



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

COMMUNITY LIFE

What should the City do with its 8 acres of Cubberley?

PAT BURT

Due to high uncertainty about PAUSD future enrollment (currently declining, but potentially growing significantly due to state development mandates), the school district is not able to have any good sense of their future needs for the site. Consequently, the ability to have a joint development plan is not what the city would prefer. The city should develop its own plan for its 8 acres. Given the potential for housing growth in the San Antonio corridor, the city should focus its uses on community center type facilities rather than housing on the site.

REBECCA EISENBERG

Cubberley is a tremendous opportunity!

I was extremely excited about the opportunity for teacher housing, which would have delivered invaluable benefit for public school families. Teachers were thrilled about this possibility too, but then – astonishingly – the school board concluded that teacher housing “served no benefit.” I’m still in love with the idea of using Cubberley for housing – teacher housing, city worker housing, lowest income, low income, and moderate income housing. Housing is what we need, and Cubberley provides an incredible opportunity to provide housing, along with green space, a community center, and other services that could benefit our community.

Without knowing all of the details, I believe that our potential to optimize Cubberley Center for our community is limited by two factors, both of which we can address:

1. The City of Palo Alto should acquire the other 35 acres of land from the PAUSD. This will not be difficult – I have handled far larger and more complicated real estate transactions. Also, funding won’t be a problem. This is real estate, and both parties have excellent credit. PAUSD needs the money but does not need the land (or, at least, may need the land but does not have current capacity to design a plan for the land). We need the land. If PAUSD needs more land, it has a few other options, and always will have the opportunity to discuss renting from Palo Alto. There never has been a logistical or rational reason for this parcel to be shared by the school district and the City. The fact that is shared in this way is an avoidable complicating factor. Fortunately, this is a complicating factor that experienced lawyers are fully equipped to resolve. Let’s resolve it.
2. Let’s send out an RFP (general Request for Proposals) and see what comes back. Too often the City of Palo Alto appears to choose a service provider before making that service provider do the work of showing us that they are the best firm for the job.

In the business world, RFPs are standard (as seen in: “Mad Men,” for example) and Cubberley is a large enough project to attract the interests of dozens, maybe hundreds, of design firms. Assuming that we control the 43 acres (which we can and should do), we can send it all out to bid.

Before sending out the RFP, however, city leadership should set certain guidelines, such as: (A) maximize affordable housing; (B) provide sufficient housing for teachers and all city workers if they choose to live there; (D) ensure that there is capacity for a child care center and health center; and (D) make sure the building is LEED-certified and otherwise green. (For example.) These factors (with the preceding used for illustrative purposes) should be baked into the specs, in order to set expectations and not put housing up to a vote. In other words, the world will not be the limit; but rather: the project must further the public interest as delineated (generally or specifically) by the City.

Within those parameters – whatever they are – we can compare multiple – maybe dozens! -- of visions for Cubberley.

In my mind, the opportunity to view an array of visions is important, because Concordia's vision did not sell. That was not necessarily Concordia's fault, or the fault of the individuals managing that project – but it is the reality. The vision was not sold.

Cubberley is the last remaining large site that (potentially) belongs to the City of Palo Alto (which the exception, potentially, of the land where the railroad tracks lie, if that is the case). It is wholly reasonable that Palo Altans will want to feel ownership in the design of its future, and I believe that community buy-in **MUST** be a part of whatever is determined.

That said: there are many ways to obtain community support without dragging the initial design stage on indefinitely, as often happens in Palo Alto. We can set deadlines, for example: (1) initial bids due February 1; (2) community initial vote by March 15; (3) finalists notified for second turnaround due April 15; (4) Community feedback due May 15; (5) project and firm greenlight on June 1. Or whatever other schedule fits.

Given the economy, and the general economic transition to remote work, and the numerous capital projects that have been scrapped as a consequence of both, there will be a lot of firms eager to showcase their visions to be considered for this exciting, worthy project.

A well-run Cubberley redesign **process** presents an ideal opportunity for a new Palo Alto City Council to introduce itself. This new Palo Alto City Council will be a Council that takes the process of decision-making as seriously as the results, with the understanding that optimal results never can be achieved without a well-thought out system of decision-making, and mindful, responsible approach to project management.

It's impossible to predict (but exciting to imagine) what could come from such a new way of conducting city business. That said, the new City Council, new system of decision-making, and new Cubberley Center itself must share one non-negotiable ingredient:

It must be true, at all times, to its primary objective: that of serving the community's best interest.

LYDIA KOU

I believe the Community spoke as to what they wanted. We should respect their time and input. Cubberley, as it is, offers a wide range of Community serving activities. We should renegotiate our lease with the School District. Land is best saved for open space and much-needed recreation.

ED LAUING

In the face of COVID-19 budget challenges, we have significantly reduced our use of the space and lack the resources to undertake significant improvements. Post-COVID, the city should determine whether the school district is ready to commit to phased redevelopment of the site, including joint investment in shared facilities. If not, it may be time to redirect negotiations with PAUSD towards realignment of ownership boundaries that would allow the city to move forward on its own in redeveloping the city's portion of the site.

Planning for such a project should revisit the community-generated concepts produced last year, seeking similar efficiencies to maximize green space and create flexible facilities that can be adapted over time as community needs change.

STEVEN LEE

Any discussion of Cubberley will definitely need to be done in concert with PAUSD. With such a large lot owned in part by the City and in part by PAUSD, we have a once in a generation opportunity to build a beautiful, bold and innovative community space that addresses and responds to multiple community needs. I imagine a neighborhood-appropriate, compact, well-designed shared-use campus that incorporates space for a secondary school, if the district needs one, along with significant increases in community space and open space. I also think we can increase community space and open space while also building teacher and senior housing on site. If we work together, listen to each other's concerns and needs, I believe we can do all of these things and create a campus that we and future generations can be proud of.

RAVEN MALONE

I'm supportive of suggestions to develop parts of Cubberley to provide senior services, education, gyms, community gathering spaces, and affordable housing for teachers and other workers. Additionally, building more densely would create even more space for new developments to support the community and allow for more open space at Cubberley in general.

GREER STONE

The city's ownership of Cubberley should be reserved as a community center for our city. As chair of the Midtown Residents Association, I have always been frustrated by the lack of city services and amenities in South Palo Alto. Palo Alto does not have a true community center, at least compared to what many other cities of comparable sizes have. It would be a shame to not redevelop Cubberley into a modern community center that could include a space for all ages to enjoy community activities, meeting rooms, senior services, and provide space for non-profit organizations to operate out of at reduced rates.

GREG TANAKA

My record on development and local projects reflects my commitment to listening to residents and community feedback. Unafraid to be the lone vote, I listened to the community and voted against placing housing at [Cubberley Community Center](#). Cubberly brings back many memories for the residents of Palo Alto and what happens to its 8 acres should be a reflection of their thoughts.

CARI TEMPLETON

A community group has formed to help with the visioning process for this space, with the goal to create a space for all Palo Altans. I am excited to see what they propose, based on community input, and believe we need to encourage this kind of community engagement. I want to see this space ultimately continue to serve all residents, with a mix of education, community, and open space.

AJIT VARMA

I love the proposals outlined at <https://www.newcubberley.com/> which came through significant thought, discussion and outside consultation. This is an important space we should invest in developing and modernizing to provide a "new green space in addition to space for all the existing uses (gyms, Friends of the Palo Alto library, martial arts, performing and studio arts, language classes, etc.) and new activities such as a cafe, pickleball courts, a wood workshop, media center, art classrooms, gallery, skate spot, biking and walking track, culinary kitchen, playground, and two swimming pools."