

GREENSITE'S INSIGHT

March 9, 2026

GREENSITE for MAYOR!



As you might have read in last week's issue, I have thrown my hat in the ring and am running for Mayor of the City of Santa Cruz. The photo above of the current council and Mayor will have at least one change at the end of this year and possibly three. Mayor Keeley is ending his four-year term and has not filed for a second term; council members Scott Newsome and Renee Golder are both running for re-election and both face challengers to their seats.

So, why am I running for Mayor? I've lived in the city of Santa Cruz for 51 years. For 46 years, I've been actively involved in local politics at the city council level, and with few exceptions, always on the public side of the podium. I've experienced how public input is regarded at city hall; have watched closely how decisions are made; have observed the various mayors, how they run meetings and set the agenda. And then there's the upper management staff. Do they follow policies set by council? Or does the tail wag the dog? With all this experience, I'd like a chance to be on the decision-side of the podium.

I've brought many issues before the various councils. The first issue in 1981 involved evaluating the city's response to rapes reported to the Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD). This focus evolved from my position as founder of Rape Prevention Education on campus. I was hired by UCSC in 1979 to establish and head this brand-new program, which I did for 30 years. Taking the issue into the community in the 1980's, led to an organizing drive to put the issue on the ballot. This effort led to the then council adopting the ordinance rather than it going to a public vote. This Ordinance 81-29 mandated the formation of a city commission, the Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women. I was appointed by council as a commission member and its first chair. My immediate task was to read and evaluate two years of reported rapes, about 48 redacted reports in all. The results were of grave concern. The quality of investigations was inadequate on many levels. I wrote up recommendations and waited for council to act. I'm still waiting. Fast forward to 2023-24 when I served a year on the Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury. One of the investigative topics included an analysis of rapes reported to the SCPD and the city's handling of the issue. Deja Vue. The current council's response was a repeat of the council from the mid 1980's. Apparently, a tourist town does not want rape to be publicly aired.

Other issues that have brought me to city hall on the public side of the podium include the major effort by a small community group, Don't Morph the Wharf! to stop the city turning the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf into a Pier 39. Other issues include trying to protect our remaining heritage trees, an effort so far with few successes. I have some ideas on how to change that result. Of course, a mayor is only one of seven; work needs to be collaborative and respectful of staff. But undemocratic patterns have set in and are rarely challenged.

A common pattern at city hall is to prepare and try to defend wholly inadequate environmental reviews of major projects. The public is routinely ignored, leaving the only option to file a lawsuit, which the city usually loses, squandering large amounts of public monies. I believe this pattern can and should be changed.

Speaking of money, from the perspective of 46 years, I note a recent city trend of accelerated hiring at the top management levels, including a plethora of consultants, leaving the boots on the ground workers lean and spread thin. I saw this happen at UCSC over 30 years and now the city on a hill is in the red. The same thing will happen at the city level if this trend continues. Retirement of highly paid public servants can bankrupt a city.

Council members now have districts. I would recommend regular in-person meetings between individual council members and their constituents. Not just a wandering around a room to chat with department heads or put sticky notes on a board but proper town hall meetings.

The biggest issue I see right now is the rampant overbuilding in the city and the gutting of the established built landscape, the loss of a sense of place. Why is this happening; who benefits; what are the myths that keep us acquiescent? I'll explore more of this next week.

In the meantime, if you are keen to volunteer to help move my campaign forward, email me at greensiteformayor@gmail.com.

Gillian Greensite is a long time local activist, a member of Save Our Big Trees and the Santa Cruz chapter of IDA, International Dark Sky Association <http://darksky.org> Plus she's an avid ocean swimmer, hiker and lover of all things wild.