

**Laurel Barton**

**City Council Candidate**

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### **Candidate Introduction and Statement**

I started my career at City of Visalia after completing a degree in Plant Science at CSU Fresno. Soon after being hired, I was drawing construction plans and preparing bids for park development projects. I passed the Landscape Architects licensing exam and learned grant writing, bringing in millions of dollars for projects as staff at City of Visalia and City of Tulare.

I served terms on the Visalia Unified School District Board and on Visalia City Council and was privileged to serve one year as a State Senate Fellow in Sacramento. During this period, I adopted two brothers, then aged 4 ½ and 6, who are now nearly 30 years old.

I enjoy Morro Bay's friendly people and our city's beautiful vistas. I have met many of you while participating in the local chapter of American Association of University Women, Estero Bay Newcomers' Club and Morro Bay in Bloom.

I am running for Council because I want to help the city through these difficult times. I have the experience, skills, and temperament to do it. The current Council has set the course on important issues like the water reclamation facility, vacation rentals and the sales tax measure, but there will be big decisions on these and other issues in the future. I work well with others and will contribute to outcomes that serve the interests of all our residents.

I have several layers of experience in city government in California, a master's degree in Public Administration from University of San Francisco, and can hit the ground running.

**Question: Do you think our four economic centers (Downtown, Waterfront, Quintana, and North Morro Bay) are healthy and successful? If not, what three things are needed to improve business conditions in the city?**

Morro Bay's four economic centers (North Morro Bay, Quintana Road Corridor, Downtown and Waterfront) are not as healthy and successful as they could be. I pledge to support Chamber stakeholders' efforts for long-term meaningful improvement. I will champion the following three initiatives after the election:

1. Improve connectivity, visibility, and wayfinding among and within all four economic centers.
2. Invest in noticeable "welcome mat" services such as daily power washing of sidewalks in commercial areas, increasing the number of trash and recycling containers, increasing the



frequency of cleaning and maintenance checks of public restrooms during busy periods, providing portable public restrooms (with handwash stations), making sure that benches and tables in areas common to all are in good condition, etc.

3. Prioritize the Community Development Department's efforts to assist new and existing businesses who will add diversity to our existing commercial mix of products and services to fill our empty storefronts.

**Question: If you received a \$1 Million dollar grant to use for the city any way you wanted, what would you do with it and why?**

Given Morro Bay's long-term dependence on tourism as a major economic driver of revenues to operate our city and the need to realize a significant return from any grant funds received, I would invest in moving the Highway 41/Embarcadero access study forward. It's a complex but necessary project that will take significant study and planning to arrive at a design, and significant additional State grant funding to build.

**Question: In seeking your position as an elected decision and policy maker in this 2020 election, what do you think are your shortcomings or lack of expertise and how do you intend to deal with them?**

What is very clear from the conversations I have had is that we have underinvested in harbor maintenance for a long time. I will make it a priority to work to find new revenue for the fund that is dedicated to the operation and maintenance of the harbor. I feel a twenty-year plan that budgets for annual harbor maintenance and improvement projects would result in smaller, predictable increases in boat-slip fees for our fishing and live-aboard communities.

**Please describe your business experience.**

As a city council member in Visalia, I viewed every decision I made through the lens of how it would affect local businesses. During my tenure on council, the community identified preserving downtown Visalia as the commercial and cultural core of the city as a major goal. As we focused on that effort, I learned how important it was to hear from all stakeholders to ensure that the goal was reached in a manner that met the needs of existing businesses. Morro Bay has untapped potential to become a 21<sup>st</sup> Century downtown. Following the pandemic, the City must be prepared for a new retail and commercial reality. The skills I learned in Visalia will serve me well in addressing those needs here in Morro Bay. I appreciate how council decisions on individual matters affect overall outcomes for businesses and residents. I enjoyed success as a council member in looking at the current situation, always with an eye on what could be. I am excited by the prospect of doing that here in Morro Bay.

