



# 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: \_\_\_\_\_ Kevin McDonnell \_\_\_\_\_

District/Seat: \_\_\_\_\_ Mayor \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does the fairgrounds mean to you and your community?
  - a. For me, the fairgrounds is both a community space and a distinguishing characteristic of our town. It celebrates and preserves our agriculture roots. It serves as a disaster center. It is an available space for all our differing community groups – it's inclusive. As a 37-year resident of Petaluma who has raised four kids in town, we have always been fair go-ers. My kids and I have enjoyed being ribbon winners at the fair.
  
2. What are your favorite and least favorite aspects of the fairgrounds?
  - a. I am a great enthusiast for "the fair" as well as every other on property use; such as carnivals, circuses and cultural events. In fact, I believe that I brought the only professional woman athlete and Olympian ever to Petaluma for a speaking engagement and at the fairgrounds. I go to the fair for at least a half dozen events each year. I do not like that the property is under-utilized and hasn't had the investment that would make it an even bigger and better community space than it is.
  
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?
  - a. As a member of the Council subcommittee on the fair, I have read all the history of the fair. Sonoma/Petaluma's agricultural history is important to preserve and respect. Equally important the fairgrounds allows us to showcase locally sourced food and other important innovative trends in agriculture.
  
4. What is your vision for the future of the fairgrounds over the next 50 to 100 years?

- a. I cannot image Petaluma without a fair. Currently that is the challenge before the fair board – how to each year pull together the effort that it requires to host the fair. However, I see the fairgrounds changing over time. I see it adding even more community space and activities. I see the city investing in those improvements. No one can predict needs and desires 100 years out, but we can protect what is essential today and foster an organic collaborative effort to make sure the fairgrounds continues to serve the people in the future.
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?
  - a. The 4<sup>th</sup> DAA puts together a great program for the people of the town and region. They preserve the needed emergency resource so important to Petaluma and the County. The 4<sup>th</sup> DAA doesn't seem to have access to the resources necessary to grow and utilize the property more fully.
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?
  - a. The Healthy Democracy report provided the Council with ideas from the community. The key takeaway was that the fair is greatly supported and that people want more opportunity and space for community. The report suggests many different ideas. The Healthy Democracy group was not asked two important questions. One, how do the ideas fit together; that is how much space does any idea require and how much will these ideas cost and where will the money come from to make them a reality. The city needs to consider what the people want, what it takes to continue a fair and how to pay for changes in the future.
7. At what point should the future of the fairgrounds be determined by an official vote of the residents of Petaluma?
  - a. A vote can be considered when a complete concept is fleshed out and presented.
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?
  - a. The voice of all the public should be heard.
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?
  - a. I am hopefully that the Fair and the City will collaborate more to bring more community opportunity to the property. This means more frequent bridging between the parties than just as the term of a lease nears. Good things and new ideas need to be considered more regularly. Funding is not always available and when it becomes available there need to be a readiness by the Fair and City to take advantage. Stewardship of a property of this importance requires constant re-investment of assets and of ideas.
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?

- a. The fair requires subleases to fund its mission. I don't see the city interfering in that. The tenants need security to conduct business. The DAA and the city need to sort out the lease quickly to avoid negative impacts. The DAA and the city are equally responsible for sorting out the lease agreement.

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

- a. I expect that the property requirement of the fair will be in line with the reports initiated by the DAA and the city. I don't believe that the report constrains the DAA from negotiating for a different footprint.

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?

- a. At this time, there is no public consensus on the speedway. As the process goes forward it will no doubt be central to the lease negotiations. It may be the biggest point in the negotiations.

13. At times of natural disasters and public health emergencies, the fairgrounds serves as the city's 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?

- a. If the city ends the lease with DAA (which I cannot imagine) emergency facilities should still be on the property.

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?

- a. I'm okay with a 25 year lease if the parties agree on the terms.

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

- a. I can't imagine Petaluma without a fair. I also want the fairgrounds to be more than it is now. We have an opportunity to envision a fairgrounds that meets our current needs and provides opportunities for future community benefit. The lease negotiation is our only opportunity to take the vision forward. Thanks for the opportunity to submit my thoughts on the future of the fairgrounds.