

## 2020 LA City Council District 10 Candidate Questionnaire

SCANPH shared the following questions with the campaigns of both candidates running for Los Angeles City Council District 10 in the 2020 general election: Grace Yoo and Mark Ridley-Thomas. We thank both candidates for responding to the questionnaire. More information about the candidates is available at <https://clerk.lacity.org>. More information about voting in Los Angeles is available at <https://lavote.net>.

### Question #1

*Everybody agrees that we need more affordable housing, but we need more public funding to make that happen. Locally in recent years, Prop H and Measure HHH raised new public funds for affordable housing, but these are nowhere near enough and will not last forever. What **specific** local funding sources for the City do you propose as the next step to build more affordable housing for Angelenos?*

**Grace Yoo:** Los Angeles has an affordable housing crisis. It's not going to fix itself and it's not going to get fixed until we elect honest leaders with the will and commitment to actively pursue creative solutions with integrity and transparency. It's certainly not going to get fixed while corrupt leaders are making back-room deals with developers that result in exorbitant costs and fewer affordable units than should be required.

When we are pursuing to build new affordable housing, we need strict oversight to make sure unscrupulous developers are not exploiting our crisis. Local funding is only effective if we successfully eliminate channels that misuse the money to benefit their own agenda. We need to incentivize developers who can and will bring units to market at costs that are reasonable and sustainable, so that there will be affordable units that people can afford to live in. We need to be better at controlling the construction consultant fees that help streamline the process for developers but often at a tremendous cost to the taxpayers. The truth is that every aspect of affordable housing cost needs to be carefully scrutinized and the city should always retain the right to veto any contractor hired by a developer of affordable housing units when they are not abiding by the rules, such as not paying agreed upon minimum wages.

Lastly, with the budget having a huge deficit for the upcoming fiscal year, one source of funding would be the City Council discretionary funds of \$30-\$50 million annually to support affordable housing. We need to reallocate funds and have accountability and transparency from start to finish.

**Mark Ridley-Thomas:** In America, you must literally win the lottery to access to affordable housing – only 1 in 8 eligible low-income residents are able to access federal housing vouchers.

This has put tremendous pressure on local governments to think creatively about how to increase the supply of affordable housing absent sufficient public support.

I was driven to author Measure H because I knew the County didn't have a sustainable source of funding to prevent homelessness, and to provide both housing and the services needed to help individuals thrive who are exiting homelessness. But it is not enough – we are over half a million units short across the City.

The City must look to other funding sources, including expanding property tax rebates to support affordable housing at the workforce housing or moderate-income level.

Also, the City should also be intentional about creating an affordable housing plan with non-profit developers.

We need to make the entitlement process more efficient so that developers can spend less money and time in pre-development of good projects.

And we need to think creatively about new local sources of funding to support the operating subsidy to ensure housing can be developed. I was an initial investor in Housing for Health's Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool. We need to leverage and expand this model.

### Question #2

*Although the City of Los Angeles is the biggest city in California and the second biggest city in the United States, it cannot do everything on its own. LA needs to partner with the County, the State, and the Federal government. In recent years, the State Legislature has had a bigger impact on affordable housing throughout the State. What **specific** legislation would you like to see come out of Sacramento to get more affordable housing built here in LA?*

**GY:** The coronavirus pandemic has helped us see how the government responds in a state of emergency. The issue of homelessness and affordable housing should be viewed with a similar sense of urgency and community resilience. I will be a tenacious

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fighter to make housing a priority at every level so that we can finally make a dent in a problem that too many politicians have ignored.

If we are going to talk about affordable housing then we should talk about affordable housing. What has come from the State in the past has been more about housing in general and focuses on the construction of luxury housing instead. I believe locals should have a larger impact on local housing issues, solutions and zoning, who understand the nuances and differences of each neighborhood. One time the State wanted to pass a bill that required everybody by right to build six story buildings. We have small towns around California that have firetrucks whose ladders only reaches three floors. This shows how out of touch the State has become of what is possible and safe for the area, and thus the need for local control on zoning laws.

When I am elected, I will urge the State to immediately increase the funding for Board & Care facilities, and erect tents and emergency shelters on unused federal, state, county, and city lands and empty buildings as we do in natural disasters. I will make sure in my district affordable housing is a priority and that we build affordable housing units along with units at the luxury end. Despite warnings from policy experts and homeless advocates, City leaders have continued to allow low-income housing to be demolished without concern about where the low-income residents would go. I hear stories about new "affordable" apartment units costing the city more than \$700,000 to build in City Council District 10. For one unit! The cost is outrageous and will forever prevent us from being able to build enough permanent supportive housing. Not only that but the City needs to make up for the housing that was lost and make additional ones to prevent more people from becoming homeless.

**MRT:** We should work with Sacramento to expand the welfare exemption to affordable housing at 120% of AMI. I believe that this type of approach, especially in areas where we are seeing a lot of gentrification and displacement, for example, around transit lines in Los Angeles, is critical to providing much-needed financial subsidies to development, but also to preventing massive economic disruption within urban communities. At my urging, both the County and Metro have adopted positions to support legislation that accomplishes that objective.

## Question #3

*Coronavirus infection rates are still high in Los Angeles, and the disease is still affecting people with low incomes, people of color, and essential workers at higher rates than the general population. Rent relief for residents infected by coronavirus is essential, but solutions so far have only shifted the financial burden from renter to landlord's including affordable housing. These policies put NOAH/mom and pop properties at risk, and they also destabilize affordable housing developers and operators, which puts our City's entire affordable housing portfolio at risk. How would you address this situation with policies that protect renters and our City's private and publicly subsidized affordable housing?*

**GY:** During this time of need we need to look out for the renters and the mom and pop landowners alike. It is not equitable for us to push the burden on the landlords and watch them lose their homes. The government needs to reduce property tax payment or waive it for the time being, so as to not put all the burden on mom and pop landlords. The government must share the burden.

**MRT:** This crisis is unprecedented, and we need to be aggressive to ensure that renters stay housed and that property owners, especially mom-and-pops, are supported. At the County, I have supported ongoing eviction moratoriums in order to prevent the massive displacement of renters. I have also championed over \$100 million being distributed in the form of rent relief, including piloting an effort in the Second District in the early summer to provide direct grants to support renters living in properties owned by mom and pops. I have also championed a \$10 million investment in eviction defense, which includes an education and outreach campaign that will target 1.5 million Angelenos. I have also supported efforts to make our foreclosure prevention unit more robust and to fund the non-profit agencies that provide mortgage owners with technical assistance and more resources so that they can scale up these efforts.

It is critical that property owners have the ability to refinance, defer debt or work out an acceptable relationship with their banks – and if they don't have the ability to facilitate that on their own, the County and City should be equipped to engage. The crisis is not going away overnight, and we will need to continue to work to ensure that the housing market stays as stable as possible – and that a massive number of Angelenos are not forced into homelessness as a result of this pandemic and the economic implications.

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## Question #4

*Los Angeles is changing. With the population growing and housing construction not matching that growth, housing prices continue to go up, which affects both rent and the price of buying a house. Everybody is affected. In many parts of LA, the result is gentrification, which often prices out Black people, Latinos, and other vulnerable communities. What **specific** City laws would you push to protect vulnerable communities in changing neighborhoods so that they can stay in their homes?*

**GY:** The first line of action to keep people in their homes should be to halt no-fault evictions and predatory rent hikes by providing accurate know-your-rights information to renters and homeowners. I will work with County and State leaders to provide more beds and facilities, designate "safe parking lots" and convert existing unused buildings such as old motels and vacant warehouses into housing as it is less expensive, greener and faster to develop than new construction.

I want to incentivize developers to build projects that provide different types and sizes of housing: projects that range from tiny 250 sq. feet to larger 1200 sq. ft. units. We need that kind of variety so everyone can find a home that fits their needs and their means. The issues of affordable housing and construction are not limited to increasing prices but also job search, public transportation, health and environment. As a result of an exponential rise in prices and gentrification many people of color are forced to live in areas further away from their workplace. Usually, they reside in areas that pose health risks as well as lack effective public transportation. People who work multiple jobs find it difficult to spend time with their family and take care of their mental health. Thus, it is important to build housing near the areas with jobs so that people do not have to sacrifice one necessity over the other. They have a better ability to be involved in living a safe, healthy and sustainable future for themselves and their families because they can be home.

**MRT:** Our City still experiences the impacts of a history of redlining. At LA County, I championed a series of reforms to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing – including expanding and implementing programs and policies that protect against housing discrimination and provide financial assistance to individuals with limited means. This includes creating source-of-income discrimination protections that expand the prohibition of discrimination to rental subsidies, the expansion of current homeownership programs for residents with limited means, and stabilization subsidy programs that can offer short-term and long-term rental assistance to at-risk or displaced families. Additionally, fair housing services must be expanded, and a partnership between the housing authority and landlords has been demonstrated to incentivize program participation. We have also asked the County team to work with community organizations to develop in-depth gentrification study. This is a package of programs and policies that I would like to see replicated at the

City; they are also reforms that are consistent with LAHSA's Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness.

## Question #5

*The City of Los Angeles has many dedicated professionals who want to help build more affordable housing in LA. Unfortunately, bureaucracy gets in the way and can make it more difficult for nonprofits developers to build more affordable housing. Would you support a "delegated authority" for some affordable housing projects? This means that some projects will be approved for funding by highly trained HCID staff without multiple trips to Council for redundant review, which would lower the cost of affordable housing building and speed up the process.*

**GY:** Yes, I like the idea of "delegated authority" and would want to read the fine print. We need to streamline the process for developers and reduce costs by eliminating redundant steps that do not benefit anyone. It is scary to go to the city planning department and get approval but when you go to another department you are told to change your plan. We as the city need to be consistent, so every department that has to check comes together to create a big checklist where we can build affordable housing and low-income units without wasting time and money. Efficient and just decisions with ethical means of funding and intention will help bring the affordable housing that this city needs.

**MRT:** Absolutely. We must create more efficiencies in the permitting process and we need to empower competent staff to move projects forward. We must take advantage of community plans that set the framework for a community vision, and not redesign or redo the planning process for each project. We simply must move faster and more thoughtfully to address our housing crisis.

## Question #6

*Do you commit to meeting with SCANPH staff and a small group of our nonprofit affordable housing builder members within 45 days of the start of your term? We believe that building a relationship between nonprofit builders and your district's City Councilmember will mean more affordable housing here in LA.*

**GY:** I believe affordable housing is a critical need and will commit to meeting with the SCANPH staff and nonprofit affordable housing builder members within 45 working days of my start of term.

It would be a joy to work with SCANPH and collaborate with Non-Profit Organizations, private agencies and different governmental departments. I will have an open-door gathering

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twice a month where I meet with people and plan my next steps such as tackling the upcoming budget crisis. I am here for the community and all the volunteers who also wish to see a positive change soon.

As a longtime leader in my community, I know how to bring people together with different opinions to solve problems. I will work closely with the community so that they support new development and redevelopment projects because they fit the neighborhood and are not forced into the existing surroundings by politicians who are in cahoots with greedy developers trying to make as much money as possible. We cannot think that the solution is in someone else's neighborhood. To really solve our crisis, we have to look at all neighborhoods and communities and determine what is appropriate in each one. I have the will and drive to make this happen. In partnership with SCANPH and other affordable housing collaborators, we will bring residents together and lead them to "Yes, In My Back Yard" instead of "Not In My Back Yard."

**MRT:** We should meet within the first 15 days and regularly thereafter. Addressing our city's affordable housing and homelessness crisis has been my priority as Supervisor, and will continue to be my priority as City Councilman, and I would welcome SCANPH's continued partnership to advance thoughtful and effective solutions.

*The mission of the Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing (SCANPH) is to facilitate affordable housing development across Southern California by advancing effective public policies, sustainable financial resources, strong member organizations, and beneficial partnerships. For more information, contact Frank Martinez, Policy Director, at [fmartinez@scanph.org](mailto:fmartinez@scanph.org).*