



THE PLANNER

City Council candidate Flora Gil Krisiloff is a veteran of the Westside's land-use fray

By [Bobbi Murray](#)

Judging by the walls of her campaign headquarters on Venice Boulevard, Flora Gil Krisiloff seems like the "family candidate" for Los Angeles City Council's 11th District. There are pictures of her husband and three grown sons, another of herself with her 84-year-old mother, and a sepia-tinged image of her dad, Jose Gil, who flew for the Flying Tigers, an all-volunteer air force that battled with the Chinese against the Japanese during the early days of World War II.

But sit down with Krisiloff to talk about her runoff race against Bill Rosendahl for the 11th District seat, and you quickly find what really gets her hyped: the wonky legalese of land-use planning. For voters who worry that the devil is in the details of day-to-day city government, Krisiloff may be the answer to a prayer. She has made her reputation dealing with the growth issues that many find the city's most pressing, and was mentored by termed-out Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski, who has endorsed her.

Krisiloff's manner is warm as she lays out her narrative: She arrived in the U.S. at 11 years old as her family followed a sister who got into college here; later, Flora received a full scholarship to UCLA, where she earned a B.A. in public health. Her father died of a massive heart attack when he was 53, the same age that Krisiloff is now. She suspects it was the strain of all that he carried within - memories of the war, being an immigrant from Taiwan (half-Chinese, half-Costa Rican) who didn't speak English, and life as a steelworker who struggled to support his family after moving them to Santa Fe Springs. Krisiloff embraced public service, volunteering for one year with Volunteers In Service To America, or VISTA, a national anti-poverty program, traveling along the Snake River in Idaho doing health care outreach with mostly Mexican

migrant workers.

"I experienced some discrimination," she cautiously admits now - not from the farm workers, but from the overwhelmingly white Idaho population.

Back in L.A. County, she worked as a public health nurse in Compton - public health being principally concerned, as she frames it, not with treating sick people in hospitals but tackling preventive measures and education to keep people out of them. She went on to earn a master's degree in nursing and, later, a master's in business administration. "I wanted to make a larger impact on policy and money makes the world go around, so I wanted to learn about the money side," she says.

Her intensity brightens as she details the land-use fights in which she has been engaged as a volunteer and stay-at-home mother for more than 20 years. The first concerned the busy little corner of her neighborhood at San Vicente and 26th Street, on the border of Brentwood and Santa Monica, and where plans were in motion to develop a mini-mall at an already congested site.

Determined to scale back this project, she visited then-Councilman Marvin Braude and first met his staffer, Cindy Miscikowski. Krisiloff pulled together residents from Santa Monica and Brentwood, along with enlisting the major property owner on the corner to help argue for less dense development. The upshot was no mini-mall on that corner, along with a policy precedent for limited commercial development in areas that abutted housing.

The newly realized design for San Vicente Boulevard was another of her fights, organizing endless community meetings to arrive at a lushly landscaped, pedestrian-friendly setup with shops and services instead of the banks and insurance offices she says squeezed out the mom-and-pop businesses.

And three-and-a-half years ago, the Veterans Administration was considering heavy commercial development on its 400-acre land parcel near the corner of Wilshire and Veteran. Krisiloff was invited to be part of what she calls a flawed process that ended up with a plan that would have permitted development equal to two-and-a-half times the size of Century City, she says. That plan was derailed with the help of Congressman Henry Waxman, along with Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who has now endorsed Krisiloff's candidacy. She currently sits on a new committee that will come up with another plan, through a process she wants to be more inclusive.

That's a word Krisiloff uses a lot. The other is "process" - breaking down the environmental impact reports, exploring zoning regulations and variances, marshalling "stakeholders," the people and institutions affected by a given development project - it all fascinates her. She really seems to love it.

"I do! I really do," she exclaims. "People tease me that I love process. But I think that the outcome is as good as the process. So if you have really inclusive, transparent process, you get a better result at the other end."

Supporters call that a tremendous strength. Renee Chanon, who lives in Krisiloff's Brentwood neighborhood, recalls a neighborhood fight over a cell phone tower location. Krisiloff was on the West Los Angeles Planning Commission at the time, a local board born of the 1999 city charter reform. "Flora was the one who dug into the issue," says Chanon, who remains impressed with the way she ran the meetings. "She included everybody."

Myra Kriwanek, who volunteered alongside Krisiloff at the elite Harvard-Westlake School, where Krisiloff handled endowment finances, praises Krisiloff's "uncanny ability for responsible planning, her uncanny sense of land use and planning to address the transportation, development, and compatibility of commercial and residential projects."

But critics wonder if that neighborhood-level, process-oriented focus can distract from District 11's big-picture challenges: transportation policy questions posed by the expansion of LAX, the traffic crisis that epitomizes L.A. gridlock, maintenance and access to world-famous beaches, conservation in the Santa Monica Mountains, and the Playa Vista development, possibly the largest in the history of Los Angeles County, which also threatens the last remaining coastal wetlands.

A council member must manage them all in a way that's responsible both to the immediate neighbors and the larger L.A. area, says former 6th District Councilwoman Ruth Galanter, who supports Rosendahl. Galanter says she met with Krisiloff. "What emerged pretty clearly is that the stuff she loves the best is the minutiae of planning and zoning," the former councilwoman relates. "And I said to her then, and I meant it sincerely, 'If that's really what you love, you'd be happier on the planning commission than the city council.'"

Galanter compares Krisiloff's interests with that of her mentor, Miscikowski, with whom Galanter is not on the best of terms after a bitter redistricting fight in 2002.

Krisiloff's enthusiasm does seem to wane a bit on some issues that usually evoke passion on the Westside. On the question of airport expansion, she opposes the plan that will eliminate three terminals and build a central off-site check-in terminal, but points out the multiple legal actions already fighting it - including those brought by adjacent cities and the L.A. County Board of Supervisors. "My position is, you can't do anything while it's in litigation," she says. On Playa Vista, she praises the amount of wetlands acreage that's been purchased (and saved) and notes that wetlands restoration will "take years and a lot of money. We need to support these nonprofit organizations any way we can."

Her rival, Rosendahl, is outpacing Krisiloff in fundraising and has picked up a list of key endorsements from quarters as diverse as the Sierra Club to conservative Supervisor Mike Antonovich. And he beat Krisiloff in the three-way primary by three points. But Krisiloff touts her support from Miscikowski, Yaroslavsky, and, recently, the Police Protective League. "I'm really proud to have that sort of support," she says, "because I really come from the community. I'm not an insider. I'm an outsider, so I'm really pleased that the people who have traditionally been more involved have seen what a good candidate I am."

Published: [04/21/2005](#)

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