

District 2 City Council Candidate Forum Q&A Notes*
February 5, 2020
Anza Elementary
7:00 p.m.

Introductions

George Chen:

First 19 months in office:

1. Trapped coyotes
2. Organized international youth swimming (for 2028 olympics)
3. Initiated electronic neighborhood watch

Geoff Rizzo:

1. Born and raised in Southwood
2. 30 years in Torrance Police Department
3. Focus on Safety and Infrastructure
4. 40 years in city government

Question 1: What is the most important challenge to our city?

GR: Unfunded pension, refinery hazards, loss of local control of land use. On land use, we need to push back, offer counter proposals.

GC: Public safety is high, but number 1 is generating revenue so we can attack current problems. Increase tourism.

Question 2: What are steps to mitigating pension liability which is 25% of budget. Corollary question: What metrics can be measured to show that budget is on track?

GC: Generate more revenue and treat pension liability with a "get well plan" (risk/waterfall). Aggressive steps for new hires. Currently have a 480M liability.

GR: Steps have already been taken 8-10 years ago and currently seeing some fruition of success. Plan to pay down debt included a Rolling Hills property swap (\$3M), renegotiated contracts, and pension formulas adjusted. By 2023 the budget should be better and by 2037, ought to be fixed.

Question 3: What are your views on the finalized contracts that have been approved for Police and Fire Departments? Do you support a similar compensation package for other city employees?

GR: Five bargaining groups involved, \$10M over 3.5 years for pay and benefits, a pretty good deal for city. We're looking at new contracts for City.

GC: I asked Treasure Director if we have enough in the budget to support this and he said yes. George added that Torrance employees are *very well* compensated. Focus is on revenue.

Question 4: Where do you stand on Modified Hydrofluoric Acid (MHA) and do you support the ban?

GC: We use more lethal chemicals in the city. My question are these: Is the chemical Cal-OSHA approved? Are they AQMD approved? If risk mitigation is good, I'm o.k. with keeping MHA.

GR: Mitigate risk. Rule 1410 from AQMD says there is an agreement to allow the use of MHA. Our job is to ensure they are operating safely. Ban it? Not at this time.

Question 5: Do you agree with the new state laws that change local zoning controls?

GR: Disagree. We need to monitor and contact legislators to fight this. Need to leverage state representatives (SB50).

GC: Disagree. We need to get the right people at the right place to influence decisions. There is an effort to decrease San Bernardino and Riverside housing density numbers causing coastal area density to increase. We don't want that - don't be a victim.

Question 6: How should homelessness be addressed in Torrance?

GC: We have a whole generation of people feeling entitled. Drug addicted criminals are working the system. State leadership changed some felony crimes to misdemeanor. We need to enforce laws such as not allowing public defecation. Seattle and Rhode Island have addressed homelessness issues and have videos on YouTube that you should watch.

GR: It's a complex issue. Federal funding was cut to mental health care during Reagan administration. Changes to prison rules (Felony to misdemeanor changes releasing people) and the working homeless (with job but living in car) present different problems which require different strategies. We need to have enough tools in the toolbox to fix, meaning we need laws in place to combat the various forms of homelessness that Torrance has.

Question 7: Where does Torrance stand with respect to single use plastics and where do you stand?

GR: Torrance doesn't have many rules on the books. The Art Center limits polystyrene. There are costs associated with a ban on single use plastics and some of those costs may affect Torrance operations and businesses in Torrance. This is a business decision that requires financial assessment.

GC: Government needs to stay out of this area. Businesses need to take responsibility.

Question 8: Does every house in Torrance need to have a tree (in the parkway)? What is done to endorse this rule?

GC: Is this a trick question? Not aware of any rule, but our public works department is very good.

GR: I'm unaware of any laws in place. When tracts were developed, the trees in parkways were planned out. In the permit process, city planning may require landscape and they would be the ones to enforce. There is a block-by-block plan for what trees can be planted on our street.

Question 9: The city allows short term rentals. Do you approve?

GR: No, I don't like short term rentals and voted no. "Single family residence" is why people moved here. Short term rentals take away long term rentals [take off market]. Criminal activity associated with short term rentals.

GC: Voted to approve short term rentals. Owner occupied and owner supervised short term rentals are o.k., for example a 4 bedroom house with a spare room rented out is o.k. We don't regulate long term rentals, why would we regulate short term rentals?

Question 10: Are you for or against Measure X?

GC: For. I moved it from 1/2c tax to 3/4c tax. Part of this measure is risk mitigation to the budget to not be a victim of county-wide tax increase.

GR: For. It helps us maintain local control. With this measure, it takes us to the 10.25 percent tax limit. This measure approval won't be triggered until the county triggers an increase. If the county did impose increased tax, we would invoke our 3/4c increase and Torrance would keep all the money (and not have to share with county).

Question 11: Are you for or against measures J & Q which change City Treasurer and Clerk to appointed positions verses elected positions?

GR: I support both. Clerks need knowledge (of their job) and training. If an elected position, we may have a popular person that lacks the skills to do the job. Best to appoint the best qualified person for the job.

GC: In favor. The job needs a specific set of skills. The elected person [who is not qualified] could hire someone to do the work and the elected person would just be a figurehead (a loophole).

Question 12: Are you satisfied with Torrance's current coyote management plan and if not, what do you propose?

GC: They are urban predators. I don't want Torrance to have the first bad incident. Need to look at mating season trapping. I'm in favor of more aggressive actions against coyotes and year-round trapping.

GR: I'm satisfied with current plan which I proposed and is to be reviewed in Oct/Nov this year. We can't eradicate [because coyotes compensate], can only manage. The current plan does provide for year-round trapping based on threat level. We need to ensure that part of the plan is to educate people.

Question 13: Regarding Beach City Healthy Living Campus, Does Torrance have any discretionary control?

GR: I'm opposed to the project. It's too big for the neighborhood and will completely destroy the neighborhood. We control the proposed entrance to the underground parking structure and will continue to fight until the plan is acceptable.

GC: On Flagler Lane, we have authority to control. When Redondo Beach votes, we don't have a vote. We need to present impact data to [RB] council.

Wrap up:

GC: Thank you Southwood Homeowners Association and SHA leadership. I'm working to support the 2028 Olympics and improve technical workforce.

GR: Thank you SHA. I will continue to serve your current issues. I'm willing to confront issues and listen to the problems.

*We strived to represent the candidates' answers as accurately as possible.