

Community service at heart of Jaffe's campaign

BY PK HATTIS

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APTOS >> For Bruce Jaffe, holding public office is rooted in one thing: community service.

Whether it's fixing a pothole or securing new sources of drinking water, it's all about how public officials can harness their unique skills and channel them into tangible improvements to make life just a little easier for their constituents.

Now, the 40-year county resident and longtime Soquel Creek Water District boardmember, confident in his own skills and expertise, aims to broaden the scope of their application by running for the soon-to-be vacant 2nd District seat on the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

"As a member of the community, I care about others in the community," Jaffe recently told the Sentinel in a phone interview. "I would work hard as a supervisor to increase the quality of life in the 2nd District."

Jaffe, 68, grew up in Palo Alto but moved to Santa Cruz in his early 20s to escape the bustling Bay Area scene.

After making his way through the community college system, Jaffe went on to receive his doctorate in earth sciences from UC Santa Cruz and eventually settled in Aptos with his wife Denise Elerick, founder of Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County, and their two children who are now in college.

One of Jaffe's more formative experiences in politics and conservation came as a founding member of the Nisene-to-Sea Open Space Alliance. Jaffe explained that the group halted a proposal to build 20 homes in the land behind Cabrillo College in the early aughts that the alliance feared would impede public access to The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park. Though one home was ultimately constructed according to Jaffe, the alliance worked with the county to build a public trail in the area that led to preserved public access to the park's west side entrance.

Jaffe has also gathered more traditional political experience as a 21-year boardmember

with the Soquel Creek Water District, which he currently chairs. Among the efforts he is proudest to have championed is the agency's Pure Water Soquel project, which is expected to open this year. The project aims to take treated wastewater, purify it further and inject it into underground wells to both secure a reliable water source for the agency's roughly 40,000 customers and buffer against creeping seawater intrusion that could spoil the freshwater basin.

"I've learned a lot at the Soquel Creek Water District about leadership," said Jaffe. "I want to take what I learned as a water director, in addition to my science background, and address the challenges that the county faces."

Jaffe's current term expires in 2026 and he confirmed in an email that should he win election to the county Board of Supervisors, he would resign from the water district.

Among the challenges Jaffe said he'd focus on as a supervisor are climate adaptation, disaster resilience, social justice and equity, transportation, a rapidly growing senior population, homelessness and soaring housing costs.

When it comes to addressing the county's chronic housing crisis, Jaffe voiced a desire to increase housing production and incentivize affordable housing development; in his words, "a carrot rather than a stick."

"Numerous people have told me about the permitting process and how it's onerous and time-consuming," he said. "I think reducing the red tape and streamlining the permitting process would increase the housing production."

Jaffe acknowledged that homelessness is a "complex issue," and felt solutions worth exploring include micro homes, expanded mental health and addiction treatment services, as well as collaboration with community organizations and pursuit of state and federal grant opportunities.

The county also needs significant funding from regional authorities to support the ongoing recovery from numerous environmental disasters, with reimbursement claims totaling more than \$250 million since 2017. Jaffe, the inaugural chair of the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Agency — which was created in 2016 to preserve sustainability of the mid-county basin — believes no other candidate is better equipped to help Santa Cruz County adapt to the realities of climate change.

"I've worked with world experts for more than 20 years on the effects of climate change and sea level rise," he said, adding that his scientific background would "situate me well to evaluate the possible ways to adapt to climate change."

County officials have said rising disaster costs and cash flow issues are only worsening a

core issue of “systematic underfunding.” The supervisors took aim at this late last year by unanimously voting to put a measure on the March 5 ballot that, if passed, would raise the unincorporated sales tax from 9% — tied with Capitola for the lowest in the county — up to 9.5%.

Jaffe supported the board’s decision, saying “the county is underfunded and it seems fair to me that if the cities have higher taxes, that the county can raise their rates to those levels.”

The measure, which needs a simple majority to pass, is estimated to generate \$10 million annually to be used for county services that address climate change impacts, the housing crisis, homelessness, infrastructure and worker shortages.

Lofty goals for solving major county issues aside, Jaffe returned to the simple hope that his community service approach will lift all boats with the rising tide.

“I would work to increase the quality of life for all people,” said Jaffe, “those who have a good quality of life now and those whose quality of life needs to be increased.”

Information about Jaffe’s campaign is at jaffeforsupervisor.com.