

Candidate Interview: June Louks

In a nutshell, tell me your history with Malibu. How long you've been here. And tell me a little bit about your family, what your local ties are.

So, I grew up in the Palisades, I lived there 30 years. I graduated from Palisades High School. So I lived in the Palisades when you could find a parking space and I've been in Malibu for 8 years and, from that perspective, I know what's coming as far as traffic and just finding a parking space.

Did you witness that transition in the Palisades and you see it trickling into Malibu?

Exactly. Big time. Except in the Palisades we never had clear ocean water where we could look down and see the fish, so that speaks to my heart even more to protect it because I know what's coming.

What triggered your move to Malibu?

My husband and I have always dreamed of living in Point Dume and we never thought it would be possible.

What made it possible?

A window opened. This lot was for sale at a price that we could afford.

Speaking of your husband, he works in real estate and he has some commercial real estate experience as well. Does that conflict at all with what your campaign platform has been to kind of protect against commercialization?

He's a commercial real estate broker and he is in full support of protecting our rural character and safeguarding our environment, and as a broker, I think he sees the advantage of protecting our rural character and our environment. It's like that whole concept, you don't spend the principle. And that brings us to another point. You know I'm running on the Malibu vision and mission statement, and I think it's our common ground. It's what brings together the real estate agents, the businesses, the residents, because when we protect this, it protects the value, it protects our lifestyle, our quality of life, our health as well as our property values, that they're not separate. And in 2014 I think it's really clear that as a voting base of .. I think Malibu's read to come together and find that common ground and stand up for that common ground together.

Is there any sort of contradiction in him working, even if it's not in Malibu, him working in commercial real estate and you wanting Malibu not to be commercial?

No. No. And he loves the environment, he wants to protect it as well. It gives me a vantage point

as to the bottom line focus of the developers and so perhaps as a mama bear, I even more want to protect what I love most about Malibu. I've had such healing here in the last 8 years. You know I had a health crisis 8 years ago and it brought me to my knees and it was through connecting with the land and the healthy lifestyle we have here in Malibu versus in the city that was so healing.

What was your health issue?

I had a long list of challenges, but mostly with migraines, memory loss, my hair was falling out. My vision was actually deteriorating. And since I've lived in Malibu the last 8 years, I've documented, it's improving. So I changed my lifestyle and living in Malibu we can connect with the earth, I started growing our own food so I could have rich soil to grow healthy food.

You often mention that we need to protect the rural character and prevent commercialization in Malibu, and when you talk about the current city council, you seem to have taken issue with some of the votes or some of the votes they've had or ordinances they have or haven't passed. Can you specifically list or tell me what projects you've had problems with on the city council?

We have a 25 percent grade. Anything like say in Malibu that's a 25 percent grade or greater, we're not supposed to touch. But we are building over that and beyond its span.

You mean the Crummer site?

No, but I've seen multiple projects allowed and they've been given variances to be either in the ESHA [environmentally sensitive habitat area] or the 25 percent or greater grades. Another one is with the commercial projects, they're required to have 40 percent landscape, 25 percent open space, so 65 percent landscape and open space. Yet when you look at the drawings, they're not honoring that code. What they're doing is they're taking walls and counting the square footage of the vertical wall in the landscape requirement. They're also taking trees in a parking lot and counting that span, even though its over concrete, and calculating adding that to either landscape or open space.

Which commercial projects are you referring to? What plans have you looked at?

Well, I have them all right here, I don't know that I could list them.

Well, there are several. There's there's Whole Foods, there's La Paz, there's the hotel, there's Sycamore Village.

Right, Sycamore Village.

You've examined those?

I've looked at all of them, and the hotel I would say that I didn't see it at first glance, and so I had to have [Planning Director Joyce Parker-Bozylinski] explain to me where it was. We first looked at the Whole Foods proposal and once I saw the direction that they were going, I didn't take a really hard look at the rest because they all looked similar in that kind of disrespect to that code. If I could use the word disrespect. What would be a different word? Just nonconformance with that code.

Getting back to my question, what has or hasn't the city council done in your eyes to address these types of issues?

So, one of the catalysts for me was seeing our city council not support the formula retail ordinance because it allowed for 30 percent of chain stores and then it had a list was it of 7 or 10 exceptions...so that left us maybe a 30 percent margin to support local or independent businesses, and that's reasonable. I thought, why aren't you doing this on the entire 26 miles, and it seemed that everyone I talked to in the neighborhood, because I talked to a lot of people about it, that they supported it, yet they wouldn't speak out because they were either connected with developers or real estate agents. Everyone here is either tied in to real estate or corporate America. The celebrities that I talked to didn't want to speak out because they felt that they might not get that next job, commercial job.

And how could you change that as a councilmember if you're elected?

Well, that's a really good question Melissa. And I didn't know how that would happen until Rob Reiner submitted his referendum.

What do you mean by that?

So, showing support of the referendum from everyone that I talked to in the community, there's a very strong support for having a very strong formula retail ordinance. It keeps Malibu unique and it keeps our local economy and independent businesses, it supports them.

Do you spend time in the Civic Center?

I was just there today.

Where were you?

I was at 5 Point, I did yoga. I did stop in that store..it's not fred segal. Its right on the corner as you leave, it's one of the clothing stores.

When you're at the Country Mart or at the Malibu Village, do you see a reflection of the Malibu you love or do you see something else?

It's becoming like a rodeo drive and a shopping destination.

And you believe the ballot initiative could change that or reverse it? What do you think it could do?

Foster businesses that serve our community rather than businesses oriented towards regional shoppers. And as residents, why wouldn't we stand up for that? And my gut tells me that that's what the regional shoppers really come here for is to get a sense of Malibu and to get a sense of our rustic rural character.

That all over Southern California you've got these chain stores and that people come to Malibu hoping, wanting something more unique. So from that perspective I think it's a win-win. I don't feel that will detract from the regional shopper as we protect our more rustic rural style for all of us.

The unregulated proliferation of formula retail would frustrate the goal and lessen our Malibu's appeal. And the goal would be to maintain a vibrant and diverse commercial visitor.

Sometimes during candidate forums you seem flustered by a question or you're not familiar with a topic. Do you feel that if you're elected you would be playing catch up on a lot of things? What kind of message do you think voters receive when you answer 'I don't know.' and are you comfortable with that kind of thing?

I've gotten a lot better. I have a strong values system and voters I think will vote for me because they share the value system of wanting to protect Malibu and keep Malibu, Malibu. There's a lot of things that have happened that haven't been on my watched that city council incumbents have decided on that I wouldn't necessarily have supported.

Like what?

One thing that comes to my mind is when Laura Rosenthal spoke out for the use of rodenticide as a "necessary evil" at our high school.

When was that?

That was in 2010. So, I watch that. It was heavy on my heart. We talked about it in our Malibu Agricultural Society and now, this last year, we've taken action on it. And I'm learning so much more about Malibu that it's dialed me into the politics of Malibu.

Do you feel that you still have a lot of learning to do and catching up to do?

I'm a quick study. I don't know if you noticed that, but it doesn't take me long to get up to speed. When we were building our house, I took the code home, I read it over the next 2 nights, I built it in three months we got it approved from the city. So that shows you what a quick study I am. To

read the code, design the house according to the code, get it approved in three months and to understand what, there wasn't a lot of back and forth.

It can take a really long time when we push the envelope and try to get a bigger piece of the pie and go for variances.

One other thought is I think my inexperience is to my advantage because I'm not aligned with any of the camps in Malibu. I'm really in a neutral place to hear all sides and support coming together, supporting a compromise, supporting all the stakeholders to come together and communicate. And that's something I have to do with a family of four teenage girls and their friends, all those dynamics, which can be hostile sometimes. I do think more clearly when there's harmony in the house.

You're kind of in the middle, staying out of things, while Andy Lyon and Hamish Patterson have spoken out publicly criticizing Laura Rosenthal on various things, including her track record with the high school. How come you've chosen to stay out of the conflict?

It's not what I'm about. I am not political in that sense. I'm not about tearing each other down. I feel that they're all my neighbors, and that community is like a delicate fabric and if we take a machete, it's difficult to repair that fabric. So I'm sensitive to that. I also think our public servants deserve respect, even if, I'm running because I don't agree with their decisions that they're making, but I feel I have a different kind of integrity. It's just different. Yet I hold respect for them, I hold respect for Hamish and Andy as whistleblowers. I see their value in the community as well. Yet I feel that if we can take our anger, leave it at the door, focus on the issues that are driving the anger, the community will wanna come out more, will have a stronger community voice, will be able to constructively collaborate, the talent comes to the party. But that doesn't happen when we have a council meeting where there's a lot of hostility. The community voice people don't want to have. They feel disenfranchised.

It's interesting you say that. When I talked with Laura and I asked her do you think people are afraid to speak up? Why do certain meetings not garner any attendance? She thinks that a lot of people are watching from home and she thinks that a lot of people are happy with what the council is doing, so they don't bother to show up. Do you think that's true?

I've been knocking on doors, I've been hanging out at the markets, out in front of the markets. I've talked to a lot of people. Hundreds and hundreds of people a week in the last month...and the consensus that I'm hearing is that they're aligned with our vision and mission statement. Everyone. They want to support our rural character, they want to protect our rural character, they want to protect our environment and our natural resources. And they want to have our community voice come together. When we're split down the middle, when we're infighting, the developers, the builders can have a field day because we're too busy focused on the infighting and not able to stand up as a unified whole on common ground to protect what we love. And that's their fulltime job. This is a part-time or spare-time interested for the residents to be

involved on the civic level. Like that cell tower hearing that we were at, and Crown Castle spoke out for T-Mobile. So Crown Castle, that's his full time job. He does this for a living. And it's of tremendous value for this community to come together on our mission statement, our common ground and have a cohesive voice. And I feel that I can bring that to the table as a city councilmember.

I might not, you mentioned, know all the issues. I might not have that familiarity, but I represent the voice of the community. And when I go to the business roundtable and I'm sitting there, I feel that I'm the community voice.

Let's talk about the high school. Do you feel that there was some kind of coverup when the toxic soil was first discovered? And are you satisfied with the progress that has or hasn't been made as far as figuring out what might be wrong at that campus?

Yes there was some kind of coverup. And no, they have not addressed it.

Were specific people part of the coverup? Why did it happen?

I think it happened because we're a part of a larger school district, which is the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. They're 84 percent, we're 16 percent of the vote. We're just an extra in their movie.

Do you think they ignored the problem when it came up?

I think it was brushed aside. It's hard to say exactly, but I think the problem is that we're not our own school district. If we were our own school district and we were able to elect our local Malibu parents that we chose with stakeholders in our schools, that we would be better represented. Not only with the toxic issue, but with the funding issues. With our not being able to hire our own principal here who has shared values. That whole SeaWorld issue came about because there was a lack of understanding. Here we are Point Dume Marine Science School, going to SeaWorld.

What should the next steps be in addressing problems at the high school?

I would do it differently. I don't know that I would have hired Environ. I like to support local businesses and there's cleanup companies, groundwater and soil remediation companies that we could have sourced that are local.

In Malibu, you mean?

I know one in the Palisades. In Southern California. Environ is a national company. They're not just someone you could say 'hey, could you come over, could you go over this test?' When we can work at a local level to solve our problems I think it also—the costs, we've spent 500,000 and not a shovel-full of remediation has—there's still PCBs in the classrooms. And they left the

windows open. That wasn't Environ, that was the previous group. That was baffling to me, to think that that was acceptable and they're not doing those tests. The managing of those contracts doesn't seem..I've worked w/lt contractors. You stay on them, get three good bids.

What is the single biggest problem facing Malibu in the next 4 years and how would you work to address it if you're elected?

Can I give 2?

Sure. No one so far has given me just one, so go ahead.

I think the single biggest challenge in Malibu is finding our common voice as a bloc of voters that's unified, where we can communicate in a healthy way with each other. Where we can be productive. If we're gonna address any problems in Malibu, I feel that Malibu has a lot of potential, but until we can communicate effectively, put our anger outside the door, focus on the issues, bring in the talent, constructively collaborate, with all the challenges that are coming down the pike, our planet's in crisis.

OK, so what about something specific?

So the second is we have a historic opportunity to become our own school district, and the community needs to have leadership they can trust.

Do you believe that could be accomplished in the next four years?

Because I believe in Craig Foster, and I've seen what he's done. And because Craig Foster says that it can happen in a year and a half to two years, or as long as 10 years, I have hope that as I support him as a city council person, as I can do my part in having the families feel represented at a civic level, that we can move that along. And I have a vested interest. I would love for my Charlotte and Hailey to go to the local schools.

They're home schooled?

Actually, I only have one who is home schooled and Hailey is in the eighth grade at the Malibu middle school and Lauren is a senior at the high school.

Are you comfortable keeping the eighth grader in the high school?

No

Are you thinking of homeschooling her next year?

We are weighing our options. And we're also looking at private schools. That said, it was a

fantastic experience for Lauren. The toxicity issue, because I had that health crisis—and one thing I didn't mention about the health crisis which I should is it was related and caused by heavy metal toxicity. So I'm very sensitive to the toxicity issue, and I'm also it's not only the existing infrastructure and the soil that wasn't remediated. It's also the rodenticide that they've been putting out every month. That's spraying, putting out chemicals that are toxic, not healthy exposure for our kids that are out on the soccer field.