Questions to the Candidates from Walk & Bike Mendocino

1. Quality bicycling/walking opportunities and safe bike/pedestrian infrastructure enhance quality of life and address issues such as affordability, equity, health, and the safety of our streets. At the same time, studies from Portland and other US cities show people on bicycles spend more per month in local business districts than those arriving by other modes. Considering these benefits, what can the County do to actively support improvements in biking and walking infrastructure?

First, in recognition of the fact that economically thriving cities benefit County coffers (through increased tax revenues, tourism, and healthier communities less dependent on County support of residents), the County’s elected representatives to MCOG should support all funding opportunities available to cities that will fund completion of their bicycle and pedestrian plans. I also think that the supervisors should pass a resolution in support of developing biking and walking infrastructure so that staff countywide will stay alert to funding opportunities and ways in which they can coordinate with cities—or the State in the case of the Great Redwood Trail—on projects. Finally, the County can work with Visit Mendocino to be sure that they promote the walking and biking infrastructure that we currently have.

2. Childhood obesity and chronic weight related health issues are a major problem. As an elected official, how would you use your position to foster an active living agenda that will make measurable improvements in these chronic, but often preventable, diseases?

I support a fully staffed Public Health department, including the Prevention division—which used to be extremely active in schools and communities Countywide—to implement projects around active living and community health. I am familiar with the benefits of public health projects thanks to the many grants I wrote for the department over the years. These types of projects build resiliency among youth, in particular, in low income neighborhoods and communities and neighborhoods and communities of color, where rates of childhood obesity and chronic weight-related health issues are much higher than in wealthier, Whiter areas.

3. Forty percent of vehicle trips are less than two miles and many of us trip-hop with our cars rather than walking when we have a number of closely located errands to do. Will you commit to using your leadership position in the community to “walk the walk” by personally walking and biking whenever possible during your tenure in office?

I would definitely commit! What a great challenge. (I got some awesome roller skates for Hanukkah this year. Does roller skating count?)
4. The proposed Great Redwood Trail can potentially connect Hopland through Redwood Valley and on to Willits crossing four of the five County's supervisorial districts. The County's Director of Transportation has stated this would be a "park" and will not budget or help build any of it as part of our transportation infrastructure. **In a time of climate crisis, do you agree with this position? What will be your approach to building this critical infrastructure and do you consider it a priority?**

The BOS makes policy about transportation priorities in Mendocino County, not the director of Transportation. The BOS could take a leadership position in this area and strongly support trail development. The justification for this policy stance should include the myriad economic, environmental, and community health benefits that the Great Redwood Trail promises.

I understand that the County has contracted with out-of-County consultants to perform a Park Needs Assessment. The Board of Supervisors should take a close look at the findings from that report when it is complete. It is my hope that it will include recommendations pertaining to the Great Redwood Trail that the Board of Supervisors can move forward and begin implementation of in partnership with Walk & Bike Mendocino.

To fund the Mendocino County leg of the Great Redwood Trail, we need to look beyond the County general fund. We should pursue State funding, grants, and investigate creating a parks and recreation district for the Greater Ukiah Area.

5. Mendocino County has a strong rural agrarian cultural and economic history. Yet in a time of climate change, it is clear that concentrating growth in urban centers (Ukiah, Willits, and Fort Bragg) and rural nodal "downtowns" has many advantages. Homes built in the wildland/urban interface and sprawling developments increase fire risk and do not provide enough tax revenue to provide the services their owners demand. **What steps will you take to ensure development, with or without population growth, is sustainable and climate friendly?**

First, we need to recruit forward-thinking developers to build close to city centers—not sprawl into agricultural land and open space. There is tremendous opportunity within the Ukiah city limits for developers of infill housing because the demand for housing is so strong. Secondly, we need to convince the owners of blighted and underutilized properties within the Ukiah city limits that their property has value to developers and get synergy going toward infill development. I am convinced that after the first sustainable, climate-friendly infill project gets built in Ukiah, more will soon follow.

The City of Ukiah is only one of seven cities in the State that met its quota for subsidized, low-income housing. However, the County needs to make a more serious commitment toward meeting its Regional Housing Needs Allocation.
I agree whole-heartedly with the California Energy Commission’s 2018 decision to require all new homes to have solar power beginning in 2020. Although the requirement for solar panels will add $8,000 to $12,000 to the cost of a home, the cost will be more than made up in lower energy costs. The County should also make a commitment to 100 percent clean energy for all of its buildings.

6. The Joe Rodota Trail in Santa Rosa has been allowed to be used as a homeless encampment rendering it all but unusable for pedestrians and bicyclists. Although homelessness is neither created nor cured by paths and parks, the problems associated with homelessness are frequently raised as a reason not to develop or improve paths and parks. **What will you do as a Supervisor to ensure that we can “have nice things” like trails and parks despite the problems created by our homeless population?**

We need to make sure that we prioritize permanent supportive housing for the homeless population. This is, in fact, a primary strategy being put forth by the Strategic Planning Committee of the Mendocino County Continuum of Care Governing Board. Assuming that we ensure that both permanent supportive housing and emergency shelter is available to everyone who needs it, we should not allow people who are unsheltered to camp in or near parks and trails. As we have seen along the Joe Rodota trail, allowing people to camp in places not equipped to support such a use is a public health hazard, both for the unsheltered as well as for nearby residents. It is also environmentally unsound. And it is unfair to the people who would like to use the trail for its intended purpose of nonmotorized recreation and commuting.

We also need to acknowledge the research that shows that most homeless people have had multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and thus work to address the “upstream” causes of homelessness by identifying vulnerable children and youth early on, while they are still in school, and providing them with the care they need to be successful so they never grow to experience homelessness in the first place.