

LINDA EVANS – MAYOR – CITY OF LA QUINTA

September 4, 2020



Bender, Linda

2020 Candidate Endorsement Packet



August 28, 2020

Dear Mayor Linda Evans,

On behalf of the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee (GCVCCPAC), we would like to extend our congratulations on successfully qualifying for the November 2020 general election. The ability of a free people to both seek public office, and to have an equal voice in who is elected, is a hallmark of American democracy. We thank you for your willingness to participate in the process. While seeking public office is the right of every citizen, it is the very few that are willing to sacrifice on behalf of their community and engage in this process as a candidate. You have our respect, and on behalf of our local business community you have our gratitude.

The GCVCCPAC was formed in 2019 to give our local business community a voice in local elections. As you know, community-based organizations have a long history of actively engaging in local elections. From newspapers to labor unions, from environmental groups to local community associations, collective groups exercise their right to engage in the political process through a variety of channels, including endorsing candidates they feel best represent the positions and values that advance the causes they feel important to them.

The purpose of the GCVCCPAC is to identify candidates for public office who share the GCVCCPAC's values in core areas such as job creation, business regulatory environment, community infrastructure, professional development opportunities, and other areas we see as vital to the long-term growth and development of the Coachella Valley. Our scope of interest is any elected position within the state, county or local government that impacts these local conditions as part of their governing jurisdiction.

Attached is our 2020 candidate endorsement packet for La Quinta City Council. We hope you are willing to complete the questionnaire enclosed so we can learn more about you, your governing philosophy, and the issues that are important to you as a candidate. We have also included a FAQ document that may answer questions you may have about the endorsement process the GCVCCPAC conducts. We thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

With kind regards,

Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee



Candidate FAQ

1. Why am I receiving this packet?
You have been identified as a qualified candidate seeking office within a governing boundary the GCVCCPAC has recognized as vital to the growth and prosperity of our local business community.
2. Is an endorsement from the GCVCC PAC the same as an endorsement from the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce?
No. Though they share a common name and represent a common collective interest, it is important to recognize they are not co-governed or financially intermingled. The GCVCCPAC has a separate Board of Directors, its own set of bylaws and its own financing. The Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and staff have no role in, or influence over the decision-making process of the GCVCCPAC, nor are funds from the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce used in support of it.
3. Do I have to participate in this process?
No. A candidate does not need to engage in any portion of the GCVCCPAC endorsement process. But please be aware, a candidate's personal decision not to engage in the GCVCCPAC endorsement process does not mean the GCVCCPAC will refrain from issuing an endorsement in their race. We hope you choose to engage, as it will help the GCVCCPAC Board make informed decisions.
4. If I fill out this packet does it mean I will get an endorsement?
No. The GCVCCPAC has several options when it comes to issuing endorsements for a race. They may endorse a single candidate, they may endorse multiple candidates, or they may endorse no candidates. There are many reasons why the GCVCCPAC may choose to engage, or not in engage, in local races.
5. I am not familiar with the GCVCCPAC, the causes they serve or what is important to them, how do I learn more?
Generally, the governing principles of the GCVCCPAC will align with that of the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce, which represents the local business community. For a better understanding of the issues and positions that are important to the local business community, we recommend you visit the GCVCC website at GCVCC.org, click on "Legislative Action", and then "Legislative Platform". The direct link can be found here: <https://gcvcc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Policy-Legislative-Platform.pdf>
6. I still have questions, who should I contact?
You may direct additional inquiries to PAC@GCVCC.org. A representative of the GCVCCPAC will get back to you as quickly as possible.



To better help the GCVCCPAC Board with endorsement decisions, we kindly ask that you complete the following questionnaire. All questionnaires need to be completed and returned to the GCVCCPAC no later than September 4th, 2020. You may email your completed questionnaire to Advocacy@gcvcc.org, or mail it to the following address:

ATTN: GCVCCPAC
82-921 INDIO BLVD.
INDIO, CA 92201

You may also choose not to participate in the process by signing below, or simply not returning this document. Please note, a signed acknowledgement below will halt any further follow up communication from the GCVCCPAC for this election cycle.

I decline to participate in the endorsement process conducted by the Greater Coachella Valley Chamber of Commerce Political Action Committee.

Signature (please make sure signature is legible)

Date

Below you will find questions that address a range of topics important to the GCVCCPAC and our local business community. In some cases, they seek to learn more about your governing philosophy, in some cases they may seek how you would vote on specific issues or even actual bills. The more specific you are with your answers, the better we will be able to understand how you might govern if (re)elected. Please use as much space below the answer as necessary to express your opinion. We kindly ask you type your responses to ensure an accurate rendering of your responses to the GCVCCPAC Board.

1. Please share with us your vision for La Quinta?

My vision for La Quinta is to create revenue sources that will sustain our city for generations to follow. While progress has been made since I was elected Mayor in 2014, the pandemic has set back our economy in a devastating way. While we have redefined how we do local government, through restructuring our employee base, compensation, and benefits to streamlining processes for new development of businesses and homes to make it easier to live, work and play in La Quinta – we must now continue that transformation to address the current status and make adjustments to ensure success. We have reviewed and continue to make revisions to our regulations and ordinances. This effort is to consistently evaluate their purpose and effectiveness in our ability to grow and be more creative and flexible – for businesses, residents and development. Retaining standards of quality is important; however, updating the processes, workflow, and restrictions will foster new ideas and create new business opportunities to meet the consumer demands of the future.

Key areas of development and vision include:



1. SilverRock – A resort destination that will include: hotel, residential, retail, convention, recreation, and golf which will produce property, sales, and hotel tax revenue for years to come.
2. Old Town/Village La Quinta – A retail/hospitality area of the community with expansion options currently under review. Opportunities include housing, jobs and sales tax revenue as well as increased retail and tourism related businesses in a pedestrian friendly, alternative transportation environment.
3. Vision Highway 111 Corridor Plan – A plan that repurposes and transforms big box stores and businesses to a “retail-tainment” destination. This includes transportation options that will attract new experiences for consumers to our economy. This retail corridor derives 75% of the city's sales tax and is a critical area to retain and grow given online shopping trends and declining sales tax for cities.

Another element that is paramount to preserve and enhance in La Quinta is:

4. QUALITY OF LIFE - Preservation of parks, trails, dark skies and open space will enable La Quinta to preserve its charm while promoting a healthy community. As a hiker, I appreciate all that La Quinta offers and I'm proud to support La Quinta as a Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) city. We added an outdoor National Fitness Court in North La Quinta near La Quinta High School, providing the ability for free exercise to everyone. The North La Quinta X-Park construction will be starting soon, and will provide a state-of-the-art experience for all ages. In late 2020 and 2021, La Quinta's segment of CV Link will begin construction, providing alternative, safe transportation and additional access to our commercial corridor along Highway 111, the city's primary source for sales tax. The Short Term Vacation Rental Ad Hoc Committee was also formed over the past year to review the current program and offer recommendations to the City Council to ensure proper enforcement to address non-compliant operators. It's essential to find a balance between maintaining our neighborhoods in a peaceful manner while retaining a vital revenue source for our city's tourism and hospitality segment.

2. If (re)elected, what are some of the most important issues facing the City you would like to address?

Areas of focus for me, and as outlined in our capital and strategic plan, are projects/opportunities underway that require further attention. These include the following:

- Economic Recovery due to COVID-19
- Short-Term Vacation Rental Program
- SilverRock Hotels – Montage & Pendry
- Storm Drain / Flood Control Enhancements – in process, but not yet finished
- X-Park – Competition skate/bike/scooter park near LQ High School
- CV Link – La Quinta's 2-mile portion – to begin construction in late 2020/early 2021
- Vision Highway 111 Corridor Plan – Transformation of retail/commercial tax base
- North La Quinta Perimeter Landscaping – Using Measure G Funds – 4 year project – near completion



3. What do you feel the role of a Council Member is?

The role of a Council Member is to set policy and direction for the city in which they serve. They also serve as an advocate and ambassador for businesses and residents. Council Members are selected to represent the residents as a whole, versus advocating their own opinions on decisions. They serve the community, need to listen to the community, collaborate and participate in the community and always have the best interest of the community (businesses and residents) in mind when making decisions. They must also invest in a regional perspective for the valley regarding economic development and quality of life.

4. Often, some of the fiercest opposition to commercial development can come from the residents adjacent to the development. How will you handle these situations? Specifically, a situation where a developer is seeking to develop commercial property as it is properly zoned, but residents are resistant to it?

An existing project that is undergoing opposition is the Pavilions project, located on the northwest corner of Jefferson and Avenue 50. It includes a Pavilions market, fueling station, and several commercial and retail spaces. This project has been in the works for several years, and will be presented again, in a continued Public Hearing, during a City Council meeting in October. How are these situations handled? I handle them by absorbing the input, comments, and feedback about the project from residents, business owners and the development community. I also review the viability of a project in terms of use, need, demand, and projected revenue. I also ensure the project meets the standards and conforms to code, law, and zoning for the intended use based on its location. I will not approve or deny a project based solely on opposition from residents. Too many elements require consideration – all of which are important. As for my position on this particular project...I'll determine that at the Public Hearing in October.

5. Due to the COVID-19 state of emergency many local governments are facing financial shortfalls. Would you favor increasing local taxes to make up for those shortfalls?

No.

6. What do you feel are important elements to keeping your local community, including local business property, safe from vandalism and theft and generally promoting a secure environment for your residents to conduct commerce? Specifically, where should City budget be invested?

La Quinta has made public safety a priority since its incorporation, and we continue to value the role of our law enforcement team. We spend nearly \$18 million a year with our Riverside



Sheriff's Department contract for police services, and our residents and businesses are pleased with that investment and our low crime rate. We have dedicated deputies that patrol the commercial corridor of Highway 111, protecting businesses and our largest sources of sales tax revenue. We will continue to make public safety a priority because it is an investment that has yielded positive results from a business and resident attraction perspective.

7. Do you feel your City has adequate infrastructure to support current commercial activity and future growth? What area(s) of concern do you have, if any? What area(s) for improvement do you see?

La Quinta has adequate infrastructure for its size, and we can still accommodate some growth. Areas of concern include the shift of big box shopping to online sales. Another area of concern is the need for stronger broad band coverage to expand the types of businesses in our city. As for improvements, we have developed a Highway 111 Corridor Plan that addresses the current and future retail trends as well as lifestyle transportation trends. This plan includes a process to transform and evolve the Highway 111 corridor to meet the changing retail, shopping, and entertainment needs moving forward. We continue to work with the developer of SilverRock to bring to fruition the hotels, homes, and retail – all of which are part of our financial future.

8. How do you feel your City Council can positively impact commerce in your City, including business attraction and retention efforts?

We have and continue to positively impact commerce in our city. We have an Economic Development Committee comprised of two Council Members (Evans & Pena) and staff. We include outside attendees when relevant to the discussion/business topic/proposal. We have dedicated staff who focus on economic development, including business attraction and retention. We have built relationships with our business and center owners/managers, and work with them on changes and improvements as needed for safety and optimal attraction. We partner and collaborate with the Chamber and CVB, as well as econ staff from other cities and the County, to optimize opportunities for both La Quinta and other cities across the valley.

Tid Bit: Our econ guru, Gil, was the one who introduced Dutch Bros to Indio AND he suggested the location that are building on for their new location. Dutch Bros will also break ground in La Quinta (Jefferson & Fred Waring) in Sept/Oct, and will be completed prior to the Indio location.



- 9. Cities and the local business community can sometimes have a contentious relationship when it comes to business code and enforcement, particularly in areas such as sign ordinances, “sidewalk sales”, and other aspects of attracting business. Share with us your thoughts on your current business ordinances and any changes you would like to see (if any)?**

Past Councils were more rigid with signage and current Council is more flexible and business focused to promote commerce in La Quinta. I’m proud to share that during COVID-19, we have been able to fast-track change to allow businesses to remain operational and adjust to the demands set forth by the Governors orders with the pandemic. This includes signage, banners (partnered with the Chamber), and our new Al Fresco program, which allows restaurants to extend outdoors for more capacity and to meet new standards. All of these changes have been made with either no or much reduced fees normally incurred by businesses. We will continue to make changes in the Highway 111 Corridor Plan as a means to promote business and “retailtainment” for residents and visitors to enjoy. Plan

- 10. One of the most important elements of conducting business within a city is the process of applying for permits and the fee schedule associated with it. How would you rate your performance in this area? Are there any specific areas for improvement you see?**

I rate our city as high performers in this area. Why?

1. We have invested in technology that allows all of our residents and businesses to do their transactions online
2. We put a hold on any increases in fees this year due to the pandemic
3. We are reasonable and in the lower half for fees compared to other cities
4. We engage the business and building industry in discussions and reviews/audits of our fees and make changes accordingly if they are in the best interest for growth

- 11. Short-term or “vacation” rentals have become a hot topic within the valley, with many city’s acting on the matter. What is your position on short-term rentals in your City?**

I support short-term vacation rentals in La Quinta and will continue to advocate for them. But, I also strongly support quality of life for our residents. As a result, constant review and revisions to our program are needed to strike a balance for both commerce and quality. Our program yields approximately \$3.5 million in revenue (pre-COVID). It’s a necessary part of our hotel tax base. We have to fix the problems and continue to improve the program.



12. Affordable family housing continues to be an issue within the valley. How would you rate your City when it comes to offering affordable housing to your local workforce? Do you have adequate housing of all types to support your community? Are there any specific actions you would take regarding this?

Yes, La Quinta has done an outstanding job providing affordable housing units (1800+) for our community and we have adequate housing of all types to support our community. We recently completed Washington Street Apartments (affordable housing) and will be exploring other affordable housing options because of the funds we have available. There is always room for additional housing within our city limits that will promote jobs, economic revenues, and will bring further value to our already affluent community. The State needs to develop a more affordable way to build housing so we can continue our positive efforts to offer housing to all levels of income in our community. We need CEQA reform and fast-tracking for affordable and market rate homes.

High-End/Market Rate

La Quinta continues to experience residential growth in both tract home developments and custom homes within gated communities. We have several large developments under construction, with the SilverRock Resort FINALLY coming in the near future. SilverRock will combine hotel and residential living, with commercial and retail opportunities to compliment golf and other recreational activities. The city has approved other projects as well, and progress is dependent upon market demand.

Affordable

We have opportunities in La Quinta to expand our affordable housing units. We completed our Washington Street Apartments project within the past year, refurbishing the existing 72 units and constructing 68 new units for seniors and adults with disabilities and Veterans. This was a CVHC collaboration with La Quinta. We have funds available for housing, but are limited in the land available owned by the city. We are exploring options for Veterans housing at this time.

Another potential area of improvement, probably the last “eye-sore” in La Quinta, is a run-down mobile home park near the High School (Dune Palms Mobile Homes). This park does not meet the quality standards of La Quinta. We have much of the housing funding to cover a project of this magnitude, but we currently do not own the property. We are evaluating other options to get this project done. This location is part of our Housing Plan.



13. What specific assistance would you like to see your City take to support your local small businesses during the COVID-19 state of emergency and the resulting economic hardship many are facing? Do you have specific proposals to help get these businesses through this period, as well as back on their feet when the economy fully opens back up?

La Quinta has been a LEADER in our valley and county in regards to responding to and supporting our businesses during the pandemic.

COVID-19 impacts have taken a toll on our economy and our city budget – for our residents and our businesses. Our City quickly responded to help mitigate the impacts on residents and businesses by taking the following actions:

- Developed a COVID-19 microsite on the city’s website with Federal, State, County, Regional, and Local resources for residents, businesses, and visitors;
- Implemented executive orders to ensure enforcement of State/County orders to assist with flattening the curve to avert a surge to our local hospitals;
- Executed a digital marketing and education campaign with various COVID-19 information messages;
- Developed and implemented the COVID-19 Small Business Emergency Economic Relief Programs with an allocation of \$1.5 million to small businesses;
- Developed an AI Fresco Program to provide financial support for restaurants creating additional outdoor space to comply with the State Industry Standards to remain open;
- Established a food distribution partnership and donated \$40,000 to FIND Food Bank to provide food for LQ residents in need;
- Started a friendly caller program to provide a social connection with residents to ensure their needs are met;
- Utilized the La Quinta Museum for childcare (collaboration with the YMCA) for children of essential workers;
- Manufactured face shields at our Creation Station for local hospitals;
- Provided financial support for local homeless shelters and programs;
- Expanded Code Compliance service hours and coverage to better manage short-term vacation rental issues;
- Participated in various Federal, State, County, and Regional emergency management and COVID-19 update calls;
- Served as a leader and advocate amongst Valley Mayors and businesses to County and State officials in providing status on hospital activity/surge to assist in decision-making for local jurisdictions;
- Authored letters to County and State officials (either for LQ, several valley mayors, county-wide Mayors, and local entities (PSAM & The Living Desert) to advocate and support re-opening businesses, request relief/CARES funding, and ensure health and safety (masks, space, distancing);
- In my healthcare position, I assisted the County with the first drive-through COVID-19 testing site in the Coachella Valley by working at the site and facilitating the process for the first few weeks.



- 14. The Coachella Valley has many regional entities that have been created to help spur and support economic growth, the Greater Palm Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership, and the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, just to name a few. What are your thoughts on these organizations in general (or specifically)? Do you favor a regional partnership approach to economic growth?**

I support a regional approach for many areas and recognize that each entity listed brings a different strength and focus to our destination. I do support a regional partnership approach to economic growth, but recognize the need for some city specific efforts based on the financial investments needed to bring projects to fruition.

- 15. Communication is always vital when it comes to local government and its residents. Do you feel the City does enough to keep residents and the business community informed as to available programs, road projects, upcoming events, City Council actions, etc.?**

Yes. www.laquintaca.gov

We do an extensive amount of communication to our residents, visitors and businesses in a variety of formats. This includes interactive websites, Next Door messaging, all social media platforms, NIXEL, the Gem, email blasts, direct mailers, meetings, calls, workshops, etc.

I'm interested in hearing from the Chamber on other ways we can provide outreach to our community/businesses. Thanks.

- 16. As of the drafting of this document, personal service salons and restaurants continue to be closed in Riverside County. Do you believe these businesses should be allowed to re-open immediately in your City if proper social distancing and PPE are exercised by the business? Please explain (we understand this is not within the control of City Council, we are looking for your opinion on the subject).**

Yes – reopen! I have been an advocate for safe opening and will continue to push for a safe opening for ALL businesses, including schools. We must co-exist with this virus and we know how to prevent the spread. We need to OPEN before we completely collapse economically.

- 17. Do you agree with how the City has invested in and handled the SilverRock development?**

Yes. This is no small project. The current agreement was signed in November 2014 – just six years ago. I have learned that development is not a fast process, but a large investment when done right, yields favorable returns.



- 18. It is the perception of some that the City has tried to walk a fine line of promoting strong economic growth, while also trying to retain a quiet “village atmosphere” for its residents. The many sides of that endeavor (the pro and the con) were seen in the execution of, and reaction to, the inaugural Ironman event. How do you feel La Quinta has balanced quality of life with economic growth?**

IRONMAN: We learned from experience with the Ironman Event. The event was well-received and an honor to be held in our area. However, the traffic flow and execution failed. We learned from that, improved the process, and proved to our residents that we can have world-renown events without greatly impacting quality of life. Educating people on the return on investment, revenue gain, and investments made into the community by those gains, is an ongoing process and supporting by many. They know LQ is a tourism destination and we depend on hotel and sales tax revenue.

AMEX: We learned that our planning team, including the golf operator, our staff, the parking and security companies, and police were not prepared for such a huge success and crowd for the post-golf tournament concerts. However, the residents and community embraced the event and entertainers we brought to La Quinta.

We have done an excellent job bringing quality growth and events to our city that enhance our reputation further, whether its sports, art, or hotels (Montage). There is always room for improvement; and the planning side and execution has since become more scrutinized by the City Council as a result of our past experiences. Typically, operations is not under our purview, but the complaints are real, thus our need for additional oversight to ensure the plan is better executed in the future.

- 19. La Quinta has a strong “big box” commercial presence in its City. While this has contributed to a strong tax base, it has also been problematic when these national chains pull up stakes and leave behind large, abandoned spaces that are often in very prominent locations. Do you agree with the commercial strategy the City has traditionally used along the Hwy. 111 corridor? How do you see that space best utilized in the future?**

Our Council recognized that status quo is not an option in the years ahead for the big box entities on Highway 111. As a result, we embarked upon a forward thinking plan about two years ago. We engaged Urban Land Institute (ULI) to begin reviewing our Hwy 111 Corridor, and the trends of shopping and impacts on sales tax to local cities. After the ULI report, we contracted with Rangwala to further advance a plan to create a vision for the repurposing of the corridor, as 75% of our city’s sales tax is derived from that 2-mile stretch. This plan also reviewed business types, transportation flow, CV Link, and entertainment/experiences.



I encourage you to review the plan. We will be discussing a proposal at our September 15th Council meeting on Form Based Code to move our plan to the next step towards execution. It's an exciting project and one that is visionary to ensure viability for years to come.

Please use the below space to share any additional advocacy positions, personal experience, or information you feel may assist the GCVCCPAC with making an endorsement decision.

Nothing further. This questionnaire was very long.

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. The GCVCCPAC may follow up with additional questions, or in some cases even request to speak with you directly. All endorsements will be announced at least 21 days prior to the general election.