

# Torrance Election 2014

## Candidate Q&A



The Riviera Homeowners Association (RHA) sponsored a city council candidate forum at South High School on Wed. April 2 at 7 PM. We invited all of the city council candidates to attend, and also invited Southwood, Southwood Riviera and Seaside Ranchos HOAs to attend.

In addition, the RHA participated in the mayoral candidate forum on April 16 hosted by the Southwood HOA

These are the questions that were posed in emails to each of the candidates. Below the questions, you will find the responses from those candidates who were able to respond.

Congratulations for stepping up to serve our community! We at the Riviera Homeowners Association board have chosen these five questions as the most pressing issues for our area. We will be asking these questions orally at the April 2 council forum and the April 16 mayoral forum. We would also appreciate a short written answer to each question. Please send your answers to

### 1. Trees and views

Many homes in the hillside have ocean and/or city views. The City has ordinances that help preserve these views from being impacted by construction. However, there are no ordinances that protect homeowners from loss of views caused by trees or foliage and there is no process to resolve disputes or intentional obstructions. Although many residents have requested it, the City has never held a hearing to consider a tree ordinance.

Do you think the City's current provisions are adequate, or should they be expanded? How do you think the City should go about deciding this issue?

### 2. PCH Greenery

Across Pacific Coast Highway from South High School is a half-milelong stretch of the highway with homes that face PCH. The only thing separating these homes from the highway is a 15-foot median with a small length of chain link fence and a few bushes. Since most of the trees died 6 years ago, the residents have been trying to get wrought iron fencing and greenery in the median to protect and screen their homes.

If Project R federal funding is not granted for this, would you support the city of Torrance providing necessary funds?

### 3. Mansionization

There is a lot of concern in our area about mansionization and loss of community character from homes that are too large. The Hillside Overlay Ordinance states that the .50 floor area ratio may be exceeded only in cases of "extreme hardship," but that limit is often not enforced.

Would you advise that the City follow the ordinance and grant a larger than .50 F.A.R. only in extreme hardship?

### 4. Constituents

At a meeting to consider a proposed development, the following statement was made: "I believe as a Councilmember that we represent not only the homeowners but also people who want to come in to the city and build things. They are both our constituents."

Should these groups be treated as equals? Please explain your philosophy.

**5. Pensions** An article in the "Wall Street Journal" on Oct. 30, 2013, stated that the city of Torrance would eventually go bankrupt paying for pensions for city employees. The city now requires new employees to contribute to the cost of their pensions, but existing employees do not. Do you believe the City will go bankrupt because of pension costs?

What can be done to mitigate the problem?

# Mayoral candidate answers

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## Tom Brewer

### **1. Trees and views**

Please let me start by saying that any council member can request that hearings be held on issues that are important to the community. During my tenure on the council I have asked for hearings or fact finding meetings a number of times. If any council member has said that they want hearings, they should have simply requested that a standing council committee or a city commission hold a hearing. I would imagine that the appropriate city council committee to hear this issue is the Community Planning and Design Committee that has jurisdiction over the General Plan review and implementation, redevelopment, zoning and land use matters and environmental matters relating thereto. The only reason that I can see that we haven't had a hearing on the foliage issue, is that council members have not wanted to hold those hearings.

I don't have a problem with the city council considering the foliage problem, but I don't think it should be limited to only one section of our city. If a council member wants to consider this issue, I would hope that the whole city has a chance to express their opinions as well. I must also say that I don't see that the city should bear any expense to enforce a foliage ordinance. We simply have other places to spend money.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

I am in favor of improving the median along the southern portion of PCH that is across the street from South High School. The vegetation is dead and we need more protection for the homes south of the median. Measure R will provide the funding for most if not all of the work. For the moment Cal-Trans controls PCH and has the say on what is installed along that section of PCH. I would hope that they listen to the residents along there as well as the city staff as well.

If there isn't adequate funding for the project, I would be in favor of exploring where to get money from the city coffers to cover the remaining unfunded portion of the project.

### **3. Mansionization**

Every case must be considered individually. The Hillside Overlay Zone actually covers more areas of the city than just the Riviera neighborhood. In non-hillside areas of the city, homes may be built up to .6 FAR. Simply saying that a house is a mansion because it exceeds the .5 FAR is wrong. You must realize that part of the FAR of a building may include the "air space" above a first floor area. In some cases, making minimal changes to a project will bring the FAR down to .5 and for the most part the

home has the same scope and size as it did before. Most lots in Torrance are about 6,000 square feet. A .5 FAR project in the Hillside Overlay Zone, on that size lot can be up to 3,000 square feet, with almost no review by the Planning Commission or the City Council if it follows all the other requirements of the city. I think some would argue that a house that is that size is a “mansion”. A number of lots in the Riviera are larger than 6,000 square feet, which means that the homes could be even larger than 3,000 square feet.

When projects have been approved by the Planning Commission or the city council, each body approved the project because there were findings that the project could exceed the .5 FAR because they felt that extreme hardships would be incurred if it were changed. When the projects are approved the hardships are spelled out in the resolution of approval. I have always followed the code for allowing projects to be built and I will continue to do the same when I am the mayor. Also whenever I have supported a project I have always spelled out what I consider to be the hardship that could be incurred if the project was to be changed and again I will continue to do that when I am the mayor.

#### **4. Constituents**

The implication from this question is that you feel that some individuals or groups don't have the same rights as others. As the council member that made the statement, I would hope that all of my fellow council members feel that they should treat everyone equally as well. We as council members cannot discriminate against any one particular person or group. Everyone that comes before the city council to speak must be afforded the same consideration. If I were to say that one group has more rights than any other group, I would not be allowed to participate in any hearing conducted by the city council.

#### **5. Pensions**

I don't think anyone on this city council has said the city will go bankrupt because of pension costs. I am the only candidate for mayor that has talked about our growing pension obligation and the problems it will create. What I have said all along is that the city is currently spending 12% of our budget to the pension obligation and that the expense will rise 50% to 18% of the budget by 2020. To put that another way, right now for every dollar we spend for a safety employee's salary, our city must contribute about 50 cents toward their pension. By 2020, that could go up to 65 cents toward their pension for every dollar we give them for their salary. That is a problem. The plan that the city currently has is to continue to allow more money go to pay for pension costs. That is not the plan that I favor. As we devote more money to pay our unfunded pension obligation of \$392 million, less money will go to repairing our aging infrastructure and also toward other city services. I do not believe that new income from bringing new businesses into the city should all go to paying down our pension obligation. To keep our city attractive to new businesses our infrastructure needs to be repaired. New income should be used as a way to help generate more new income.

We do that by repairing our streets and buildings and making the city an attractive place to locate a business.

I have not been endorsed by our city unions, because I have been honest with them about how I would address the pension problem. Although new city employees do pay toward their pensions, senior employees continue to have the city pay for their pension. When it comes time to negotiate new contracts for employees, I favor having all employees pay toward their pension. I do not, nor have I ever favored cutting benefits that retirees will receive. I just think it is time everyone pays something for their pension.

## **Pat Furey**

### **1. Trees and views**

I have been speaking with folks from the HOA for a few years. And, I have reviewed a number of protective ordinances from other jurisdictions. But, for some reason I have not been able to find support to even put this matter before the council for a hearing. If elected mayor, this will be one of the issues addressed by the city.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

This is an on-going issue the city has been addressing. The biggest problem is CalTrans which controls PCH. Another issue is the safety of the South High Students. Wrought iron fencing is decorative, but I am not sure that it provides any level of safety to pedestrians and/or motorists. So, that may be a hard sell to CalTrans.

Funding is always an issue. I do not believe the identified projects fall within Measure R funding. However, city staff is always looking to identify a funding stream for possible projects. Payment for a project such as the PCH improvement would not be appropriate from the city general fund.

### **3. Mansionization**

I have always been consistent in my vote on Hillside Overlay cases. I understand the intent of the statute - which is to avoid mansionization. And, the problems we as citizens encountered prior to 2006 is one of the reasons I sought an elected position as a policy maker. I believe the 5.0 F.A.R. should be strictly adhered to.

### **4. Constituents**

I don't know who made the statement or in what context it was spoken. Obviously, all people should be treated equally. I do believe, however, we as elected officials owe a duty to our residents to listen to what they have to say and recognize the expertise they possess.

## 5. Pensions

First of all, the Wall Street Journal article was based on a misunderstanding by the author. He did not take into account all of the different funding sources the City of Torrance has available. The WSJ did a follow up piece, but it was buried inside in a very short article.

Go on to the Daily Breeze, which would also like everyone to believe the sky is falling. It is just not so. Is there pension debt? Yes! Is there a plan? You bet!

Much of the press coverage is concerning the safety pensions or high level management employees, which are high because it is based on their wages. The average CalPers pension is just a bit over \$3,000 per month.

The current pension liability (today) is about \$392 million. Much of the debt was caused by the 2008-09 recession where CalPers investments lost almost 30% of its value. And, that debt is the total number for all current employees and those former employees who are receiving pensions today. It is a huge number, that should be looked at like a mortgage. It will not come due today. It is amortized over the years. And, according to the investments and other factors it may increase or decrease. Even with the 2008-09 anomaly, CalPers has averaged returns on investments for the last 10 years in excess of 8% and in the last fiscal year alone the return was more than 13%.

In addition to the investment factor, the City has taken specific steps to address the debt. This last year we prepaid our obligation - saving almost \$500,000. Prior to 2010, the city paid a portion of all city employees' CalPers contributions (7% for miscellaneous and 9% for safety). In 2009 we negotiated that all employees hired after 1/1/10 would pay their own contribution. (In effect a 14% and 18% wage reduction for new hires.) Then in 2013, the state mandated that employees hired after 1/1/14 would pay a larger share (6.75% for misc.[which is actually lower than our employees pay] - 12.5% for fire - 15% for police).

In addition, the state has increased the ages for retirement for new participants - misc. from 55 years to 62 years and safety from 50 to 57. And, the state lowered the benefit for safety from 3% per year of service to 2.7% per year of service.

So, with all things considered - all employees will not retire tomorrow - CalPers has taken a more conservative approach on investments - newer employees are contributing more toward their pensions - retirement ages for newer employees are extended - newer safety officers will a lower benefit percentage - the pension issue will diminish in the next 25 to 30 years.

I firmly believe the city will meet its pension obligation and not go broke.

## **1. Trees and views**

The fact that so many people are unhappy is an indication the provisions are inadequate, however I must say there are also a lot of people who do not want a new ordinance.

I was under the impression that the city was going to have hearings over a year ago. I would have been on that committee but I was not the chair therefore, I could not call a meeting. My hope and intentions are that at some point a series of hearings will be held and a decision made as to a yes or a no on a new ordinance.

## **2. PCH Greenery**

There are many areas of Torrance that need work also, as of now measure R funds have been denied. The city will be looking at other ways to fund the project, until funding is found no commitment can be made to a timeline.

## **3. Mansionization**

I have been consistent in following the guidelines over the last 71/2 years, my votes speak for themselves and as your Mayor I will continue to protect the Hillside Overlay. People knew the rules before they bought in the area, simple following of the rules is not a hardship.

## **4. Constituents**

You are not a resident of Torrance until you move here. All people are welcome and encouraged to move to Torrance. I will never put the desires of a potential citizen ahead of a current citizen.

## **5.Pensions**

Simple answer NO

As a city we are already doing a number of changes to reduce the unfunded pension liability and as your Mayor I will work to continue to reduce that deficit.

The minimum retirement age has already been raised, the percentage amount of retirement has been reduced and workman comp retirement has been reduced from 90% to 50%.



# City council candidate answers

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## Leilani Kimmel Dagostino

### **1. Trees and Views**

I reviewed the Torrance Municipal Code for the Hillside Overlay Area and I believe it is adequate in most respects. If a City tree is on City property then the City decides if it should be trimmed or removed. If the tree is on private property then the neighbors should agree upon a solution among themselves as to the disposition of the matter. Problems arise when neighbors are uncooperative and I believe I would support a hearing to discuss a tree ordinance. The City of Palos Verdes has a tree ordinance and I have reviewed it. Be advised if a tree ordinance were put into place, fees can be quite costly and the review cumbersome as per the Palos Verdes ordinance. For example, a non-refundable fee of \$5,106.00 must be submitted with a formal application for a View Restoration Permit before a public hearing can be held by the Planning Commission and an analysis of six criteria called View Restoration findings are provided for consideration. If the permit request is approved, then the applicant will be required to pay the initial costs of performing the required trimming, removal and/or planting replacement foliage. The foliage owner is then responsible for all subsequent trimming maintenance. If a public hearing for a tree ordinance in Torrance were held, I would bet that it would probably be modeled upon the Palos Verdes ordinance so this should always be kept in the back of your mind. Otherwise, I believe a petition with as many signatures as possible addressed to the City Council would be the first step in getting the ball rolling for a formal hearing for a tree ordinance.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

I reviewed the scope of Measure R qualifications and I discovered that Measure R funds can be spent on streetscapes, but only if they are part of a transportation improvement project. Then I contacted Craig Bilezerian, Deputy Public Works Director and City Engineer to see what could be done about your concern. He advised me on March 6 that your project on PCH will be funded by a \$853,000.00 grant from the South Bay Measure R Highway Program. The project is eligible because it is considered a transportation safety improvement. Public Works worked with the South Bay Cities Council of Governments and METRO to secure the funds. Funds will be available on July 1, 2014. Had the project not been eligible for Measure R funds, the City could use General, Gas Tax, or Proposition C funds.

### **3. Mansionization**

I agree that community character is important and that the .50 floor area ratio limit should be enforced with the only exception being an extreme hardship.

### **4. Constituents**

The dictionary definition of a constituent has several meanings. One meaning is somebody living in an electoral district, especially somebody entitled to vote and another meaning is that of an ingredient or one of the parts that make up something. I believe in the past that there was overbuilding with no thought to the lives of people who resided in an area. However, in order to maintain economic growth and to preserve our tax base in the City, we have to consider people who come into the City and want to build things also so the needs of both groups should be treated as equals.

## **5. Pensions**

I attended the presentation at City Hall on March 4 which discussed pension liabilities. Two things have occurred recently that affect the state of the pension status.

The first thing is that Governor Jerry Brown signed a law that says that all cities must now publish their unfunded liability on the balance sheet during the budget process.

The second thing is that all cities must follow GASB 60 which is a new accounting for employers approved on June 25, 2012 but effective in 2014/2015. This means that the accounting for unfunded pension liabilities can no longer be stated in actuarial asset value terms, but must be stated in market asset value terms. This means that instead of an unfunded pension liability of \$233,400,000.00, we have an unfunded pension liability of \$392,100,000.00 for all work groups.

Anticipating that pension costs might be a future problem, on June 20, 2011, the City made changes to the contribution limits of all new employees hired after January 1, 2013. City workers must do cost sharing and pay 6.75%, Police pay 15%, and Fire Department pays 12.5%. Also new hire retirement ages have been raised: City employees from 55 to 67, Police from 50 to 57, and Fire Safety from 50 to 57. The savings in millions from this implementation are: City employees \$.5, Police \$.4, and Fire Safety \$.3. Savings from these changes materialize gradually over 20-30 years meaning that the liabilities should be reduced by then.

City Council is going to have to keep an eye on the economy and return on investment of the underlying investments of the CalPERS Plan in order to see if the math works. This is why you need a candidate with a financial background on board to pay close attention to this.

## **Clint Paulson**

### **1. Trees and views**

I am fully supportive of implementing a tree ordinance that would provide specific guidance with respect to view obstruction from trees or foliage. I believe we need to protect the value of homeowner's property and the right to the expected enjoyment thereof. I would be happy to serve as point of contact on City Council for pushing this measure should I be elected.



## **2. PCH Greenery**

Yes, I would support Torrance providing the necessary funds for this effort if Project R funding is not granted. I would, however, need more information, such as how much it would cost, in order to properly prioritize this effort among the many other projects that need to be completed in the city.

## **3. Mansionization**

I believe in a strict interpretation of the law and its application. That way, we are all playing by the same rules. As a councilmember, I would enforce the ordinance as written. A deviation from the ordinance should require a modification to the language.

## **4. Constituents**

No, I don't believe these groups should be treated as equals. Per the dictionary definition of a constituent, as a Torrance councilmember my constituency would be limited to residents of Torrance (i.e. those that can vote for a Torrance city elected office). I would not consider people that do not live in Torrance, but that want to build things therein my constituents. I would base any decision in this regard based primarily on the benefits and detriments to Torrance voters.

That being said, I do believe we need to seriously consider how our decisions impact neighboring cities and communities and those who would do business in Torrance. We should do what is best for all, but Torrance residents should have priority in those decisions.

## **5. Pensions**

I am a strong supporter of strengthening the middle class. For this reason, I want to ensure that pensions that allow for a modest/comfortable standard of living upon retirement are maintained for city employees.

Nevertheless, I am very concerned about issues highlighted by the referenced Wall Street Journal article and those voiced by many concerned citizens of Torrance such as those expressed [here](#). These concerns should be taken very seriously as they have led to a recent downgrade by Moody's of Torrance's bond issuer rating.

What is clear is that pension costs and liabilities are increasing substantially. Will that cause Torrance to go bankrupt? I don't think we are at that point yet based on the data I've seen, but it is definitely a possibility and we should be taking substantial preventative measures to avoid financial insolvency.

To combat this problem, many have advocated for reneging on pension commitments made to past or current employees. In contrast to those voices, I believe we should do all we can to keep our promises to those people - many of whom spent a lifetime of service on behalf of our city.

Before even considering such an extreme measure, I would first advocate for other preemptive measures such as cutting spending by limiting expenditures to core government functions only. We also need to think creatively to do things more affordably. For example, we should handle more legal matters in house instead of hiring out. We should also cut out pricey fees for lobbyists and consultants. If we can make do without it, we should.

Considering this is such an important issue, I should also mention how important it is that we elect leaders who do not have a significant vested interest in public pensions such as those that receive a public pension or that have taken money from public employee unions. This is too important an issue to allow for it to be decided by politicians with extreme conflicts of interest.

## **John Paul Tabakian**

### **1. Trees and views**

I support authoring ordinances to protect homeowners from loss of views caused by trees or foliage. The loss of scenery falls under the classification of a “taking.” The term represents the loss of value due to a change in the environment of said property. A “taking” can take place due to a city public works, a neighbor’s tree block your view, and a next-door neighbor who takes to raising chickens. These are examples. I will work with your organization to author ordinances that make sense and are enforceable. One possibility may be a maximum tree height ordinance per neighborhood location. Upon the receipt of a complaint, a notice will be sent to the violator. If the situation is not rectified within 30 days, then the city will either find the violator, or trim said trees and then bill the property owner. Before making any official recommendation, I will work with your organization to author ordinances and enforcement provisions that make sense.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

The city of Torrance has an obligation to assure the safety and serenity of all residents. I support the installation of wrought iron fencing and greenery in the median to protect and screen homes. The issue is funding. If money for Project R is not available then the city of Torrance needs to secure the proper funding. I will work with your organization to find viable sources of funding to solve the issue.

### **3. Mansionization**

The term “extreme hardship” is open to the eyes of the beholder. I will not support any ordinance alteration and/or exemption of the larger than .50 F.A.R rule. Extreme house construction and remodels are having a negative impact over certain neighborhoods as properties look out of place.

### **4. Constituents**

Council members only represent the citizens of Torrance. I am insulted with the statement made by the Councilmember that they are willing to sellout the interests of our constituents for outside interest groups. As your Councilmember, I will always seek the counsel of Torrance residents when outside interests are seeking to invest in our city by “building things.”

### **5. Pensions**

The City of Torrance participates with Calpers and a defined benefit system. Many of our legacy employees do not contribute to their pension programs, while some new employees have to contribute. Our city has for too long not seen the writing on the wall for too long and did not address the necessity for pension reform. I continue to prefer the public defined benefit model, but acknowledge the need to require all employees to contribute towards their own retirement. It is essential to realize that outside interests are making significant investments in new political candidates to assure the current unsound pension program. Understand that the current pension model can continue to exist while staying out of bankruptcy, but only if the city increases its sources of revenue. This is primarily why my campaign continues to sound the alarm over the possible reintroduction of parking meters in Old Torrance and later throughout the city. Furthermore, the push by some elected officials for a .25% sales tax / value added tax in our city for fire and police hiring is a farce. The only reason for the introduction of a .25% sales tax / value added tax is to continue funding our unsustainable pension system.

### Aurelio Mattucci

1. Views have always been a good reason for arguing with the neighbors. The city needs to have an ordinance in place that spells out the process of handling disputes. The City of Rancho Palos Verdes has a successful ordinance that has been court tested.  
We can't become mediators but we can have some basic guidelines put in place, especially because the public is asking for it. A committee must be formed to serve as an advisory board to city council. As council members we must always listen to the public's wants and needs. After all we are public servants and the city belongs to the people. Let the people decide how they want to handle it.
2. Yes I would support the City of Torrance funding the beautification of that section of Pacific Coast Hwy. Let's remember the wrought iron fence project on Western Avenue that was controversial at first but was successful and looks great. I attended South High back in the 80's and it seems like the same chain link fence is still there. I would propose the option of having private sponsorships for projects like this. This would basically be no different than the Adopt a Highway program which gives companies and or individuals the ability to help fund a project and in turn receive some recognition, maybe in the form of an onsite sign or plaque. Regardless of how it needs to get funded, it's a project that needs to be done now and not five years from now.
3. The answer is yes until the ordinance is revised. I don't think it's wise to leave a gray area in the ordinance that allows us to change the F.A.R. depending on variables that could easily be manipulated. Who is to determine what "extreme hardship" is? Tearing down a thousand square foot home to build a modern home no greater than 50% FAR is just part of growth and a reflection of what

today's families are looking for. We need to have specific guidelines that are in black and white and still encourage people to build their dream homes.

4. If we have the right ordinances in place, those guidelines should be the same for all. This doesn't take away the fact that city council should always listen to what the current residents have to say. We can't discourage a homeowner or builder from coming in and wanting to rebuild a home. Torrance is built out for the most part. While there may be some small infill developments now that the economy is recovering, most homes in Torrance are rebuilt by current owners or new owners looking to replace an original structure built in the 1950s. We have to insure that families are allowed to improve and expand their homes as allowed by code, or to sell the home for as much as the market allows. Most people in Torrance use their home as their primary retirement investment and we need to respect their private property rights.
5. I am a fiscal conservative and taxpayer advocate. The City of Torrance will NOT go bankrupt. However, pension reform at the local and state level is vital. I support having employees paying for a portion of their retirement costs and having new employees move in that direction is a step in the right direction. Public safety is the TOP priority of the City of Torrance and is my top priority as well. We have first class police, fire and paramedic services and that comes with a cost. However we need to make sure that we keep a tight rein on both salaries and pension costs and make sure our departments are effective and efficient with staffing.

### Norm 'Opa' Segel

#### **Question 1 Trees and Views**

The fact that we have ordinances considering the Views of residents when there is new construction would make it logical that ongoing Views should also be considered. It would appear that the City does not want to become involved in personal matters between neighbors. I can understand the reluctance, but don't necessarily agree with it. We are a nation of rules and laws to protect ourselves from each other.

We need to have some guidelines to preserve the Views from our properties. These might be in the form of tree heights or percentage of total Views being obstructed. We should look to what other cities have done and create some guidelines to address this issue. I don't think that we will have to recreate the wheel.

Since it is difficult to force a resident to incur the expense of trimming trees, etc., it might require the resident wanting the View to pay for the trimming required. This would make it more palatable to the homeowner causing the obstruction.

The City currently has building codes that are not enforced. Residents complete construction on their property without permits and then stonewall the City's attempts to

obtain code compliance. I am personally aware of one such case in the Hillside Overlay District. The City does not want confrontations with residents.

This will be a tough issue to pursue, but since we can not “all just get along,” we need to do something.

## **Question 2 PCH Greenery**

Absolutely Yes. This stretch of PCH is horrible.

I would not be in favor of expensive fencing. I think that chain link fencing with substantial bushes (say 6 feet tall) would do the trick. Hopefully we can find bushes that don't require a lot of water. The way it currently looks on PCH around Nancy Lee Lane might be acceptable.

I would want the City to look into using recycled water similar to what has been done along parts of Anza Avenue. I don't know if this is possible.

I would also want this project to be completed over a period of several years to spread the cost. Maybe we could do some innovative things such as asking for donated bushes in exchange for some advertising over the City Council Meeting's broadcast.

We need to start thinking outside the proverbial box when it comes to coming up with solutions to our problems. We have many requests for our tax dollars.

## **Question 3 Mansionization**

This issue seems to me to be the easiest question of the 5 posed.

Exceeding the .50 F.A.R. only qualifies in “extreme hardship.” For the life of me I have a hard time coming up with an issue that would be an “extreme hardship.” But for argument sake, let's say that a resident states that they have an “extreme hardship.”

I propose that it requires a unanimous vote of the City Council (7-0) to grant this exception. This would put a serious cap on this type of activity.

I am also a believer in following the rules and regulations equally and fairly. Exceptions to any rule or regulation should be few and far between. Exceptions should be made public noting who, what, where, when, why, etc.

## **Question 4 Constituents**

No No No No No

The residents of Torrance are the constituents. They are the folks who vote for the councilmembers. The councilmember who made this statement, if true, merely needs to open a dictionary. I actually hope that this is a trick question and that it is not true. I strongly feel that this is an issue of common sense.

This is also another reason why only residents should be allowed to contribute to political campaigns in our City. Others should not be able to influence our elections.

Non-residents who come to Torrance to develop our infrastructure or create businesses are not the same as constituents. They are not residents and should not be treated as such. Having said that, we need to continue to be business friendly. We need these non-constituents to help create jobs, add to the property tax base, collect sales taxes and utility user's taxes, business licenses, etc.

These people are subject to rules and regulations not typically applied to residents. They should all be treated with the greatest respect but made to follow our rules and regulations. They are coming into Torrance to make money and should not object to following the rules. Also, as in my answer to Question 3 above, any exceptions made for these people should be made public noting who, what, when, where, why, etc.

## **Question 5 Pensions**

This is the tough question.

I did not see the Wall Street Journal article stating that Torrance would eventually go bankrupt paying for pensions. This statement though could be made about most cities, counties and states, if not all, in our country. The unfunded or underfunded pension benefits in the public sector of our county is a major financial bubble which will burst if not properly addressed.

You can equate this to the Social Security System, only cities and states can not print money. Also under Social Security there is a maximum benefit.

Private industry faced this problem in the 1980s and 1990s. Many companies dumped their Defined Benefit Pension Plans ( the type that the public sector has ) in favor of Defined Contribution Pension Plans. This type of plan limits the company's costs to the amounts placed in the Plans each year. There is no past service cost to fund. In addition to these plans, most companies also developed 401K plans to help their employees save for retirement.

Back to the Public Sector: These plans in the Public Sector promise a defined pension amount generally tied to the employee's salary at retirement. In recent years salaries in the public sector have been growing faster than those in the private sector. As the salaries grow, the amount of the promised pension grows.

Most of these plans in California are affected by the financial returns yielded by Calpers, the States Public Retirement System, of which Torrance is a member. We are also affected by the Union Contracts which cover many of our employees. Promises have been made which may be difficult to keep.

Mitigating this problem may be quite difficult. A list of some ideas which would reduce the amount of the City's pension liability is as follows:

- 1 We could freeze the maximum benefit payable, possibly by pay grade.
- 2 We could reduce the City's work force by outsourcing some functions.
- 3 We could reduce layers of management within the City which would seriously reduce payroll and the related benefits.
- 4 We could try and follow the lead set by Private Industry, as above.



None of the above ideas will be popular among city employees. Anything done to decrease the City's pension liability will be fought by the Unions. You did though ask for ideas to solve the problem.

In any event, we have to start paying more into the plan each year than we paid in the past.

## Kurt Weideman

### **1. Trees and views**

I have read the City of Rolling Hills Estates Ordinance No. 661, adding Chapter 17.55 "View Preservation" to Title 17 of their Municipal Code. I find this to be a fair and equitable solution for all parties to the problem of view loss caused by trees or foliage; it provides property owners a process to resolve conflicts, and establishes procedures and evaluation criteria by which property owners may seek resolution.

I can only offer my own observations, from seven years on the Planning Commission, of instances of intentional placement of foliage and quick growing trees planted by applicants of new construction intended to obfuscate and obstruct views to "prove" that there was no view loss from neighboring properties.

The Rolling Hills Estates Title 17, Chapter 17.55 offers a "template" by which Torrance can begin a discussion/hearing on this issue. I believe that there should be a public discussion on this issue, a discussion that has been ignored for too long.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

The City of Torrance receives highway improvement funds from a multitude of sources – gas taxes, local Measures A, C & R, plus a plethora of Federal funding agencies. Some of these resources come with specific restrictions on their use, others are at our discretion.

On the issue of the median across PCH from South High School, the City can approach one of the funding agencies listed above for funding on the basis of "Safety" (i.e. students crossing PCH); removing the chain link fence, installing wrought iron fencing and a Cal Trans approved Guard rail and adding a shielding hedge.

Metro (which administers Measure R funding) will have a "Call for Projects" coming up at the beginning of the fiscal year (July), the City of Torrance will apply for funding for the purpose listed above and has an excellent chance of winning approval. I would support exploring other avenues of grants/funding, if this opportunity fails, and at the very least would have a sympathetic ear towards this project when future Budget decisions are made – six years of a chain link fence and dead vegetation is too long to wait to improve one of the most appealing and attractive entrances into our City.

### 3. Mansionization

I am very proud of my seven years of service on the Torrance Planning Commission. **My views (and votes) on cases involving the Hillside Overlay Ordinance are a matter of public record.** During my Planning Commission tenure, and continuing with my current role as a City Councilmember, I evaluate each case/application that is presented on an individual basis. That said the record will show that I am extremely skeptical of hardship arguments when it comes to proposals that exceed .50 FAR. Furthermore, the public record will also show that I have a strict adherence to the preservation and protection of view, light, privacy and air when it comes to properties that fall within the Hillside Overlay Zone.

### 4. Constituents

I have difficulty commenting on the above statement without knowing the context, but philosophically I cannot see how outside developers can be treated equally as residents. This is the very reason the City of Torrance has a General Plan, procedures and processes which govern land use – and the citizens are given the right to have their voice heard.

### 5. Pensions

The City of Torrance is sound financially and is run in a very conservative and frugal manner. The City of Torrance will not go bankrupt. Torrance survived the “Great Recession”, while other surrounding cities struggled, without any public safety (or any other employee) lay-offs; there was no degradation of city services.

In recent years, contracts with employee unions have been amended to have new city hires pay a higher contribution rate towards their pensions. This was done via state legislation and local negotiation with the employee unions. Since I have served on the City Council the recent employee contracts have included reductions in the amount of Industrial Disability Allowance costs borne by the City (from 90% to 50%) and will over the next 20 years save Torrance approximately \$3 million in future pension costs.

In the case of the Wall Street Journal article referenced above, the statistics of the survey that produced Torrance’s high rating of debt to equity was based on only the General Fund budget and did not take into account the Enterprise funds that the City of Torrance manages (i.e. Airport Fund, Transit, Water etc.). By adding these Funds to the equation the Torrance rating would be greatly reduced and in line and comparable with like size cities.

[Heidi Ashcraft](#)

### 1. Trees and views

I would like to hear the ideas regarding an ordinance to preserve ocean and/or city views regarding trees and foliage. The process to form an ordinance for this purpose

would need to be researched extensively. The Planning Commission should be involved along with city staff. Whatever the solution I believe it should be cost neutral to the City of Torrance.

## **2. PCH Greenery**

The area named in the above question definitely needs improvement. Measure R Funds are now available for this purpose.

## **3. Mansionization**

The Overlay Ordinance is a guideline. I believe it is a good ordinance to have, it raises awareness of the project in question immediately. Extreme hardship can be defined in different ways. The most important, I believe, is what type of lot is it? The typography of the lot is very important along with the size of the project.

## **4. Constituents**

The definition I would use for constituent is:

A citizen who is represented in a government by officials for whom he or she votes.

Not someone “coming into the city to build things”, these are not equals, in my definition of constituent.

## **5. Pensions**

I do not believe the City of Torrance will go bankrupt because of pension costs. The city has consistently met all liabilities and have projected they can meet expenses. We do have to keep a close monitoring of revenue trends. Torrance uses a multiyear forecasting system for cost projection. The city council has, through negotiations, reduced retirement benefits, this is a continuing work in progress.

## **Geoffrey Rizzo**

### **1. Trees and views**

At this time I would be hesitant to adopt regulations that affect living things such as trees and foliage. However, I have heard “hearsay” evidence that there are individuals in the overlay district that have planted trees and foliage out of “Spite.” Based on that evidence, I feel it is appropriate for the City to explore an ordinance to address issues of “Spite” fences, trees, or foliage.

Initial steps should be to examine existing law on issues of “Spite” fences, trees, or foliage as well as what other cities may or may not have on their books to address the issue. I would also like to conduct a survey of the residence in the overlay district to determine if there is support before entering into public hearings and considering an ordinance.

## **2. PCH Greenery**

In speaking with City staff, I was advised that the medians (North, Center, and South) along the stretch of PCH in question are under CalTrans jurisdiction. According to staff, CalTrans has voiced objections to the City making any modifications to the Center median, but is open to improvements to the South median.

Staff advised that improvements to the median are appropriate for the use of Measure R funds and that a request for funds is being made at the end of the March. Again, according to staff the preliminary design calls for a “K-rail” style base along the median with fencing on top and drought resistant landscaping.

## **3. Mansionization**

In general, the floor area ratio (FAR) in a residential zone is 60% of the square footage of the lot or parcel the structure is located. What the Hillside Overlay ordinance does is establish a benchmark whereby an additional level of review and approval is required for structures where the net interior floor area of the structure exceeds 50% of the square footage of the lot or parcel up to the maximum of 60%. In making that determination the Planning Commission (or Council on appeal) must make several findings. The first is that denying the application to exceed 50% “...would constitute and unreasonable hardship to the applicant.” The second is that if the increase is allowed that it “...would not be materially detrimental to the public welfare, and to other property in the vicinity.”

Absent evidence that staying within the 50% would create an “unreasonable hardship” and not be “detrimental to the public welfare” or “other property in the vicinity” I see no reason not to abide with the existing ordinance. Inasmuch as Hillside applications are reviewed on a case by case basis, each is unique and necessitates independent review.

## **4. Constituents**

Being a nation of laws, every individual is afforded equal protection under the law. People who want to come into the city and build things have equal protection as long as they abide with community standards that are established through local ordinance.

## **5. Pensions**

I don't believe the city will go bankrupt because of the costs. Currently, the city is in a situation where there is unfunded liability. It is my understanding that the city has developed a payment plan that will reduce that liability in the next 20 to 25 years.

Going forward, requiring new employees to contribute toward their pensions is one of the steps being taken to mitigate the problem. Others steps include reducing the disability benefit, adjusting the retirement formula, and extending the retirement age. These steps should stabilize the system in the outer years. The situation developed over a period of time and it will take time to resolve it and insure sustainability.

**1) Trees and Views:**

Yes I do believe that homeowner's views need to be protected. If a resident however has a tree that happens to be in the way of a view, and the neighbor's don't mind - then there's not really any point of enforcement. Once the neighbors have a problem with it, then I'm going to have to be in favor of chopping it down.

**2) PCH Greenery:**

Absolutely. My budget plan; which includes pension reformation and being much more scrupulous on the contracts our city manager proposes; would free up money that is much needed for infrastructure. I would make sure that the high filler or facer plants that are selected are evergreens and not deciduous, so that there is less of a mess left on the street. If leaves, pine-needles and bark are covering the ground in the area, you can almost be certain that it will cause problems with the sewer systems if a heavy rain comes.

**3) Mansionization:**

I am against mansionization. I would vote against it. But if it ever passed, I would ask that the soon-to-be mansion owner turn their driveway from cement to permacrete. Big houses result in less surface area for rain to percolate into the ground, causing more runoff and less water into the groundwater supply. If exceptions were to ever be made by the council, I feel that the mansion owner would have to make up for it in other ways.

**4) Constituents:**

Residents come first - without a doubt. Residents are willing to pay the taxes to live here and it is the duty of the city council to make choices that benefit the tax payers as much as possible. If developers want to come into the city to build things that the residents demand, they must fit into our zoning laws and regulations.

**5) Pensions:**

The fact that bankruptcy is even a possibility is a huge sign that we need to reform our pensions. I think it was a bad decision to cut so much slack on the pension contributions to begin with. If you can make 90% of your base salary plus health care for the rest of your life after 30 years of working, you need to be paying into calPERS. Some say that our city will increase its revenue so drastically that it will keep up with covering pension costs. To me this is nothing short of high-stakes gambling. Anti-Pension reformists assume that the economy is sure to keep on growing for the next 10,20 or 30 years, but any economist will tell you that there is no guarantee of this. When it comes to budgeting, it is better to be safe than sorry. Safety officers need to pay their fair share.

1. Trees and views: The hillside overlay area of Torrance, in which I resided for almost 10 years during the 1990's, including doing a permitted significant remodel, is a special area that deserves reasonable protection. The ordinance in place regulating development in this area I believe is a generally good ordinance, when properly enforced, to reasonably balance the rights of property owners to develop their property, and the rights of neighbors to their views, light, air and privacy. The issue of trees however, is not currently regulated, and is a much more controversial issue, as there are people that believe that trees add value and character to neighborhoods and should be protected, but at the same time, clearly can affect the views of homeowners. Complicated by the fact that some trees are public (on City parks or easements) and some are private, as well as a diverse variety of trees.

I believe that the best approach to determining if and how an enforceable ordinance could be put in place would be to hold public hearings of those in the affected areas, and see if a reasonable ordinance can be drafted from those hearings, which, if completed, would then be voted on in the normal manner of approving new ordinances via City Council. And very importantly, if such an ordinance should be developed, it should be cost neutral to the City, as I'm very concerned about the time and money required to hear what could likely be many hearings. I do believe that new planting of trees and hedges of more than 6 feet in height should be reviewed to protect further deterioration of views due to vegetation. But mostly, I would like for neighbors to work together to settle concerns privately as much as possible.

2. PCH Greenery: I support the installation of new vegetation in this area to replace the old vegetation that died off, but I would be less in favor of wrought iron fencing due to the high initial cost and the high cost of maintenance due to age and damage. Certainly if measure R funds were available for this, that would be best, but for a greenery only solution, I think it would be reasonable for the City to provide funding for this as part of the overall beautification of our City that needs more attention. Pressure to try to get cooperation from Caltrans is critical as well.

3. Mansionization: I believe that the existing ordinance, when properly enforced, is sufficient, with the exception of unusually large lots that are unbuildable due to terrain issues. In those cases the FAR should be reduced accordingly to represent the buildable lot size.

4. Constituents: In regards to the quoted statement, I would disagree. However, if someone new buys a home in our City, they should be allowed to build on their property within the guidelines, ordinances and codes that apply to their property. We cannot make rulings based on how long someone has lived in Torrance. I also believe that realtors selling property should be well versed in disclosing Torrance's rules and regulations to potential buyers so as not to foster difficult situations after the fact.



5. Pensions: I do not believe that the City of Torrance will go bankrupt as a result of its existing pension commitments. We can take some proactive steps to mitigate the problem by paying down our obligations when excess funds are available, and to continue to work with the labor groups and Sacramento to ensure that pensions are fair and reasonable, but yet allow Torrance to attract and retain the best possible employees.

## **Charlotte Svolos**

### **1. Trees and views**

I believe that residents considered the value of views when they were purchasing their homes. Protecting property values and making sure that laws preserve that value is a duty that the City Council should be willing to undertake. At minimum a hearing should be held to see if such an ordinance is feasible.

### **2. PCH Greenery**

I would not want Measure R funds dedicated to this as I feel that these federal funds should be reserved for projects that benefit all of Torrance since all residents will bear a piece of their repayment and there are more infrastructure issues than there are funds to deal with them.

I would at minimum approve funding new plants and depending on cost, would consider the fence.

### **3. Mansionization**

Firstly, the most important thing to do is define what an unreasonable hardship would constitute. Such loose parameters need further definition to be effective. Second, the other criteria that must be met under this statute is that it would not be materially detrimental to the public welfare, and to other property in the vicinity. I believe we should mail notices of the hearing to a one block radius of the proposed improvement to allow those affected to respond to the application when considered by the planning commission.

### **4. Constituents**

By the legal definition, the council member is correct because the business is providing permit fees to operate and therefore has a vested interest in the decisions of the city. However the terms first definition lists residents which would include businesses that reside within Torrance. They are not equals however because the business will primarily think about the good of the business and the resident will have to reap the

consequences long after the business has completed the project. The good of the community should be the ultimate deciding factor in all development.

## **5.Pensions**

I do not believe that the city will go bankrupt. There have been multiple reforms passed that would not have been considered in the article on that date. That does not mean that we should blissfully ignore any projections that include those factors in their projections. I believe that if we need to make further reforms that we do so in a responsible manner in connection with employees. If the city were to go bankrupt it would break their contracts and send us all into disarray and no one wants that. I believe we could consider an early retirement program to incentivize existing employees to retire and replace them with employees who contribute, resulting in overall cost savings.

## **[Alex See](#)**

### **Trees and Views**

The Hillside Overlay Ordinance was created in the '70s to restrict building in these areas to preserve view, light, air and privacy, and investment of homeowners. In order to prevent homeowners in these areas not acting neighborly, and avoid people cutting down or poisoning other people's trees, the City's current provisions need to be examined and expanded if necessary. The city should evaluate and research other cities' similar ordinance, survey the areas and set up hearings to receive input. The city should give sincere consideration to the issue.

### **PCH Greenery**

I had the opportunity to speak with a Measure R Representative at one of the SBCCOG events and my understanding is that the project has been approved for 2013-2014 and will be funded. Due to the safety concerns of the residents who live in this area, I believe this project will begin soon. The description of Measure R for this project is: "Safety guardrail, fencing and landscaping project to prevent illegal mid-block pedestrian crossing and vehicle incursion onto PCH from a frontage road on the south side of PCH used as a student drop off area for South High School which is on the north side of PCH. The amount of SBHP funding is limited to the lesser of \$852K or the funds needed beyond a potential federal safety grant to construct the south side safety improvements."

If the funding is not there, I would support the City of Torrance providing the necessary funds to move forward with this project. This stretch of road is a major street connecting to neighboring cities. My children attended Richardson and South High schools, and I would like to ensure the safety of our schools children. I have seen speeding cars in this area and some students attempting to cross the street without using the safety of the crossing bridge.

## Mansionization

Yes, I would advise the City follow the ordinance.

## Constituents

We need to respect homeowners who are here first. We also need to welcome people who want to come in to the city and build things. It depends on the definition of 'things'. If a person was buying a vacant lot and building a house for him/herself, then rightfully they are both our constituents. However, if an investor is trying to build commercial buildings, then the impacted homeowners' right should be protected.

## Pensions

The city will not go bankrupt since the City is paying the pension into CalPERS. The City will be able to pay off the City's unfunded liability of about \$400 million in 20-25 years. The City is anticipated to generate additional tax revenue from the rebuilt Del Amo Fashion Center and other Hawthorne retails corridor so that city services would not be interrupted.

## **City Council Candidates not responding:**

- Milton Herring
- Rahmat H. Khan
- Omar Navarro

**The next General Municipal Election will be held June 3, 2014  
for mayor, three councilmembers, city clerk and city treasurer.**

**For election information go to <http://lavote.net/> or <http://www.smartvoter.org/>**