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740 Western Avenue, Petaluma CA 94952  
8 AM – 9:30 AM

## **GENERAL MEETING – Meet Mayor-Elect Teresa Barrett**

- Rabbi Feldman called the meeting to order at 8:10 AM, then welcomed those in attendance, reminding them how PCRC evolved and the organization’s purpose.
- Introduction of PCRC Coordinating Committee Members Elece Hempel, John Kennedy, Phyllis Tajii, Faith Ross, Naomi Crawford, Lou Zweier, Abraham Solar and Peggy Sebera.
- Reading of Mission and Vision Statements – Elece Hempel
- Rabbi Ted introduced the guest speaker, Mayor-Elect Teresa Barrett.

Calling herself, “Almost Mayor elect,” she told the audience that the final vote count won’t be released until next week.

With that, Rabbi Ted opened the meeting by asking her what was it like campaigning for Mayor.

Barrett said this was her fourth campaign running for city office, and she told us that one of the most critical components of any campaign is walking precincts. “People want to hear directly from the candidate.” Between 2006 and 2014 she saw the city’s socio-economic change. During her first campaign in 2006, she said Petaluma had a base -- homes were occupied, neighborhoods were solid. In 2010 she observed a rise in vacancies – empty homes and neglected yards. She attributed it to the financial crisis that hit California in 2008. Then, in 2014, she noticed a turnaround. The occupancy rate was higher. She noticed fewer people home when she went door-to-door, but did see packages on doorsteps. The economy, she noted, was making a comeback.

This year, she noticed even more packages outside homes. And while fewer people were answering their doors, residents were reaching out to her nonetheless. This year she attached postcards to her door hangers. She said the number of postcards she got back was unprecedented. “People really wanted to know what was going on and to be involved.” She credits the 2016 election for Petaluma’s emergent political climate. “The 2016 national election made it clear that people want a voice. It galvanized political intent and action.”

- Highlight of additional topics and questions raised during the meeting:

### **How did you get into public office?**

Barrett said she was motivated by the lack of women in positions of public service. In 1998 she applied for a position on the Planning Commission. In 1999 she was appointed to fill a vacated seat. “I applied because there weren’t any women on the panel.”

Prior to that, she served on the Tree Advisory Committee and the Library Advisory Board as well as numerous other local, regional and educational committees. Before entering the public sector, Teresa said raising her children was her top priority. When her kids reached a certain age, she felt the time was right to branch out and channel her energy into her community. “I’m the kind of person who is community involved.”

In 2006 she ran for City Council, where she would serve three terms.

When asked about her decision to run for Mayor, she said a friend suggested she do it, telling her, “It’s not about you. It’s about your values reflecting the voices of our community.” She said that comment struck a chord with her and she embraced it, and she said she is committed to being, “A Voice for the Residents of Petaluma.”

She added that Petaluma's city government maintains a weak mayor system, which, unlike a strong mayor system, is more ceremonial. The role is essentially a figure head for the city – a formal representative in meetings and commissions outside the city. Even as such, she harkened back to a City Council meeting last April when Council Members discussed amending the city's charter, proposing a ballot initiative that would do away with direct elections for mayor – giving the City Council power to appoint someone to the position. She said residents were very vocal and made it clear during that meeting that they wanted a voice. "Residents," she said, "called it undemocratic and a power grab."

## **What are the criteria for a City Manager?**

Barrett said that on December 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> seven people will appear for an RFP (Request for Proposal). Two panels will participate – Sitting Council Members will make up one panel, and Department heads and City Council Elects will make up the second panel.

"We want fiscal skills that are as strong as John Brown when he came on in 2008 when the economy tanked."

## **What about Petaluma Police Department like understaffing; homelessness; housing and Petaluma's budget woes?**

Barret said there was no conflict in terms of PD policy. She complimented Ken Savano, praising the work he has done as Chief of Police. She said she understands the need for more revenue adding that would have to happen by way of a tax increase and that would be up to the voters.

As for homelessness, she said the city relies on non-profits, noting that it's not exclusive to Petaluma, "Homelessness is a statewide issue." She added that there are some in need of affordable housing, while there are others who do not want housing at all. She said homelessness and housing are issues that need to be addressed and she hopes the new governor will work with it.

When asked about the housing shortage and lack of affordable housing, she said she wants protections in place. If there are no regulations then landlords can summarily raise rents.

As for roads, Barrett said Petaluma dodged a bullet with the defeat of Prop 6. She pointed out that Petaluma gets a million dollars a year from the gas tax that is dedicated to road repair in Petaluma.

As for sales tax, Barrett said that it was believed that the county was going to initiate a sales tax in 2019. If not, she said Petaluma will have to research ways to convince residents that a tax increase is necessary. She said that over 70% of the city's general fund goes toward public safety and it's still not enough. She said, winning the hearts and minds of Petalumans regarding taxes is a challenge. "We don't like taxes."

## **Generating revenue through marijuana dispensaries?**

It was noted that Santa Rosa moved to embrace marijuana as a tax source. Barrett said she is a proponent of medical marijuana and said that the distribution license means it can be distributed anywhere. She said that Petaluma may get the impetus, but it will require 4 votes to approve it. She added that whatever the downside, it should be treated as medical – not a legal problem.

## **Petaluma's Housing Crisis**

Barrett said that "we can provide incentives." She listed transit-oriented development as one possibility and referred to the Greenbelt Alliance redevelopment near the old 101 Camino Real in Santa Clara. (El Camino Real Corridor, Santa Clara County.)

Other ways to generate revenue -- higher taxes on underbuilt parcels as an incentive to consider density housing. She said the east side of Petaluma, for example, has open spaces but no real places for people to convene. She floated the idea of developing commercial/residential areas, where commercial businesses would operate on the ground level and housing made available on the upper floors.

She said the housing issue is a wage issue and mentioned Denmark's use of pensions as an example of what's being done to address the problem there.

Barrett said that a goal setting session with the new City Manager is slated for January, when goals will be set for the next two years and part of it will include raising taxes.

## **Is national politics effecting Petaluma?**

Before the meeting adjourned, Rabbi Feldman asked Barrett how she thought the national politics is affecting Petaluma. She said, “it’s making people more fearful, insecure, but it’s also making them more active, more engaged and making us saner.”

Marjorie Helm, whose organization (National Association of Social Workers California Chapter) is member of PCRC’s coalition, and previously served on PCRC’s Coordinating Committee, thanked Teresa for her support for “It Won’t Happen Here.” She mentioned a spike in hate crimes in Petaluma, drawn from a CA DOJ report released in 2018, covering the number of crimes in 2017.

<https://www.petaluma360.com/news/8522666-181/doj-report-shows-hate-crimes>.

Her comment prompted open discussion about Petaluma’s response to bigotry, racism, social and religious intolerance.

One of the audience members suggested that a public meeting should be held with Sonoma County’s Commission on Human Rights.

She was advised that PCRC had already sponsored a forum with the Sonoma County’s Commission on Human Rights earlier this year (January, 2018); adding, that plans are already underway to host a public engagement concerning the same issues.

The date, time and place will be announced in the coming days.

Rabbi Feldman brought the meeting to a close by thanking Barrett for agreeing to meet and speak with PCRC and its coalition of community partners.

Meeting adjourned at 9:27 AM