



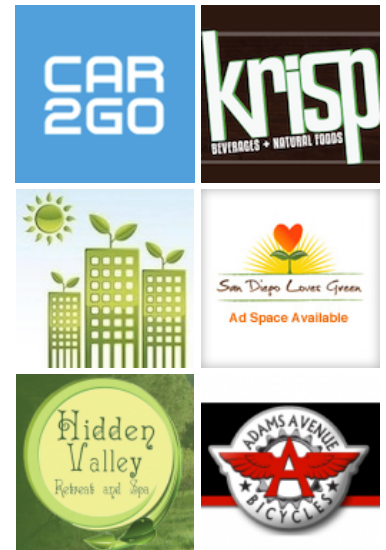
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Mayor Filner’s Plan To Green San Diego

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Mayor Filner’s Plan To Green San Diego

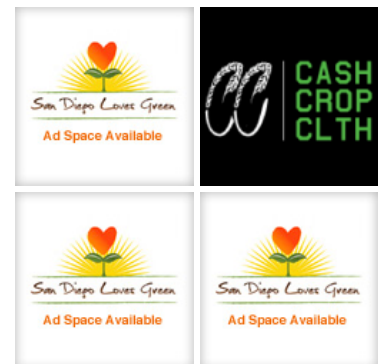


Sitting down with new mayor Bob Filner last week was like a breath of fresh air. Mayor Filner gets it. He understands that climate science is a reality and that we have a tremendous responsibility to do all we can to reduce our impact on the environment. Like he said, “The problem is real and we can’t deny it. If we want to keep our beaches in San Diego, we have to get our heads out of the sand.”

Mayor Filner steps into office with a strong track record in environmental leadership; he has an A+ rating by the Sierra Club for his lifetime environmental voting record in Congress and he plans to bring that leadership to the city of San Diego. “We should be heading towards a net zero emissions city. Which I think we can do. Then use that to challenge the rest of the cities and nation to take the same policies, because we can’t do it alone,” explains Mayor Filner.

As a progressive, I can’t deny the enthusiasm and excitement I have had for Mayor Filner’s campaign. His election into office signals a new era for the city, one focused on sustainability, clean technology, creating a robust green and blue economy, progressive economic development and profoundly improving our neighborhoods and communities. Mayor Filner’s vision and plans for the city with respect to greening it and creating a sustainable future are inspiring. To begin with he plans to elevate the discussion of sustainability, climate change, and clean tech and build these concepts into the way city planning is done. Sustainability will be the cornerstone of ordinances and permitting going forward. Planning for the city will take into consideration questions like: Is this moving the city towards more sustainability? Is this helping us to get to net zero carbon emissions? Is this getting the city off of fossil fuels?

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His strategy is to create a whole new department or agency within the city with a working title right now called Healthy, Safe and Sustainable Neighborhoods. He will be calling on industry experts like Bill Powers, Jim Bell, scientists at Scripps Institution of Oceanography as well as leaders from organizations like the Sierra Club and the Environmental Health Coalition that have been shut out of the government process in the past to lend their expertise and be a part of what he is doing. “We need these thinkers. We are going to bring them in and have the real power to make changes,” says Mayor Filner.

“But we are going to have to change the mentality of some of these environmental and sustainable groups. They are so used to begging the government for minor changes. And they’re in a defensive mode; they are trying to stop bad things. We need to get in an offensive mode where we are thinking big! And I need these folks to think with me BIG. Now they have someone that agrees with them in office. Let’s not think small anymore, let’s think offensively in terms of major things we are thinking about. We don’t just have to stop the bad things... because I am going to stop those.

“I am going to need them to go out and organize in the communities to back me on this. We are going to be challenging some established interests and if we don’t fight back in an organized way, they will try to defeat us on what we are trying to do. There is a reason why we haven’t done it up until now, there are big economic interests that don’t have a stake in it or have a stake in trying to stop it. So we are going to have to deal with them and I think an educated public will,” inspires Mayor Filner.

He plans to get creative in the way he elevates the discussion of sustainability in the city. He recognizes that people are not equally informed, there are prejudices out there and the economics are not really clear. Mayor Filner intends to utilize community resources to educate the community through public service announcements and featuring industry experts on the city’s television network Channel 24. He also plans to create a speakers bureau made up of our community experts that can go out into the community and talk about these issues at churches, schools and planning meetings.

Experts like Jim Bell, the mayor points out, has researched and wrote extensively on how mathematically we can with just a small percentage of our parking garages and rooftops devoted to solar, power the entire city. “We could be energy independent, rather than building these environmentally destructive transmission lines in East County and into San Diego. Politically it is harder than technically to do this stuff.”

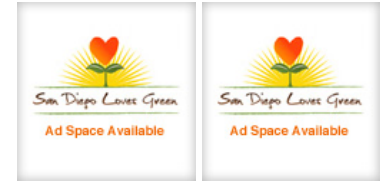
His plan to put solar on all of the public buildings within the next five years has been well covered in the media. I wanted to know how he was going to pay for it. He explained how there are companies now that will put up solar technology for not only governments, but also for companies and individual homes without any upfront costs. The way the solar is paid for is through the energy savings and over the course of 10 to 15 years the cost saving pays for the photovoltaic cells and panels without any capital investment. Mayor Filner emphasized by doing this, it will create hundreds if not thousands of jobs as well as help to drive the costs of solar down for everyone else.

Supporting economic development that stresses green jobs is a top priority for Mayor Filner. In addition he is also going to support what many may not recognize as our burgeoning blue economy which is based on our ocean and includes innovations like wave energy and algae biofuel production. He wants to be a city that combines both green and blue tech and create what he calls an *aqua economy*.

I also asked the Mayor whether he would be willing to look at public property that wasn’t being utilized and allow the land to be converted to community gardens. Not only did he say yes, but he enthusiastically shared that his vision for the word “Healthy” in his new department was very broad and most definitely included access to local organic food. He likes community gardens because they do a lot of things one of which encourage the community to come together and it also encourages our children to understand that their food does not come from a box in the frozen food section or from fast food restaurants. He would also like to see a central commercial food market for local farmers developed. It triggered my creative buttons and I have begun developing a creative way to bring this all together and will be submitting a plan for how this could be accomplished to city in the weeks ahead. So stay tuned!

The mayor also plans to create a bike infrastructure by the time he is finished. He recently went on a bike tour with some local enthusiasts around Little Italy and Old Town and realized just how unsafe it is to ride a bicycle or walk in the city. He understands why we don’t do it and why we end up relying on our cars too much. He stresses we don’t have to recreate the wheel, he is looking at cities like Portland that created a whole biking infrastructure. “The lady that did that we are going to bring down and say what do we do here? And I bet she can do it.” Her name is Mia Burke and she wrote the book, “Joyride” and he wants to utilize her expertise in San Diego.

Of course I had to ask his thoughts on San Onofre and his plans for protecting the public. “Public safety is the city’s prime concern. If San Onofre starts under its current condition it is very unsafe. We will be doing all we can to add our voices to the other voices to make sure the NRC does not allow that to start up again. We have shown we have



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sufficient supplies internally and if we move to more solar and other ways of alternative electricity then we don't need it. I have to show that we can do without it and experts like Bill Powers and Jim Bell can help me do that. It is a very unsafe situation now and I hope we do not allow them to restart it."

Mayor Filner is the greenest mayor San Diego has and probably will have and it behooves us to utilize this tremendous opportunity to accomplish real sustainable changes for our region. We are going to have to step out of our individual silos, work together and show the rest of the country what a progressive leader backed by the will of the public can accomplish. Let's all think big with Mayor Filner and join him in making our city a beacon of progress for the rest of the nation. We can do this!

Image Credit: Jen Allen photo

- Written by Dawn Parker-Waites

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