



Assessor-Recorder - Candidate Questionnaire

Why are you running for this office?

I was inspired to a career in public service by role models who exemplified a belief that the best of government is realized when it listens closely to the people it serves and then designs policies and programs that better their lives. This belief has guided my work since I started my service in 2009 as a neighborhood and district liaison in the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services and as I worked my way up to larger and leading roles, meeting people where they were at, providing and facilitating access to all communities and constituents, understanding their needs through direct conversations and ensuring government was designing its programs, policies and services by centering community first.

I believe that every position I have held and each office I have worked with or partnered with has benefited from this approach. I believe that we need more people with experience grounded in and engaged with community to lead vital offices and teams in our City. I've been a working artist, a service worker to pay the bills and a hard working public servant who wants to realize opportunities for fairness and equity for our communities. This opportunity to lead the Assessor-Recorder's Office and its committed team will allow me to contribute the skills developed over a decade of service to better serve San Franciscans, enhance education and financial literacy programs for residents, homeowners and seniors, advance racial equity

programs within and without the office, and ensure the ongoing financial stability of the city with fairness and integrity. It is and will be a continued honor to serve the people of the City and County of San Francisco.

What are your values and how did you get them?

My values have been informed by my family, my life as an artist and service worker, and my decade of public service through San Francisco's most challenging times. I am the grandson of Mexican immigrants. My grandfather was a butcher and my grandmother was a seamstress who worked hard all their lives to provide stable, loving homes for their families. My father is former Senator Art Torres, a trailblazing elected leader and former Chairman of California's Democratic Party. My mother Yolanda Nava is a writer and former journalist, who throughout her career has served as an advocate and role model for women. These role models and my lived experiences have shaped my values of hard work, my belief in the positive potential of government coupled with a healthy skepticism of its abilities and limitations, and my commitment to the power of art, creativity and solutions guided by community. These values have guided me throughout my public service and will continue to do so.

Over the years of my career in public service, I've worked behind the scenes, developing and executing programs that create jobs and economic opportunity for residents and the City's diverse neighborhoods and small businesses. My passion for and belief in good government grows from my very personal experience of the difference it can make in people's lives--from helping a single Latina experiencing domestic violence find a safe, stable home, to creating financing for Chinatown merchants to weather the impacts of city construction projects, to providing a Hayes Valley barber access to capital that will help his business survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Building a government that is easy to access and approachable is fundamental to my approach to ensuring government works for everyone.

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What communities do you represent and how do they hold you accountable?

Throughout my public service career, I've committed to realizing a City that works for everyone and most especially for those who often get overlooked or left behind. As the former Director of the San Francisco Office of Economic and Workforce Development, I led the City's COVID-19 economic relief efforts for workers and businesses. I'm most proud to have helped focus the city on building a more equitable economy, launching the City's first African American Business Fund, committing funding to serve the Latino community in the midst of the pandemic and increasing resources for women entrepreneurs, minority and immigrant owned small businesses, and essential workers. These programs were all informed from deep community engagement with those they were meant to serve as well as those partners doing the work in our communities and neighborhoods. I've ensured I remain accountable to the diverse bodies of constituents and taxpayers of our City by being present, being accessible, and following through on the commitments we've developed together that best address their needs.

My commitment to San Francisco's communities reaches beyond my formal role as Assessor - Recorder to my volunteer efforts focused on racial equity and inclusion in the arts, community centered urban planning, greater investment in affordable and public housing and community health.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

I'm proud of the diverse coalition of elected and community leaders and organizations that are supporting me. I believe they reflect my ability to

represent the diverse interests of our city, advocate and act on behalf of equitable outcomes for our residents, and competently and responsibly lead one of the most fundamentally important offices in our City. I'm honored by the working relationships we've developed over the years, before and most especially throughout this pandemic, and our collective commitment to realizing the best of government.

What will be your top priorities if you are elected as Assessor-Recorder?

My top priorities are grounded in operational excellence, fiscal accountability, robust community education and engagement, advancing racial equity and accessible customer service.

We'll continue our efforts to ensure a fourth successful year of closing our roll on time, defending our valuations at the appeals board, modernizing our systems to make online access and service tracking easier for the public.

We'll continue our focus on our Transfer Tax Audit program to be sure entities are paying their fair share and no revenue is being overlooked – all to benefit to our tax base and the critical services they fund.

We'll continue our expansion of our Family Series either in person or online as health guidelines allow and as best to facilitate community access. This culturally competent series will provide much needed information on policies and programs benefitting and impacting homeowners such as Proposition 19, estate planning, homeownership basics, and financial literacy.

We'll advance our racial equity priorities by focusing on the diversification of staff within the office, additional trainings for our staff members, and providing more opportunities for professional growth specifically for staff of color. We're also looking forward to advancing the conversation of racially restrictive covenants and their role in San Francisco's history as we comply with a new state law that requires our recorder division to establish a program to identify and redact unlawful racially restrictive covenants

from our records by July 1, 2022. And we will implement new programming with nonprofit partners to expand estate planning resources for communities of color.

What improvements would you make to the Assessment Appeals Board?

As the Assessor-Recorder I respect the independence of the Assessment Appeals Board. At the same time my office and staff are committed to ensuring that the fair and accurate assessments we propose are vigorously defended to ensure we are fulfilling our obligation to realize the most stable and secure source of funding that benefits essential services for San Francisco. The Assessment Appeals Board is an independent agency, separate and apart from the Assessor's Office. One of the challenges that lie ahead for the Board will be the hearing of an increased number of appeals cases coming before it. They'll need to ensure that all appeals are resolved within the regulated timelines, to be sure we're able to capture the decided upon final valuations for the properties coming before them. In addition, the Board will need to manage and mitigate the realities of returning to in person and/or hybrid hearings to best serve the interests of those coming before it.

How will you ensure that the City is capable of defending and maximizing property tax revenue, specifically underreported and unrecorded property transfer taxes?

This year I was proud of our office's success, in the midst of the pandemic, to close the roll on time for the third year in a row. Ensuring all property has been fairly and accurately assessed is the priority for our office and continues to guide our work each and every year. We all know how vital these resources are – that represent 28% of the City's current \$13.1B budget – in addressing the needs of our most vulnerable and diverse communities. These resources ensure the ongoing stability and vitality of our city services and public infrastructure – including emergency services, our roads, parks and schools. I am proud of the continued results of our Transfer Tax Audit program to ensure private entities pay their fair share as

San Francisco continues to move through this pandemic. Since its inception, we've realized over \$70M in value from our partnership with the Board of Equalization. This partnership strengthens our ability to collect unpaid transfer taxes and to close loopholes for legal entities.

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Will you commit to a timeline for improving the online record search and property search pages on the Assessor-Recorder website?

We are vigorously pursuing our final modernization project this year that will improve a variety of functions for our office, making visibility into and use of our systems easier for the public. That includes continues improvement of our online record search and property search pages on our website.

While we have made significant strides this year, I remain committed to continuous improvement in this area, accessibility to this office and a sense of genuine belonging for all San Franciscans, most especially for those most marginalized.

In March, we began fulfilling online copy requests for the first time and in August our new Records Manager system went live providing a markedly better user experience to the public. Going forward, we are now in the process of developing a plan to meet the new requirements of AB1466, a new state law requiring all California Recorder's offices to redact unlawfully discriminatory restrictive covenants in their records. We will seek to maximize the public benefit of this new program by not only redacting discriminatory covenants as required but by further seeking to leverage work on this program to perform additional Optical Character Recognition (OCR) on the full range of our records going back to 1906, as well as imaging and indexing for additional decades prior to 2000. Our ultimate goal is to maximize online accessibility to all of our records.

How could you use the power of your office to assist in the creation of a public bank?

As former director of the city's Office of Economic and Workforce Development, I know firsthand the importance of lending institutions to the well-being of our city, our neighborhoods and residents, a fact particularly and deeply underscored by our collective experience with COVID. And I know the dangers presented to our marginalized communities should those traditional institutions fail our communities. For this reason, I'm continuously interested in partnering on policies and programs that strengthen our communities. If capitalization funds can be made available without jeopardizing essential city functions, I believe a Municipal Finance Corporation (MFC) - which I understand to be the current focus of the discussion about a public bank for San Francisco - could fill a critical role in supporting small businesses, affordable housing and our communities. Beyond an MFC, I look forward to developments in this important arena.

How could your office play a role in carving out a housing market that is affordable to working class San Franciscans?

We're proud of the opportunities we've taken advantage of to help address our City's affordable housing crisis - from supporting estate planning efforts to ensure affordable housing can both stay in community and individual hands while enhancing intergenerational wealth to supporting legislation to ease the costs associated with developing affordable housing. We partnered with the Board of Supervisors on a recently passed piece of legislation to amend the Business and Tax Regulations Code to exempt certain transfers of rent-restricted affordable housing from the recently increased transfer tax rates. And we look forward to more opportunities to partner with community partners and legislators to advance affordability options that benefit the creation and stability of affordable housing in our City and counties.

How could you use the power of your office to carve out an additional assessment to create tax increment and bond financing?

As someone newly appointed, I'm deeply focused on effectively performing the critical responsibilities assigned the Office of Assessor-Recorder under state law. As such, I would need a clearer picture of the proposal raised in this question to both appropriately respond and ensure the Assessors in the State were best educated on the value of any forthcoming proposals that may affect state law. As an economic development professional, I believe in the potential of tax increment financing to serve our communities and would work with all partners to ensure the effective implementation of any new proposals that would come our way.

How will you manage the perceived conflict of interest from accepting campaign contributions from the real estate industry you are charged with assessing and overseeing?

I'm extremely proud of the diversity of contributors that have donated to my campaign at all levels -from \$10 to \$500. These include artists, nonprofit workers, small business owners, labor, family & long-time friends, tattoo artists, barbers, service and health care workers, musicians, community leaders from all parts of our city and professionals from a multitude of industries. They all know that I take seriously and act guided by my first and foremost commitment to the Constitution of the State of California and all its associated laws and regulations that guide our work. All assessments must be made and defended by the rigorous practice of fair and accurate appraisals as required by state law. The needs of our communities are too vital, the principles of equitable access too important, and the integrity of our government too precious to be influenced by special interests.

This is why since the beginning of my service that I have focused on being present in our communities, bringing programs and services to those without the resources that others may possess and starting new initiatives in our neighborhoods to increase accessibility and service for our residents.

Could you share a favorite San Francisco holiday tradition?

One of my favorite holiday traditions with my family has been making fresh tamales - both savory and sweet. It's a restorative practice sitting around a table, working the masa, simmering the vegetables or meats and chiles, layering the corn husks and finally enjoying the aromas that fill the apartment as the tamales steam on the stove. Especially this year, I love the tree lightings in our neighborhoods, from the Castro, to Civic Center, to the Bayview and our Golden Gate Park and hearing the Boys Chorus fill Grace Cathedral with the hope that only young voices can provide. And even more so, it was a honor to join the communities at Glide, in the Tenderloin, in Chinatown, and in the Bayview and Potrero Hill to be sure that individuals and families had the food and treats to make their holiday feel special.