

**Napa County Latinx Democratic Club
Candidate Questionnaire
DEADLINE FOR RETURN: September 4, 2020**

Candidates Name: Lester Hardy Area/District: City of St. Helena

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Candidate Specific Questions

1. *What qualifications do you have for the office you're running for and why do you deserve the Napa County Latinx Democratic Club's endorsement?* I have been active in and with local government for over 30 years - as a community activist and organizer, as a member of the St. Helena City Council (1990-1994), as a citizen and client advocate, and as a member of the St. Helena Planning Commission (2017-present). I have been Chair of the Planning Commission for the last two years. At all times I have been a member of the Democratic Party, deeply committed to progressive values.

2. *Please include an example of your leadership on Latinx issues? Also, what will you do as an elected official to ensure that POC and our Latinx communities are represented?* In 1992, the St. Helena Police Chief worked with the Border Patrol to organize a raid in St. Helena, and - even worse - Chief West gave the Border Patrol the addresses of ten homes where Chief West said he had evidence that illegal immigrants were living. Thus, the operation included the warrantless searches of ten homes in violation of the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution. I was the only City Council member who supported Father Brenkle's request for a special meeting at which the Council could hear from its aggrieved residents, and when, a few months later, I introduced a resolution to prohibit St. Helena police from cooperating with immigration enforcement actions, my motion died for lack of a second. The times have changed; my values have not. In July of this year I asked the City Council once more to schedule a meeting to hear the concerns of the Latinx community of St. Helena, and I emphasized the importance of providing translation services - I have delivered this message in person and in writing, and I will persist until the outreach is meaningful. More important, I have endorsed Rosaura Segura's candidacy for a seat on the City Council - there is no better way to insure representation of the Latinx community than to elect one (or more) of its members.

3. *What are your top three priorities, and how will you ensure that you accomplish those?*

My top three priorities are (1) addressing to call to social justice in substantive, meaningful ways, most importantly through development of affordable and workforce housing, including self-help projects that provide lower income workers with an opportunity for home ownership; (2) improving the City's fiscal position so that it can better afford to do all the things it needs to do, including contributions to affordable housing, revitalization of the downtown business district, and repair and maintenance of streets and other critical infrastructure, and (3) addressing the fractious, polarized nature of public discourse in St. Helena so that controversial matters do not end so often in a choice between inaction or litigation. This last item may be the most important, as without a significant improvement in the City Council's ability to navigate the challenges presented by a divided and angry populace, our ability to successfully address other important concerns, such as the first two items on my list, will remain severely compromised. I will bring all of my knowledge, experience, and collaborative skills to these challenges, but nothing I might do alone can possibly guarantee success. Accordingly, I will continue to do all I can to motivate others to join me in the hard work ahead, for it is only by working together that we can meet the challenges of the future.

Issues

4. *Latinx community members are often deemed essential workers, what will you do to mitigate the effects essential workers suffer during this pandemic, including your employees?*

We already know that people of color, including the Latinx community, have suffered disproportionate effects from the COVID-19 epidemic. Many experts believe that crowded housing conditions have been a factor for the Latinx community, and I have seen for myself how the shortage of affordable housing leads to overcrowded, substandard living conditions for many. Accordingly, I believe a relentless push for more affordable housing is one of the most important things we can do to reduce these risks in the future. For the present, it is essential that all workers have access to quality health care, and that employers do more than simply follow the health orders coming from state and county health officials - employers must be responsive to the needs of employees whose risk factors are high - those with existing health conditions that increase their risks, as well as those for whom age alone is a significant risk factor. I have no employees myself, but as a City Council member I can advocate for appropriate responses to the needs of the City's employees, and I can deliver the same message to employers in the community.

5. *How will you tackle the next upcoming natural and public health disaster and how will this plan actively engage the Latinx Community? What is your plan to ensure that disaster planning is culturally competent and provides language access?* We must review the response to the natural and public health disasters of 2020, and the review must include feedback from the Latinx community. The key to doing a better job in the future is to learn what we have done well so far, and what we have not done well. By engaging with our Latinx community on precisely these questions, we can make future planning more accessible, and more culturally competent.

6. *What is your stance on Black Lives Matter? How do you link this movement to the needs of the Latinx community?* The Black Lives Matter movement has created an opportunity for St. Helena to engage honestly and directly in an effort to be more inclusive, so that the City can better serve the needs of all its members by including the Latinx community in ways that are substantive and ongoing. This effort is long past due, but the time is right for action, and we must persist until the inclusion of the Latinx community in our City government and public decision-making process seems so natural that no one gives it any thought.

7. *What is your stance on re-appropriating police funding? What does this mean to you in your role and what policies will you pursue to address this call to action?* St. Helena, fortunately, has not experienced the abuses of police power that have brought the Black Lives Matter movement into being. That said, I am adamantly opposed to military-influenced training for police officers. Our police are here to serve the community, not to make war on it. And though racism may not affect police practices in St. Helena in such horrific and conspicuous ways here as it has elsewhere, it would be foolish to believe - as some do - that our Latinx community does not experience racism and discrimination. It does. I have seen it with my own eyes, and hear it with my own ears. Part of the goal for outreach to our Latinx community is to find out how the members of St. Helena's Latinx community experience racism and prejudice, and what their experiences with local law enforcement are like. Our Police Chief has lived in Mexico, and speaks some Spanish, so I am hopeful we can make real improvements in this regard.

8. *Families of all ranges continue leaving our community because it is too expensive for them to live here. Many families are doing long commutes in order to work here, therefore increasing their carbon footprint, missing on important family time, and much more. What is your commitment and plan to increase workforce housing so families that work here are able to live here? And what will you do to help keep families that are living here to remain here (e.g. increase the quality of life, health and wellness, youth and children activities, etc....)* St. Helena will never be able to build too much workforce housing, and the most we can do will not be enough. Accordingly, the City must be relentless, nimble, and opportunistic in pursuing opportunities to get workforce housing projects approved and built. We must identify available and desirable sites, we must insure that we have enough such sites zoned for housing, we must recruit qualified partners from the affordable housing development community, we must take full advantage of private development projects to create opportunities, both in terms of land and in terms of funding, and we must press to get things done.

9. *Do you believe it is the role of elected officials to take policy steps to assure adequate affordable housing?* Yes!

9a. Specifically, what suggestions do you have to make housing more affordable? And would you support requiring new developments to set aside a certain percentage of affordable housing? St. Helena has long required that new housing developments either make 20% of the project units affordable, or else contribute to the City's housing fund.

The problem with in-lieu fees has always been that they do not cover the cost of constructing the units they replace. And the far greater problem has been the community's demand for low growth rates, in combination with neighborhood-based opposition to housing projects of all kinds, but especially affordable projects. I believe the best approach for St. Helena is to be aggressive, opportunistic, and flexible. Where a project offers an obvious opportunity to include affordable housing on site, we should insist on it. When a project is not conducive to meeting our affordable housing requirements on site, we must require enough in fees to insure that the housing needed can be (and will be) constructed off site. For some projects, it could be a combination of the two. One thing is for sure: continued reliance on small, in-fill projects will not get enough units built. The new RHNA numbers should give St. Helena a good jolt in this regard.

10. *According to a report from July 28th, 2020, homelessness has continued to increase for the last several years in Napa County. In 2016, 317 people were reported to be homeless. In 2020, it reported 464 people. What can you do in the role you're running for to address this important and growing issue?* With the border effectively closed, and services for the homeless virtually non-existent, St. Helena's homeless population has declined in recent decades. That said, I believe everyone should take some responsibility for addressing the problem of homelessness, and I think in St. Helena that must begin with increased awareness of the existing programs in need of support. The City Council can and should take a leadership role in this endeavor.

11. *In the role you're running for, what can you do to help ensure that transportation meets the needs of youth, working people, families, and seniors?* St. Helena has two seats on the Napa County Transportation Agency - that is where I can do the most to ensure that the transportation needs of our youth, workers, families and seniors are being met.

12. *What action steps will you take to diversify the local workforce in your city or town? Additionally, what hiring processes will you pursue to increase the diversity of your City/Town's staff, and boards and commissions?* I think the City's hiring practices to a decent job of promoting diversity in the City's staff, though I am sure there is room for improvement. The City Council itself is responsible for appointments to all the boards and commissions. For the boards and commissions, increasing diversity requires a thoughtful and proactive approach to recruitment - the Council can accomplish a great deal simply by tasking the City Manager with developing an approach to outreach and recruitment that results in a more diverse pool of applicants.

12a. *Do you support a policy where aspiring citizens can serve on boards and commissions?* Yes! In all cases where state law does not impose a citizenship requirement.

13. *Racial Gaps In Maternal Mortality Persist. Black mothers die at a rate that's 3.3 times greater than whites, and Native American or Alaskan Native women die at a rate 2.5 times greater than whites, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Would you work to decrease maternal mortality among women of color, protect reproductive rights and a women's right to choose? Yes!*

14. *What is at least one specific thing you can do as an elected official to address the needs of LGBTQIA+ people? With respect to our minority communities, our priorities as a City Council need to be informed by the minority community members themselves. No other approach is truly inclusive. Accordingly, I will push the City Council to engage in outreach with the LGBTQIA+ community to find out what members of the LGBTQIA+ community identify as their most important issues and concerns.*

15. *What specific things will you do to defend immigration and the economy in our your jurisdiction? And would you consider making the jurisdiction you're running for a Sanctuary Jurisdiction? I think the first and most important thing is to build awareness. Many anglos have no idea how much immigrants contribute to our economy, and most know even less about how much support immigrants provide to their communities of origin. So long as Trump is President, I believe that identifying St. Helena as a Sanctuary City would increase the risk of Homeland Security operations. In other words, I believe that to protect our immigrant communities right now it is best to avoid things that attract attention in our nation's capital. We must find other ways to protect those in need.*

16. *What will you do combat climate change in your area and promote the green economy? I will fight for a combination of policies and programs focusing on use of green materials in construction, development of pedestrian and bicycle paths that offer a fully functional alternative to motor vehicles for local transportation, strengthening our mass transit system while aggressively converting mass transit vehicles from fossil fuels to battery power, and conservation of our water supply through improved conservation techniques as well as development of the infrastructure required for recycling tertiary treated wastewater for outdoor use.*

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