

BCT Candidate Questionnaire
Mark Coplan

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1. *What role do you see the arts playing in Berkeley's future? What specific policies or directives should the City Council champion to make this happen?*

The Arts are an essential component in our city's livelihood and equally important in our schools. The Arts give us creativity and challenge our intellectual being. The Arts integrate life, history and success. The Arts also promote true prosperity and strengthen our economy. For 20 years, I have played an integral part in the Arts for the Berkeley schools and intend to continue to do the same for the City of Berkeley. With new development, city government must use the Arts as a driving force to unify and enhance Berkeley. It is important that any new developments recognize and honor our community's cultural and artistic heritage, a concern that many in our community think we are losing. How can the arts drive big developer's initiatives? Through economic incentives that include the input of our artistic community, we can incorporate the Arts in the city's restructuring process by strengthening our Arts coalitions and organizations partnerships. While Berkeley has made the Arts a priority and we have successfully lobbied for funding, our Arts funding is not as comprehensive as other thriving cities. Our support of the Arts should be a beacon for the nation.

As District 3 city councilmember, I will work to make Berkeley a beautiful place to live, work and visit, and to be a more creative and vibrant city. My vision is to utilize our existing programs to provide an even larger range of on-going projects using art communities to host more BCT public events.

2. *Recently, Berkeley citizens came together and worked with the City Council to win our first increase in funding to the Civic Arts Grant Program in 14 years. Knowing how important the arts are as an economic driver and community building block, what concrete ideas do you have to create a sustainable and progressive income stream to support our growing, vibrant, and diverse arts ecosystem in the years to come?*

Please refer to my answer in Question #1

3. *Affordable housing is clearly a big issue across the whole Bay Area. Working artists increasingly struggle to find a place to live in our competitive rent market. Please explain how you would address this problem.*

As a longtime Berkeley resident, born at Alta Bates, I am disgusted with the housing crisis that is taking place in my beloved hometown. For the past 14 years, I have been fortunate with the benefit of a steady mortgage payment instead of annual rent increases. I have been a renter for most of my life, and my mother never owned her own home, so I understand the plight of renters. I have monitored the rent increases throughout the Bay Area during these 14 years, and recognize that even with our combined income, if we were renters today, we would have been priced out of Berkeley years ago. My retirement last June so that I can perform the duties of this office full time would have not have been possible.

I am deeply concerned for artists who struggle to find housing in our community -- This should not be their reality. There is no shortage of market rate “luxury” housing in Berkeley, and secretaries, artists, teachers, and even police and firefighters cannot afford to live in these new developments. As District 3 councilperson, my priority would be for low and middle income, and work force housing. According to a report from Berkeley’s Office of Economic Development Michael Caplan, only 17% of the people who work in Berkeley actually live here. We are in crisis. I would advocate for a moratorium on commercial housing developments that aren’t willing to work with non-profits in Berkeley until a pre-agreed number of low income to workforce housing units can be built working with nonprofits. This idea would be financed by our Affordable Housing Trust and development fees anticipated from projects currently under construction, or already approved to break ground over the next few years. For example, the COOP FCU in South Berkeley would welcome a partnership with the city, and could fit a five-storied apartment building on their property, with them on the ground level. Imagine if organizations like the Alameda County Labor Council invested their pension funds in safe Berkeley real estate that would protect the retirement for their employee’s while providing them with housing now. We have more reason to trust these partnerships for long term solutions when working with organizations like these and other non-profits who would see this as a sound long term investment for pension funds (etc.) in Berkeley. Some will argue that developers don’t want to work with non-profits. They can move aside for the truth: there are developers who will build in Berkeley with these parameters.

4. *What other issues concerning the arts community would you like to address? How might the arts community collaborate with the city to address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century?*

Access to the Arts is paramount to maintaining culture and history in our communities. Institutionalized cultural sectors (museums, theatres, dance and music) need support, but so do our emerging artists. As a District 3 councilperson, I will advocate to promote the arts community and provide more opportunity to our students, senior citizens and at-risk people. Studies have shown that exposure, especially during the middle and high school level determines subsequent participation and support of the Arts. By offering art and culture education programs in our libraries, schools and senior centers, we can engage our community in determining our city’s future.

As District 3 councilperson, I intend to call on the Arts community to use innovative ways to find solutions to effective use of public space and to beautify development. The box-style units that have been recently approved sorely need an Arts angle. The Arts community has the ability to alleviate the suffering of marginalized communities through Art.

Our Arts community is aware of my extensive participation in documenting and promoting the Arts in our Berkeley schools over the past 20 years. I will continue to support them in retirement, but I am very interested in expanding that into the community. Over 70,000 people watch the schools’ performance videos on Vimeo including prospective music teachers, potential donors, and of course grandparents from afar. There are 15,300,000 photos on Flickr.com: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/53901376@N04/albums> every year, and in the past three years, 300,000 people have viewed the school activities: plays/musicals, Dance Production, Performing Arts Festival, BHS graduation at the Greek.

As a Councilperson, I intend to attend and participate in many of the Arts city-wide, and all of them in District 3, just as I have in the schools. I have always encouraged school board members to

attend performances and school activities because their attendance contributes to the success of an event. I'll show up as your Councilperson to give that support, with my camera, and will continue to post pictures of events on my website.