Santa Cruz YIMBY is a grass roots organization of people who want to see more housing built in their communities. We believe that creating more housing creates more opportunity to drive less and walk more. We believe that more housing means more competitive pricing and that we might be able to afford to own a home. We believe that building housing near jobs in our community creates a truly sustainable community.

Santa Cruz YIMBY Candidate Questionnaire – State Senate 17th District

John Laird

1. Do you support SB 50 as it is currently written?

   Yes ☐ No ☒

   If no, how would you modify it for you to support it?

   I could have answered this question either way, because I want changes to the bill before the final approval. I did tell the author that if I was in the legislature now, I would vote to move the bill along while stating my concerns, and then look to the final version to see if my concerns were met. I would support the latest version as amended in the recent session – IF there was some guarantee that some measure of the new housing created as part of the entire bill would be affordable. When the bill was amended last year before it was held in Senate Appropriations, it focused on increasing housing near transit in urban areas. That is the right direction, as urban transit systems have the high volume and financial support to make that link work. But the bill did not seem to be clear on what part of new housing created under its provisions would be affordable. Right now, density bonuses might provide some new affordable housing as part of the effect of SB50, but the question is whether it would provide additional affordable housing that is actually above current requirements, and what portion of new housing would be affordable under this bill. As discussed in response to a later question, to meet the deficit of over three million housing units in California, it will take years to catch up. The theory that additional housing will lower housing affordability will not be true for a decade or more, if at all. Therefore, we have to guarantee that a measure of affordable housing is built as we move toward the goal of erasing the deficit and that will have to be part of SB50 if that is the major vehicle to providing additional housing units. I don’t represent that this will be easy, but it is necessary. That premise links many of the answers to subsequent questions – that it is our collective responsibility to make sure that there is housing for all Californians, that the state must have a role of facilitating the construction of new housing, that a real share of that
housing must be affordable, and that will require some financial support. The must also advocate at the federal level for their re-entry into efforts to meet this crisis.

If yes, are there improvements you would suggest?

Click or tap here to enter text.

2. **What do you think the state government’s role should be in addressing the housing crisis?**

State government must be a partner to all other housing stakeholders in addressing the housing crisis. To provide affordable housing as part of whatever effort is made at the state level requires some financial commitment, and that is a key part of state government’s role in addressing the housing crisis. As Assembly Budget Chair and part of the Assembly leadership team in 2006 – when the Assembly made an affordable housing bond a requirement for approving the Governor’s proposed infrastructure bond project at the time over initial lack of support in the State Senate and from the then-Governor – roughly 50,000 affordable housing units were constructed statewide as a result of that effort. The legislature and Governor took similar action which led to a successful housing bond in 2018.

Additionally, the state must address the process for approving housing at the local level, and must lobby the federal government to get back into helping to provide affordable housing.

3. **What do you think the legislative and administrative response of cities in the district should be to the passage of SB 330, The Housing Accountability Act, which prohibits a local agency from making housing development projects for low- and moderate-income as well as emergency shelter too onerous to build?**

I think that the implementation of this bill could be bumpy without legislative oversight. This legislation will facilitate affordable housing and emergency shelter development. I think the legislature must do oversight on the implementation of this bill, and then decide if there’s further action necessary – either legislatively or in helping support the efforts to provide affordable housing and emergency shelter.

4. **Area job growth has far surpassed home creation in recent decades resulting in lack of affordability for groups ranging from teachers to service workers to students, lengthening commuting times, and homelessness.**

   **What is your analysis of the problem?**

   The addition of jobs without the addition of an amount of workforce housing for the people in those new jobs has caused housing prices to skyrocket, and workers to live in more affordable locations that are a long way away from the jobs – leading to greenhouse-gas producing long commutes.
What is the appropriate role for the state in addressing it?

The appropriate way for the state to address this, is to help financially and legislatively with the construction of higher-density housing in large urban areas that have been most hit by this crisis. By incenting this, housing creation can match the job creation.

5. Although there is a shortfall of housing at all income levels, the shortfall has been particularly stark in extremely low (ELI) and low income (LI) categories. In our current Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) cycle, how can cities be supported in meeting their ELI/LI RHNA targets?

It is really going to require some help – whether financial or with land – to help the regional affordable housing goals to be met across the state. The state housing bonds in 2006 and 2018 are first steps, but it will take much more. Whether it’s inclusionary housing, density bonuses, state bond subsidies, or the federal government re-entering the house arena – there has to be some measure of support for local governments as they are required to provide housing in these categories.

6. Do you view current levels of ELI/LI production as acceptable? If not, how would you propose helping cities achieve RHNA goals for BMR (Below Market Rate) housing? Please address both (a) funding sources (b) siting (particularly in areas with high land costs) in your response.

I addressed this in the previous answer. To reiterate, I don’t think current levels of ELI/LI production are acceptable and I think financial resources need to be brought to bear. The siting issues are more problematic – only because long-term policies and practices now limit the amount of land available for new housing in some cities. I believe that if there are government-held parcels of land, they must be used; and that there might be options in building over parking areas and using other such opportunities where there is limited land available.

7. Governor Newsom has stated that he would like to see 3.5 million new housing units built by 2025. How many homes would you like to see approved/built during your term?

In the abstract, I would like to see a higher number of housing units being built in urban areas to close this gap quicker. Adding roughly 250,000 homes in a year has been a high year in recent years – which would mean that it could take decades to fill this gap at the current rate. I would hope we could increase this number, not just with a mandate – but with actual assistance.

8. Many cities in California have a long history of discriminatory housing policy targeting low-income residents and people of color, from redlining to minimum lot sizes to single-family-only home zoning designed for exclusion. What do you believe needs to be done locally and at the state level to specifically
remedy these injustices and preserve (or enhance) our socioeconomic diversity?

This is a tough nut to crack, but it needs to be cracked. I grew up in a racially diverse community, where “redevelopment” was used to tear down a significant low-income area. The state can take legislative action on discrimination, and I know there is an effort moving to repeal long-time requirements that might contribute to the discriminatory housing policies. I would support that effort as a legislator. In my prior legislative service, I did a series of bills that addressed the general area of non-discrimination, and was successful in getting these bills enacted into law. I would work to extend this effort to housing non-discrimination.

9. What changes to transportation policy and investment do you think are necessary to support housing growth? How would you connect transportation and land use planning?

I have always believed that public transportation and increased housing densities near major transportation corridors is good public policy and must be pursued. I believe this is different between urbanized areas and smaller communities — in part because I know as a former transit system board member and transportation commissioner that it is harder to financially sustain public transportation systems in places where there is not a large enough population base.

One of the problems has been that the state has been erratic in support for transit system operations. I fought for transit operations assistance as Assembly Budget Chair, against a Governor and Finance Department at the time that was not as interested. If we are going to have a good transit – housing interface, this has to be part of the solution.

During my local government service, I also participated in lobbying efforts at the federal level, trying to bring their involvement in higher transit operations subsidies. In my home area, as described in the following answer, we have tapped local financial resources at a level that is higher than comparable areas.

10. Would you support a large regional transit funding ballot measure? What projects, conditions or policies would you want to see with such a measure? Would you support requirements to ensure regional coordination in planning, delivering, and operating public transportation?

Yes. But I think this question is more about urban areas. There is just such a measure being proposed for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that would significantly increase regional support for transportation. The Senate district where I am running includes a portion of Santa Clara County and the City of San Jose. I would support that measure.
In the less-populated counties in the district, such measures have been attempted and some have passed. In Santa Cruz County, there is a half-cent sales tax County-wide for public transit (one of the few in the state) - and there also is a half-cent sales tax for more general transportation road projects – both approved by a County-wide vote. The sales tax ceiling is close to being met, and there isn’t a lot of additional room for transportation funding measures. I have always supported regional coordination in planning, delivering, and operating public transportation. I was instrumental in the establishment of the over-the-hill bus service between Santa Cruz and San Jose after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, a system that continues and carries more riders today than when it was established during a seven-week closure of the Highway Seventeen road commute route.

11. Do you believe Prop 13 needs to be reformed? If so, how would you propose to do so?

I have always believed that there is a level of unfairness on the residential side of Proposition 13, as new home buyers struggle to purchase a home, and then have higher property taxes in comparison to their neighbors, who receive exactly the same level of public services with less of a tax contribution. But I do not believe it is politically feasible to amend that part of the measure.

12. What is our moral obligation, if any, to addressing the housing crisis?

I have always believed that everyone has a moral obligation to make sure that there is adequate housing for the general population. At each level of my public service career, I have worked toward that goal. As a City Councilmember, I was part of the team that established inclusionary housing – and revamped local redevelopment, which led to over a thousand units of affordable housing being developed in the city. We also, as a city council, provided leadership in the development of hundreds of units of affordable housing. Yet since that time, available land has dwindled, development costs have risen, and the federal government has ended some of the housing assistance programs they previously had – all of which makes the challenge more formidable for local governments to facilitate affordable housing.

As a state legislator, and in the Assembly Democratic Leadership in 2006, we would not approve the Governor’s infrastructure package without an affordable housing measure. Once that pressure led the Governor and Senate to support that bond, the measure was developed, passed, and led to 50,000 units of affordable housing state-wide. I would have voted for the 2018 housing bond in the legislature if I had been a member at that time. I want to continue these efforts in a return to the state legislature – at a time when the affordable housing crisis is even greater.