. It exists because of our strong economic and agricultural roots. As such, it must be honored and protected, not displaced and devalued. The Fairgrounds are our place for gathering, where people come together as community, enjoy entertainment and summer-time fun, celebrate our heritage and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and take care of each other and our Sonoma County neighbors during emergencies and disasters. Our Fairgrounds represents what it is that is the very best of Petaluma and who we are.

#### 2. What are your favorite and least favorite aspects of the fairgrounds?

Personally, my favorite aspect of the Fairgrounds is the 4H-agriculture opportunity for our current and future younger generations.

My least favorite aspect is its rundown state and that it's not open year-round, with more access and activities for increased usage and enjoyment by the community.

#### 3. Describe your understanding of the history of the fairgrounds and how important it is to protect the history, heritage and traditions the fairgrounds has contributed to the community over the past 112 years?

The reason Petaluma as a city exists is because of its physical location, specifically, its proximity to rich agricultural land suitable for a range of products (including butter and eggs!), the Petaluma River, and San Francisco. Our heritage and traditions surrounding how we, as a city, came to be merit protection and celebration. They are core to our sense of identity. Understanding, respecting, and honoring our identity is foundational for meaningful quality of life and the viability of our local/regional economy. It is critical for true sustainability of our culture, community, and economy.

**4. What is your vision for the future of the fairgrounds over the next 50 to 100 years?**

What is needed to move us forward toward achieving the best solution is a longer-term lease and close partnership between the City and Fair. Those are two pieces that have been missing these recent years and have in fact been problematic. Our Fair should be recognized and elevated as a Petaluma Heritage Landmark, enabling full potential for revitalization of Fair and community.

**5. What are the positives and negatives associated with the 4<sup>th</sup> District Agricultural Association (a state agency comprised of local state appointees) managing the fairgrounds property?**

The negative is that they can't do anything without a lease, they have to show the state of value of changing a light bulb in order to be able to change the bulb. Exaggeration but it explains the issue. The positive is that the 4DAA wants to keep the fairgrounds the same size but make it better

**6. The city has hired *Healthy Democracy* to engage the community in shaping the future of the fairgrounds. How should the city use the information gained from this expensive and lengthy process?**

It has been a productive process for starting dialogue, engaging the City and a cross section of Petalumans with the issues and ideas.

**7. At what point should the future of the fairgrounds be determined by an official vote of the residents of Petaluma?**

Yes, I believe strongly in democracy. However, the issues surrounding the Fairgrounds land ownership, lease, management, and operations, and the role of the City of Petaluma must be clarified for Petalumans. Few people understand the full story, and it's a fairly complicated situation, including a "Catch 22" lease situation that has precluded facility maintenance and upgrades.

**8. The 4<sup>th</sup> DAA represents all of Marin & Sonoma Counties. How much input should the extended community from outside of Petaluma have on the fairground's future?**

Given the land belongs to Petalumans, and the City is the lessor, I believe increasing local input is appropriate and economically beneficial.

**9. How do you see the 4<sup>th</sup> DAA and the City of Petaluma working together to shape and protect the fairgrounds for future generations?**

With the 4DAA the fairgrounds will remain as we know it and has a greater chance to be improved upon. The 4DAA has been crippled by the city by not having a lease. The downside to the 4DAA is they can only improve upon the grounds as long as they have a long lease, minimum 30 years. The city doesn't want to work with the 4DAA they want to sell the land off to developers and shrink the fairgrounds to a tiny footprint and have a carnival instead of a large fair. The city is only interested in doubling the population of our city with tight condensed housing.

**10. Currently there are 9 permanent tenants and dozens of interim renters leasing fairgrounds property 52 weeks a year. These include schools, public services, non-profits, private businesses, raceway, farmers market, etc. Where do they fit into your vision for the fairgrounds and what obligation does the city have to mitigate negative impacts caused by an uncertain future and this lengthy outreach process?**

These tenants are important and consistent with best-in-class models in other cities. In particular, I believe the two schools should be assured adequate/increased space so kids have a insufficient and secured space to play.

**11. Should the footprint or orientation of the fairground's property change and why?**

No development! N - O! The one addition should be a new, centralized "Safety Center" that combines Police, Fire, and City offices. It should be located toward the back portion of the existing parking lot that extends from the library to the Fair entrance gate, leaving sufficient space for parking.

The front area, facing E Washington should be beautified, with more open space, trees and pathways along E Wash. It should be park like, but not necessarily turned into a park. People should be free to ride bikes through and stroll in shade. The gates should be closed at night for public and property safety.

**12. Since 1961 the Petaluma Speedway has operated in the fairground's grandstands on roughly 25-30 nights a year. What is your vision for the Petaluma Speedway over the next 50 to 100 years?**

Noise mitigation should be explored to control noise to be a good neighbor.

**13. At times of natural disasters and public health emergencies, the fairgrounds serves as the cities largest and most flexible public safety resource. Should the city decide to end the lease with the 4<sup>th</sup> DAA and change the properties use, how should the city account for these lost public safety services for people and animals?**

I believe the Fairgrounds must continue its critical role as a central public resource for natural disasters and public health emergencies.

**14. Knowing a secure future is essential for long-term financial investment into any property, if you are in favor of a lease extension for the 4<sup>th</sup> DAA on the existing fairgrounds property, what length of lease would you advocate for and why?**

At least 10 years, with an option for longer term. At least.

**15. Is there anything else you would like the community to know about your views on the fairgrounds?**

We need to elevate the importance of quality of life for Petalumans. As District 3's City Council representative, I will relentlessly work to elevate Petalumans as the number one priority in all decision making. We must not carve up every last piece of land for development. Enjoyment of our beautiful city and community is what is truly most important in life, after all.