



Candidate questionnaire – Sunshine Coast Regional Council Election 2020

Surname:	Suarez	Given name:	Maria
Position contesting:	Division 9		

Governance, Transparency and Ethical Behaviour

Q 1 Are you aware of the Principles listed at the beginning of the Local Government Act 2009 and will you commit to abiding by these principles?

YES/NO Yes	How do you see them influencing your decision-making? Prior to reading the legislation, the principles formed the basic platforms that I am campaigning upon and when speaking with residents reflect what they are asking for. I embrace these principles and will not only abide by them but base my decisions and behaviour on them.
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Q 2a What are the relevant legislation and regulations that govern the conduct of councillors and the activities of council?

Response: The principal Act is the Local Government Act 2009 and subordinate legislation is the Local Government Regulation 2012. The Belcarra amendments from 2019 are being implemented as amendments to both the Local Government Act and the Local Government Regulation to improve integrity and reduce corruption risk in local governments.

Q 2b How will these impact your decision-making?

Response: There are laws and as such all councillors and mayors are required to abide by these and report on any breaches.

Q 3 Do you or your immediate family have assets, interests or affiliations which might be likely to present you with potential conflicts of interest in carrying out your tasks as a councillor?

YES/NO No	If YES, how will you deal with these?
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Q 4 As councillor/mayor you will regularly meet to vote on various matters. Some of these votes may be passed by a majority decision, yet there exist aspects which indicate some or all of the following: improper due process, breaches around what might be deemed ‘reasonable action’ according to duty of care, statutory instruments, local government legislative provisions, by-laws, policies, procedures and responsibilities. What action would you take?

Response: Identify and report breaches or inappropriate actions via the correct process and authorities.

Q 5 Do you believe that all Council meetings should be open to the public?

YES/NO No	If NO, then what circumstances might justify a closed meeting? I believe the vast majority of meetings should be open to the public. The rare occasions that could constitute a closed meeting would include situations such as current legal matters or financial aspects of a tender process. However, once the reason has passed or is no longer applicable, the information/recordings should be made publicly available. I also believe that items for closed session should be voted on individually. Currently the items are listed together on an agenda to go into closed session and one vote is accepted for all items on the list. At one of the council meetings I attended, there was a late addition to the agenda for closed session that was only announced during the general meeting. How could councillors know or understand the reason for this addition to make a rational decision on whether or not it warranted discussion in a close session.
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Q 6 Do you support providing requested information to the community without the need for individuals and organisations having to resort to Right to Information applications?

YES/NO Yes

Q 7 Will you commit to voting to implement the live streaming and video recording of council meetings at Caloundra, Nambour and subsequently Maroochydore by 30 June 2020?

YES/NO Yes

Q 8 Do you support that, once the previously published reasons for confidentiality have passed, the live recording, related documentation and information of the confidential meeting should immediately be made public?

YES/NO Yes	If NO, why not?
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Q 9 Do you support all financial dealings of Council in relation to major projects such as, but not limited to, the Sunshine Coast Airport Expansion, The Maroochy CBD, the Broadband Cable, the City Hall and the Solar Farm being made fully available to ratepayers once a decision to proceed has been made?

YES/NO Yes	If NO, why not?
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Q 10 What do you mean by, and how would you measure, sustainable development?

Response: Development that is in line with the Town Plan and additionally implements social and environmental considerations. Applications should demonstrate how they adhere to the Design Strategy which received much input from the community yet holds no influence. Considerations for future developments should include community facilities including recreation space for young children, teenagers and general community. Land should be set aside for a community centre or if the developer has built an onsite sales centre, this building should be handed over to the community. Where possible mature vegetation should be retained, nest boxes installed to replace habitat, environmental trails/brochures/events. Council could set mandatory inclusions for developments as a condition of the approval and ensure that conditions have been met or face a financial penalty.

Q 11 Are you endorsed or supported by any registered political party?

YES/NO No

Climate change

Q 12 Do you accept that:

(a) as the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increases the proportion of the sun's radiant energy that is retained by the earth increases?	YES/NO Yes
(b) consequences of the increase in the retained energy include rising average temperatures and major changes in weather patterns that can result in drought and heavy rain in areas where such weather events had not previously occurred?	YES/NO Yes
(c) the combustion of fossil carboniferous fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas has been a major contributor to the increase in the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that has occurred since industrialisation began?	YES/NO Yes
(d) clearing of forest for agriculture and housing has also contributed to the increase in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere?	YES/NO Yes
(e) the major source of greenhouse gas emissions for local government comes from the decomposition of organic residues in landfill?	YES/NO Yes
(f) maintenance of biodiversity as close as possible to what it was before human intervention is essential for the healthy survival of the human species?	YES/NO Yes

Q 13 What do you see as the key impacts of Climate Change on the Sunshine Coast?

Response:

The coastal fringe will experience hazards such as sea level rise and beach recession. The entire region will most likely experience more extreme dry spells and wet weather events increasing our fire and flood risks.

Q 14 How should the Sunshine Coast Regional Council deal with this now and into the future?

Response:

The local council needs to focus on implementation of strategies and adaptation at the same time. Implement strategies to reduce carbon emissions such as fast forwarding Food Organics and Green Organics (FOGO) waste services to reduce compostable waste being dumped in landfill, restoration of green spaces and waterways with active and passive regeneration, transition of fleets (council fleet and public transport) to electric vehicles, further transition to renewable energy sources and applications by looking at existing and future systems and technologies, education programs to residents about activities to reduce individual emissions.

Q 15 Do you support the SCRC in joining other councils in signing a Declaration of Climate Emergency?

YES/NO Yes

Q 16 Will you advocate for the SCRC to have a moratorium on any development proposed in areas vulnerable to the impact of climate change such as in flood-prone areas and coastal zones until such time as the Coastal Hazard Adaptation Strategy is completed?

YES/NO Yes

Planning issues

Q 17 Do you agree that:

(a) development applications that conflict with the relevant Planning Scheme Acceptable Outcomes and other planning instruments should be refused?	YES/NO Yes
(b) genuine community consultation should be undertaken in the early stages of a Proposed Planning Scheme amendment and prior to being progressed to the state?	YES/NO Yes
(c) applicants wishing to lodge a Development application that substantially does not comply, or seeks to over-ride the Planning Scheme should be advised to await the formulation of the next planning scheme when they can lodge a submission on that new planning scheme during the public consultation period?	YES/NO Yes
(d) that development that is vulnerable to the impacts of Climate Change, flooding, and inundation be prohibited?	YES/NO Yes

Q 18 Do you agree that:

(a) Planning Scheme provisions regarding density, site cover, height and parking requirements must comply with the Acceptable Outcomes in the Planning Scheme?	YES/NO Yes
(b) financial contributions in lieu of the provisions of onsite parking should not be allowed unless improvements are provided within 200 metres of the development?	YES/NO Yes
(c) greater enforcement is needed where a developer constructs (or private certifier signs off) other than what has been approved, particularly in relation to height and density of development?	YES/NO Yes

Q 19 What is your understanding of when it is appropriate to override the Planning Scheme, when there are conflicts?

<p>Response:</p> <p>In past cases community benefit has been grossly overstated and used to override the Planning Scheme. there are very few circumstances where it is justifiable to over-ride the Planning Scheme and such circumstances should be acknowledged only where there is demonstrable widespread community acceptance and little or no dissent.</p>
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Q 20 Would you support extending submission timeframes from the statutory minimum in relation to Planning Scheme amendments?

YES/NO Yes

Q 21 The floodplains of the Sunshine Coast have been extensively filled primarily for urban development. This has increased the risk to people, property, infrastructure and the environment from coastal inundation and flooding and contributes to greater exposure to extreme weather events associated with climate change. Planning instruments, State Planning regulation and various reports give regulatory and guidance material regarding floodplain management with land-use one of the key areas to avoid and manage risk. Will you act to prohibit further development on the floodplains?

<p>Response:</p> <p>Australian floodplains are environmentally significant, carrying high biodiversity loads. Flood events, when they occur, can affect vast areas of land and cause significant damage to urban private property and state and local infrastructure. Construction of residential development is not the best use of this type of land. While land can be built up for new housing, these plans rarely considers the degree to which future flooding follows the natural flow of water, what constrains its flow and what are the knock-on effects for adjacent development, land and</p>

waterways. Certain crops and sport usage (sports fields) are cited as an alternative use for this type of land, but even those would need to assess the impact of any related infrastructure such as roads, carparks, grandstands. The Blue Heart project is a good example of managing floodplains with an environmental focus that provides financial benefits to private land holders, education and tourism opportunities and productive sequestering of carbon.

Q 22 With respect to the South East Queensland Regional Plan (Shaping SEQ) that was given effect on 11 August 2017, do you support the Plan in its current form relating to the Northern sub-region, including designation of the Urban footprint and population targets?

YES/NO Yes

Q 23 Do you support the proposed Coolum West intense residential/mixed use development and wave pool proposal on significantly constrained land, which is also outside the urban footprint?

YES/NO No

If NO, will you, if elected to council, support SCRC advocating to the State Government against this proposal? YES/NO Yes

Q 24 What is your view in relation to this statement:

“ALL mixed-use multi-residential buildings requiring a Material Change of Use (MCU) must be “impact assessed” except where compliance is achieved with all relevant SCPS “Acceptable Outcomes” in the codes applicable to each development application. Community notification and rights of appeal in the P&E Court will therefore be restored for all non-compliant applications simply by this change”

Response:

Division 9 has seen many development applications that seek to radically increase density which compromises parking, traffic and liveability in their local suburbs. Identifiable 'limits' on MCU requests should be determined and then implemented to trigger the application as "impact assessable" e.g. If a development had a density approved of 25 dwellings and that was increased to 27 dwellings (less than 10%), with no change to height, footprint or parking allocation requirements, then perhaps this would be acceptable to surrounding residents to proceed without Impact assessment.

Q 25 The coastal hazard and “erosion prone area” is defined by the Queensland Government and State Planning Policy Guidance states redevelopment is to “avoid urban footprint expansion into erosion prone areas (3.2)”.

How will you participate in supporting a change to limit or avoid increases in the footprint and density of medium and high rise mixed use -residential buildings in these designated coastal hazard areas to reduce overall risk?

Response:

The council will be able to formulate the limits in the new Town Plan and provide scope to object to any unreasonable or unjustifiable proposals to introduce increases in the footprint and density of high rise mixed use residential buildings in designated coastal hazard areas. The State government should also impose such limitations.

General

Q 26 The Sunshine Coast Regional Council ratepayers have been consistently hit with annual rate increases much higher than the region's CPI. How would you address this?

Response:

It is difficult to determine where the increase in rate revenue has been allocated as services and facilities have not been vastly improved, especially in divisions outside of the 'growth corridor'. Financial reports are vague and the community should be advised of exactly where these increase funds are going. The council is making a profit from our waste levy but not advising where it is being spent.

Q 27 Would you support a proposal that all Statutory Community Engagement exercises either by Council or other parties (including developers) must be carried out by a demonstrably independent and professional third party organisation according to specific pre-determined parameters?

YES/NO Yes

Q 28 Do you support the Environment Levy and its policies, including continued acquisition of land for conservation, partnership funding for Land for Wildlife and other environment programs?

YES/NO Yes

Q 29 Do you live in the division for which you are standing as a Councillor?

YES/NO/NA Yes

Q 30 If elected, how do you intend to engage with your community?

Response:

I believe divisional representatives should be easily accessible to their community, instead of making decisions from a distant desk in Nambour or Maroochydore. If elected I plan on spending as much time within Division 9 as possible. I have publicly announced that I would request a modest office space within the division and if Council did not grant this request, I would fund it myself. As Division 9 has three major urban centres, I would move between the three locations regularly by utilising the library, café's, shopping centres and office space. I will attend community association events/meetings and provide regular updates via websites and social media platforms, as well as lettbox notices.

Q 31 If elected as a Divisional Councillor how will you advance the specific needs of your Division?

Response:

Firstly understand the current financial situation of our Council and where funds are being received and directed. Then, prioritise the needs of the communities in Division 9 and plan the process to consult, design, deliver and evaluate.

Q 32 Why do you think that you are the best candidate for your Division or as Mayor?

Response:

What makes me stand apart, is my motivation to become the councillor for Division 9. All of the candidates say they are standing for the community, however in my case it was the only reason I decided to run. I'm not gearing up for a political career, I wasn't motivated by getting a 'paid job'. The decision to be the representative for Division 9 was borne out of advocacy for lack of involvement and consideration of the community. My motivation was to address this need and ensure Division 9 residents had a voice, were informed and council was following proper process in it's provision of services and facilities to the community. I nominated as a candidate prior to the announcement that Division 9 would be a vacant seat.

I believe I am more than capable of performing in the role. Previous military experience developed my resilience, teamwork and leadership skills. Reading, understanding and critically thinking about vast amounts of complex information is something I have been immersed in 24/7 for the past 12 months. I have a Bachelor of Business degree and worked with large businesses on the Sunshine Coast where I performed a vast array of tasks that focused on the customer, community and environment.

Becoming a mother and raising two children who are now in their tweens and teens, I am excellent at negotiating equality between conflicting stakeholders! While managing home life, I also consulted in Marketing and Social Media and understand many of the issues of small to medium businesses.

I have experienced many personal highs and lows in life and believe I am empathetic, generous, determined and a sense of justice.