

Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce is proud to present our 2021 Voters Guide. Part of the Chamber's charter and mission is to connect business with the government in meaningful ways. Our annual Voters Guide is not meant to tell you who or what to vote for. That is up to you. Our job is clear, to identify the candidates and measures that are most aligned with our pro-business mission, as it relates to the quality of life in our communities.

This year, we are providing endorsements for candidates in the City of Santa Barbara.

Due to COVID-19 we have been unable to hold our usual events and forums that have allowed you to meet candidates and hear from them directly. There will be two virtual forums on two separate evenings hosted in by the AIA in partnership with the Chamber and additional partner organizations.

[Click here to register for the Mayoral Virtual Forum.](#) [Click Here to register for the City Council Virtual Forum.](#)

Mayoral Candidate



Randy Rowse

Restaurant Owner/ Previous City Council Member

Randy Rowse stands out as a clear supporter for pro-business policies. As a business owner himself running a restaurant in downtown Santa Barbara for 30 years Randy is well versed in many of the obstacles that businesses face. He has been identified as a candidate who will work as a partner with the business community to take action.

District 4 Candidate



Barrett Reed

Real Estate Investor/ Santa Barbara City Planning Commissioner

Barrett Reed has demonstrated a strong support for business growth, economic development, and pro-business policies. His firm, the Miramar Group, are responsible for adaptive reuse projects that the community have benefitted from and love. His engagement as a planning commissioner has demonstrated his willingness to serve the community.

District 5 Candidate



Eric Friedman

Incumbent

Councilmember Friedman has a demonstrated track record of his willingness to work with the business community and in collaboration with the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber appreciates Councilmember Friedman's ability to listen to all sides and make informed recommendations.

NO ENDORSEMENT

District 6



The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce has not issued an endorsement for the 6th District City Council race, though two have stood out as strong candidates for this position; Meagan Harmon the incumbent and Nina Johnson the Senior Assistant to the City Administrator. The other candidates did not reply to the questionnaire that we issued. We have included the responses to the questionnaire for you to build your familiarity with these two candidates. The Chamber may issue an endorsement for this race at a later time.

City of Santa Barbara Council Candidate Questionnaires District 6

Santa Barbara City Council District 6 Candidates

Meagan Harmon
Incumbent

Nina Johnson
Senior Assistant to the City Administrator

1. COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Efforts: The economic effect of the Pandemic has been extremely detrimental to business at all levels. Government and business have worked together like never before to assist business recovery. What do you think other jurisdictions have done right and wrong, what would you have done differently?

Meagan Harmon: Communities failed by resisting change, moving too slowly, and failing to understand real-life impacts of policies and inaction. My priorities: keep people safe and support local businesses. I led the creation of the State St. Promenade, including parklets/outdoor seating, and reformed policies that have held businesses back for decades.

Nina Johnson: At the start, I supported immediate outdoor dining expansion for business survival and a phased approach to build larger structures on State Street. Engage local designers and businesses quickly for insights and advice before restaurants invest in expensive parklets that may later need modifications, possibly resulting in future expense.

2. Downtown Housing: There is new, widespread support to increase housing within the City of Santa Barbara, including the downtown core. What policy changes would you support to accommodate new workforce housing, e.g. building heights, inclusionary requirements, and parking ratios?

Meagan Harmon: We must incentivize development that makes downtown housing feasible for developers, while being sensitive to neighborhood needs. I have been among the strongest voices for flexibility on building heights, parking ratios, increased density, and reform of Community Development and permit processing issues that have long plagued the City.

Nina Johnson: I support policies and incentives to produce more housing units for all income levels, allowing housing to be feasible and profitable over other types of development and built within current height limits with exceptions. I will reduce costs to build housing (i.e. planning/permitting) and prioritize City-owned property for workforce housing.

3. Homelessness: The pandemic has caused a dramatic increase in the effects of homelessness on the unsheltered as well as the business community and tourism industry. There is significant threat to human life, health, safety, and property due to living in unsanitary conditions and the accidental fires that spread. Business and residents have sounded the alarm but there seems to be a lack of urgency or crisis response from government. What would you do differently?

Meagan Harmon: I've championed real solutions, proven effective at helping people get rehoused - especially those who are truly unable to care for themselves: street outreach, rapid rehousing programs, permanent supportive housing, and wrap-around services. Simultaneously, enforcement is critical to deal with troublemakers and aggressive panhandlers. Eradicating encampments and protecting neighborhoods/downtown are critical.

Nina Johnson: This is a longstanding issue that requires more creative approaches, better coordination and accountability among social service providers, and accessing state/federal funding. We need mental health outreach workers and enforcement of a Sit/Lie ordinance to ensure the downtown and commercial corridors are safe and inviting for residents and tourists.

City of Santa Barbara Council Candidate Questionnaires District 6

Santa Barbara City Council District 6 Candidates

Meagan Harmon
Incumbent

Nina Johnson
Senior Assistant to the City Administrator

4. Permitting Process: The Santa Barbara City Council recently enacted a new Economic Development Strategic plan that aims to make the City more business friendly. However, there are several reports that blame inefficiencies at the City that cause huge delays in opening a new business, making a tenant improvement, building new housing and improving business vitality. Do you agree? If so, what would you do to address this situation?

Meagan Harmon: Absolutely agree. I've demanded improvements at Community Development, after decades of inaction. There is still much work to do. I've pushed aggressively and led reform efforts to: hire a business-friendly CD Director, eliminate the onerous ZIR reports, create the State Street Promenade and parklets, and increase density allowances downtown (partial).

Nina Johnson: In lieu of hiring consultants at significant expense, I support consulting the community and taking more decisive action to address delays in planning and permitting. I want to create an organizational culture of "Getting to Yes" and eliminate rules that no longer serve us and create obstacles for local businesses.

Bonus question: National changes in retail, employment changes in offices, and pandemic-related closures will create the need for incentivized and streamline change-of-use procedures to accommodate and accelerate changes in the downtown core. Would you champion a new ordinance that proactively addresses this need if it was promoted by the business community and what other ideas do you have around this concept?

Meagan Harmon: This is very exciting to me. I absolutely support incentivized and streamlined change-of-use procedures, and would champion an appropriately written ordinance. Of course, the devil is in the details - I would be thrilled to work with the Chamber to help create this ordinance and to get it passed into law.

Nina Johnson: I would champion more flexibility for retail spaces and incentivizing mixed uses in commercial corridors, particularly helping businesses who have combined retailing with other uses that trigger other costly requirements. I support moving away from burdensome restrictions for businesses that are trying to open and a more nimble, flexible approach.

5. Santa Barbara City American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA): How should the City of Santa Barbara use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for economic recovery? What would your priorities be?

Meagan Harmon: I successfully pushed for rental assistance to keep people in their homes during COVID-19 - payments made directly to landlords. ARPA has helped us maintain a balanced budget and protect core services like public safety and infrastructure. A balanced budget is key to ensuring the long-term functionality of our City.

Nina Johnson: The City should make ARPA funding available for expenditures paid by local businesses to address pandemic-related public health measures. Funding should also be available to mitigate negative economic impacts to employees and small businesses to ensure their quick recovery.

6. City/Chamber/ Business Relationship: How important is the role of Mayor or Councilmember to fostering a respectful and open relationship to the business community? How would you help build this relationship and capitalize on the ideas and concerns raised by the business community?

Meagan Harmon: Increasing voices of residents/businesses is fundamental to effective leadership; power has been held too exclusively by City bureaucrats for too long. I've achieved real reforms (i.e. State Street Committee, where I was proud to support the appointment of Chamber's President). The Chamber must be a partner in every important decision, in SB and at the Coastal Commission; I look forward to continuing to partner with you.

Nina Johnson: The Mayor and Councilmembers must listen carefully to businesses, take action, and set the tone and priorities of the community to ensure economic vitality. They play a key leadership role with business stakeholders to ensure entrepreneurs can quickly navigate opening a business and existing businesses can operate with unnecessary obstacles.