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Candidate Questionnaire

Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, District 4

Generation Housing envisions vibrant communities where everyone has a place to call home and can contribute to an equitable, healthy, and resilient North Bay. That vision is realized through the actions of our elected and appointed leaders across all ten jurisdictions of Sonoma County. Housing is top of mind for every leader, every sector, every community member that calls Sonoma County home.

This questionnaire is designed to offer Sonoma County residents an opportunity to hear from their candidates directly about their vision for the future of housing.

All candidates were given equal opportunity to respond to the questionnaire—inclusion in the questionnaire should not be considered as an endorsement by Generation Housing. This is meant to be an educational resource to residents and voters of Sonoma County.

About Generation Housing

Since January 2020, Generation Housing has built a reputable library of housing resources read and shared by elected officials, government staff, C-suite executives and community members of a diverse audience. Candidate responses will be shared on our social media channels, our website and mailing list of over 5,000 contacts.

Generation Housing does not endorse candidates running for office. This document will be an educational resource for voters and all answers shared irrespective of the candidate.

Learn more

Board of Supervisors, District 4

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What role do you believe local government (the Board of Supervisors) should play in meeting its RHNA requirements, and do you think it should stretch beyond RHNA to grow a true "housing continuum," which means diverse housing opportunities across income levels to serve our community members as their housing and family needs and assets change over time.

The BOS must be an active partner in meeting RHNA—not a passive gatekeeper. I'll work with cities to locate county RHNA numbers within city limits near services. But RHNA is a floor, not a ceiling. A real housing continuum means deeply affordable units, community land trusts, ADUs, missing middle infill, and workforce housing. I support implementing objective design and development standards at Permit Sonoma to streamline approvals and build the right housing in the right places.

The Board of Supervisors must meet RHNA requirements while championing a true "housing continuum," diverse options across all income levels that evolve with our community's needs. Within our General Plan and zoning framework, we can responsibly expand affordable, workforce, and market-rate housing. Smart, compliant growth ensures every resident has a pathway to stable housing at every stage of life.

How would you characterize the greatest set of challenges facing housing production? And what do you plan to do to help overcome these challenges?

The biggest barriers to housing production are cost, processes, and political will. Fees, entitlement delays and redundant review layers price projects out before they break ground. Permit Sonoma needs mandatory processing timelines, a tiered fee structure that protects smaller projects, and a culture that treats applicants as partners. In North County, water and/or sewer capacity are often the real limits, and cities need the county as a partner to fund improved infrastructure. The General Plan update is our chance to open infill sites near jobs and transit, with objective standards so qualifying projects are approved by right.

The greatest challenges are bureaucratic delays, high construction costs, and a lack of affordable options for working families. As mentioned earlier, as Mayor, I worked to cut red tape during Sonoma County's largest home rebuilding effort. As Supervisor, I will make it a priority to streamline permitting, focus growth in infill areas, expand first-time homebuyer programs, and champion missing middle housing, balancing production with the infrastructure needed to support thriving communities.

Board of Supervisors, District 4

Melanie Bagby	Tom Schwedhelm
Generation Housing's current initiative, Housing for Healthy Communities, is part of our effort to continue a move away from exclusionary zoning, and looks at two state laws, SB 10 and AB 1033, that we believe are perfect fits for the North Bay. SB 10 upzones to allow up to 10 units on all parcels within a half mile of transit hubs and infill parcels. SB 1033 allows the separate sale of ADUs as small homes through condoization. Both are great opportunities for increasing affordable-by-design homes as both rent and for-sale products, perfect for young families, middle income workforce, and seniors. These are both slated for action this year, but if they are extended into 2027, could we count on your support for adoption of these bills?	
Yes	Yes
Why or why not?	
Both bills fit Sonoma County. The state's new transit-density law, SB 79, doesn't reach us because it only applies to counties with more than 15 rail stations. That makes SB 10 our tool for building homes near SMART stations on our own terms. AB 1033 lets ADUs be sold as small homes, a real starter-home path for young families, workers and seniors. These are practical ways to grow housing without sprawl. I supported ADU expansion on the Cloverdale Council and will champion both strategies at the County.	I believe SB 10 and AB 1033 align with my commitment to missing middle and affordable-by-design housing. Upzoning near transit and enabling ADU "condoization" are smart, infrastructure-conscious solutions that protect agriculture and open space while expanding homeownership for young families, workforce households, and seniors. As Supervisor, you can count on my support for both measures if needed.
As part of the General Plan update, the BOS has discussed expanding housing options within Agricultural Zoning. Do you support this effort?	
Yes, with care	No
What would be your vision for it?	
Farmworker and farm-family housing belongs on working land: employer-partnered, seasonal and year-round. The people who sustain our agricultural economy need to live close to it. That policy belongs in the General Plan's Agricultural Resources Element. It should protect prime farmland and work with the Williamson Act, not around it. As growers diversify or rest land, the county should help them stay in agriculture, not open the door to rural subdivisions. The goal is housing that serves agriculture, not sprawl dressed up as agricultural policy.	Agricultural zoning exists to protect farmlands and our rural character. However, I strongly support allowing farms and ranches to provide on-site housing for their employees. Sonoma County's dairy and viticulture industries have long modeled this responsibly. Employer-provided farmworker housing is a legitimate agricultural use and should be supported within our zoning framework. However, I would not likely support housing beyond farm employee and farm owner housing on agricultural lands.

Board of Supervisors, District 4

Melanie Bagby	Tom Schwedhelm
Streamlining housing development is one of the stronger levers we can pull to help better ensure the timely approval of projects and accelerate the overall production of housing. Generation Housing has proven that collapsing Design Review Boards into Planning Commissions can produce immediate results in terms of the number of permits pulled for housing projects. Do you support collapsing the Design Review Committee into the Planning Commission?	
Yes	Yes
Why or why not?	
Redundant review layers add cost and delay without improving outcomes for residents. Streamlining approval processes is essential to accelerating housing production. At Permit Sonoma, I'll push for objective design standards so projects don't get bogged down in subjective design review. Consolidating review into Planning Commissions—with clear standards and timelines—respects applicants' time and livelihoods and gets housing built faster for the families who need it.	As Mayor, I broke down bureaucratic barriers to accelerate post-fire rebuilding. Combining Design Review into Planning Commissions reduces redundancy, speeds approvals, and gets housing built faster. Streamlining our permitting process is consistent with my commitment to removing obstacles to affordable and missing middle housing production without compromising thoughtful, community-centered development. That said, we do need to maintain design review standards in any potential consolidation.
There is work being done on a Housing Bond Measure to be put on the 2028 Ballot. Do you support this effort?	
Yes, in theory.	It depends.
What do you believe your role in that effort is?	
I would support a housing bond built for Sonoma County that earns voters' trust. My role is to help shape it before it reaches the ballot. High real estate prices are often the biggest barrier to development in Sonoma County. Before we ask voters for a bond, we need to have done everything we can to put public lands to public benefit, utilize community land trusts, and use every tool available to bring the cost of the land down for potential projects. This will maximize the taxpayers' investment and build public trust. The measure also needs a clear spending plan, a fair return to every part of the county, and independent oversight and review.	I support exploring a housing bond similar to the Bay Area Housing Finance Authority (BAHFA) proposal. While the BAHFA board chose not to place the measure on the ballot in 2024, I supported its "3Ps" framework: Production, Preservation, and Protection. The final proposal should clearly define its scope, local funding return, and voter support. I'll withhold judgement until after I see the final proposal and its benefits to Sonoma County. I want to ensure it benefits our residents, not just those in urban centers. I am willing/interested in participating in the discussion of developing appropriate Bond Measure language that benefits Sonoma County.

Board of Supervisors, District 4

Melanie Bagby

Housing is often listed as a top priority here in Sonoma County. What does it mean to you to govern in a way that is consistent with your priorities? For instance, are you prepared to make tough budgetary decisions consistent with that priority? If you have already held elected office, can you provide an example?

Yes. Governing to a priority means the budget, staffing, and permitting culture all reflect it. On the Cloverdale City Council, I championed city-centered growth inside our Urban Growth Boundary and invested in the water infrastructure we depend on, including SCADA systems and real-time water meters. At the county, I'll support fee reductions for affordable housing and fund Permit Sonoma staffing to cut processing times, even when that means saying no elsewhere. And I won't let process be used as a weapon against needed projects.

Please use this space to share any additional thoughts related to housing in Sonoma County not shared above.

Housing is connected to every other issue I'm running on: transportation, water, working families and climate resilience. We can't solve any of them in isolation. I'm pro-housing and pro-worker, and those values reinforce each other. The people who grow our food, staff our hospitals, teach our kids and pour our wine deserve to live in the communities they sustain, from Cloverdale and Geyserville to Healdsburg, Windsor and northern Santa Rosa. That is the measure I'll use for every housing decision I make as Supervisor.

Tom Schwedhelm

Housing is often listed as a top priority here in Sonoma County. What does it mean to you to govern in a way that is consistent with your priorities? For instance, are you prepared to make tough budgetary decisions consistent with that priority? If you have already held elected office, can you provide an example?

As Mayor, I made tough decisions to cut red tape and lead our largest post-fire rebuilding effort. Our efforts were recognized by Speaker of the House Pelosi when she visited Coffey Park and commented, "It is a model for the nation. It is of national significance that you came together as a community." As Supervisor, and if the budget allows, I will work to expand first-time homebuyer programs for local working families and support affordable and missing-middle housing where it makes sense.

Please use this space to share any additional thoughts related to housing in Sonoma County not shared above.

Sonoma County must remain a place where our children and grandchildren can afford to live, work, and put down roots. It is our obligation to create housing pathways for current residents and future generations alike. By expanding homeownership opportunities, supporting missing middle housing, and focusing smart infill development, we can ensure our community remains accessible and vibrant for everyone who calls Sonoma County home.