

LA JOLLA LIGHT

District 1 City Council candidates differ on short-term rentals and UCSD development at La Jolla forum



San Diego City Council District 1 candidates Joe LaCava (left) and Will Moore. (Courtesy photos)

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On the surface, La Jolla resident Joe LaCava and Carmel Valley resident Will Moore, the two candidates for the San Diego City Council District 1 seat in the November election, have a lot in common.

They are both Democrats. They are both dads. They both would be a first-time City Council member. They both see improving infrastructure as a top priority for La Jolla. They both support keeping the 30-foot building height limit in coastal communities. They both support doing away with gas-powered leaf blowers in favor of quieter electric ones.

But during an online forum presented by the La Jolla Community Center on Sept. 17, some of their differences were brought to light.

Moore, a Georgia-born small-business attorney, community volunteer and Rotarian, said he's running for City Council to make San Diego a better place for future generations and out of a compulsion to serve.

He said he grew up in Macon, "one of the poorest neighborhoods in America," before getting a college scholarship to Georgia Tech.

"I felt the need to give back because a lot of people don't make it out of those circumstances," he said.

After college, he served two years in the Peace Corps, went to Columbia Law School and took a job providing legal services to domestic-violence survivors needing protection orders.

Upon moving to San Diego, Moore joined the La Jolla Golden Triangle Rotary Club.

LA JOLLA LIGHT

LaCava, a San Diego native and civil engineer by trade, has been a community advocate for 15 years and has sat on nearly 30 civic boards, local planning groups and commissions.

His introduction to public service was at his daughter's school and it soon grew to the surrounding neighborhood and the city.

He has volunteered with the Bird Rock Maintenance Assessment District, La Jolla Community Planning Association and Save the La Jolla Post Office and assisted with forming a second MAD in The Village. From there, he was appointed to several city boards and commissions and often was asked to lead them.

On the topic of short-term vacation rentals, the two differed on whether to enforce existing laws or draft new ones.

"People cite the city attorney opinion that [such rentals] are illegal, but people have been saying that for three years and it has not advanced the conversation; there aren't any fewer than when this ruling was made," Moore said. "I think that has distracted us from solving the problem. ...

"This is something other communities have been able to deal with in a successful fashion. Let's move the ball forward and get fewer of them in our neighborhoods in a way that is actually going to stick and get good legislation passed so we can regulate them and make sure they are not taking housing stock out of our supply."

LaCava pointed out that previous proposals were shot down before they could be implemented.

"There are ideas on paper, then there are laws on the books. Are we a city of laws, do we choose the winners and losers about how we enforce those laws, and what are you going to do when the mayor and city attorney fail to enforce the law?" LaCava said. "[Current District 1 City Council member] Barbara Bry put a proposal on the table that was adopted by the City Council, and the mayor and the big [STVR] platforms bullies came in and killed it. So let's not talk about needing to have something on the table. ...

"This is a citywide issue, not just a La Jolla issue. The city not enforcing the law is one of the fundamental issues that I am going to change, not just on this issue but on other issues where the city is not doing its job. So let's start with enforcing the law, then have a conversation with the platforms about what we can do."

Their positions further differed on UC San Diego's Theatre District Living and Learning Neighborhood, a planned mixed-use development on campus that calls for five buildings ranging from nine to 21 stories tall and is designed to house 2,000 students, plus include a conference center, hotel rooms, classrooms and retail. The La Jolla Shores Association and La Jolla Community Planning Association have voiced concerns about its scope, environmental impacts and a perceived lack of communication from UCSD.

"Let's acknowledge upfront that UCSD is an incredibly important economic engine for our city," LaCava said. "But there is a way for a big public institution like UCSD to conduct themselves. And that is to realize they are not an island unto themselves, they are integrated in the urban fabric that is part of La Jolla and University City and has a responsibility to figure out how to maximize the opportunity on the UCSD property with the acreage they have, meet the economic needs of the institution, meet the education need, but be respectful.

"I think the first proposal on the table failed to do that. The community involvement failed miserably and exacerbated the anger that people had. ... So let's have a real dialogue. ... I think we can find a better solution than what is on the table today."

LA JOLLA LIGHT

However, Moore said he supports the proposal. “I frankly think it’s a pretty good plan,” he said. “I think it will enhance what UCSD is trying to accomplish and move UCSD into a new era.

“I like that they consulted with my alma mater, Georgia Tech, which built a similar campus expansion and enhanced the part of the city it was in. What we’ve run into in this case is some personalities that are involved that were not [heard]. But UCSD has done good outreach, they talked to a lot of people. There are a couple of people that wished they had two more meetings, but I don’t see any reason for that to hold up a plan of this size and scope. I am not hearing a lot of reasons why this isn’t a good plan.”

In their closing statements, the two voiced positions about whether the city is stagnating or making progress.

“We spent years arguing about old issues,” Moore said. “And we need to be thinking about what kind of city we are leaving for our children. I’m here to plant that tree whose shade I might not sit under. I think this backward-looking, slow-everything-down approach is not how you build a city. We’ve tried, and look where that’s gotten us. I don’t think it’s provided us with the vibrant neighborhoods we deserve. We have closed storefronts, unpaved roads and, even as the sun continues to shine, we have things in San Diego that have gone by the wayside, and we need to do better.”

LaCava spoke of progress the city has made and how he would keep it going if elected.

“We’re not stagnating, we’re progressing,” he said. “For nearly two decades, I have been driving conversations in the public eye, making the kinds of decisions that move San Diego forward, to work better, to serve all San Diegans, and we are making progress we should recognize and appreciate. ...

“My promise to you is to spend the next four years — eight if I do a good job — focusing on our neighborhoods in the city I love and focusing on the job you have hired me to do. We need leaders with experience who know how to change the city and work with the city and work with our constituents — our bosses — for the job you have hired us to do.” ♦