



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

PUBLIC SAFETY

What are your thoughts on “defunding” and/or reorganizing the police department? What changes do you want to see in our police department? If you would cut its budget, where would you apply the savings?

PAT BURT

[Answer includes both Public Safety questions – this one and “How would you help set policies for PAPD to address racial profiling and use of excessive force?”]

I believe we need to invest more in “public safety”, but reform and change our policing models. Some of these investments would supplement or, in some cases, replace certain public safety functions currently responded to by uniformed police officers. It is not clear whether services to be provided by mental health professionals, social service workers or other nonuniformed officers would be administered within the police (or public safety) department.

- Adopt the #8CantWait, reforms as a foundation for improving public safety by reducing the use of force, enhancing transparency, and increasing accountability.
- Renegotiate the police union (POA) contract so that the police Policy Manual is not subject to binding arbitration which has historically limited officer accountability and transparency.
- Adopt a holistic public safety program prioritizing mental health and social service professionals as default city responders to nonviolent mental health, homelessness, and domestic emergency calls.
- Restore the scope of the Independent Police Auditor (IPA) that was reduced in December 2019 so serious internal police misconduct will again be reviewed by the outside IPA rather than the City HR department.
- Proactively work to diversify hiring of police staff, including leadership, and increase our diversity training. In recent years, our staff has become less diverse.
- Track data on policing racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation patterns. Data collected serves as an impartial method for ensuring accountability and tracking patterns and progress.
- Expand community policing initiatives to enhance trust and relationships.
- Explore an exchange program with East Palo Alto for officers to serve on temporary assignments in each other’s cities to build broader diversity training and cultural understanding.

REBECCA EISENBERG

I support defunding and reorganizing the police department. By defunding, I mean moving some of its budget to other programs, similar to how the City Council recently defunded Palo Alto Children’s Theatre by cutting half of its budget. And, as the City Council told Children’s Theatre it can achieve its goals with half its budget, we must tell the PAPD the same.

With the cost savings from reducing the PAPD budget, I would seek to invest in the following:

1. Restore the funding for the community services cut by the City Council this spring, including rehiring the Firefighters and SEIU service workers it fired, reinstating Library hours (and librarian compensation), rehousing the nonprofit tenants it evicted from Cubberley, restoring the Cubberley lease with the PAUSD and reimbursing the \$4 million it withheld from the public schools, reinstating services for teens it slashed,

and of course reimbursing and reinstating full funding of Palo Alto's remarkable and wholly essential Children's Theatre.

2. Instead of the militarized police force, Palo Alto can invest in more effective means of peace-keeping, including: (a) invest heavily in mental health services -- for example, it is not appropriate that peace officers currently handle suicide prevention calls from teens; (b) supporting non-profit organizations that empower communities; (d) use neighborhood mediators trained in de-escalation to address situations that police officers notoriously are worst fit to handle, especially domestic violence.
3. With the rest of the money we gain, I support the following, according to triaged need: (a) emergency housing for the newly unhoused; (b) permanent affordable housing for the lowest income workers and working families; (c) childcare for teachers, city workers, and residents to help reboot the economy by enabling parents to reenter the workforce given children at home due to the pandemic; (d) ramping up our delivery of free covid testing, to get people back to work.

With the \$150 million (or so) set aside for the new police station, I support reallocation of those funds toward more urgent capital projects at that location, such as emergency housing for transitional homeless, housing for lowest-income workers, and affordable housing for city workers and teachers.

LYDIA KOU

On "defunding", I have to ask, "Can you really live and feel safe without police?" and don't flippantly answer this question. Would you replace police with residents? How will they be trained? Do they report to anyone?

I will not pretend to know what a police officer encounters day in and day out on the job, not knowing what to expect from a person they stop or encounter. Furthermore, I am not the person to reorganize the department. I would like for Council to direct staff to network with other cities and advocate our Assembly and Senate representative to sponsor the recently failed legislation: SB 776 (open police conduct records to public scrutiny) and SB 731 (lift the state-issued licenses, called certification of police convicted of crimes).

Council has already cut the police budget for FY20-21. Palo Alto no longer has a traffic enforcement team. We constantly hear that traffic violations are serious safety problems. Cutting more budget from the Police Department will reduce services and will increase overtime.

In my opinion, society has lumped the good and the bad police together and crucified them. Society demands police to do a lot. If there is not enough drug addiction funding, let the police handle it. Not enough mental health funding, let the police handle it. Underaged truancy, let the police handle it. School fails, let the police handle it. An alarm goes off, let the police handle it. Hey, dog on the loose, let the police handle it.

Council is working on the "8 Can't Wait" reforms at this time. We can investigate moving some of the services from the police, such as drug-induced mental health to service providers who are professionals.

I would also recommend the [CAHOOTS program \(Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets\)](#) and for the Independent Police Auditor to audit the police manual and MOU (Memorandum of Understanding).

ED LAUING

[Answer includes both Public Safety questions – this one and "How would you help set policies for PAPD to address racial profiling and use of excessive force?"]

On both of these questions, Council is doing good work - so far - on investigating options for police reform and making changes. Quite similar to what I proposed on my website in June, multiple ad hoc committees on council were formed on various aspects of the police department. This is well-coordinated with the parallel work of the Human Relations Commission. Progress is happening based on the multiple report-outs from the ad hoc committees and the HRC. Some reforms have already been put in place such as the elimination of chokeholds. There is more work to be done.

Separately, officers at fault for atrocious behavior have to be fired immediately and blackballed from police work. I would like to see our outside auditor lead such investigations reporting directly to council.

In parallel, I would also like to see a study done on how the city could swap in non-police personnel in-lieu of some sworn officers. This could include civilian social workers, mental health experts, substance-abuse specialists, and first-call responders for neighborhood nuisance calls like excess noise. This staffing

adjustment would also reduce overall expense for the city. Other communities, such as Eugene, OR have successfully implemented such an approach; we don't have to reinvent the wheel to achieve it.

STEVEN LEE

I believe we need to dramatically re-imagine public safety in our community. We need to identify what responsibilities we can take off the police department's plate and reassign them (and the associated funding) to unarmed and better & specifically trained professionals like mental health professionals, social workers, etc. We should take a good look at the Santa Clara County's Crisis Response Team which pairs a police officer with these unarmed, better trained mental health professionals, and determine if we can adopt that model or elements of it in Palo Alto. We also need to take a more holistic view of public safety. It is critical and more cost effective in the long term to fund services for low-income, minority and other underserved populations. We need to be more proactive in addressing the root causes of crime, instead of merely being reactionary and only focused on how large or well funded our police department is.

RAVEN MALONE

One of my central platform planks is reimagining community safety, which means refocusing on community resources and taking a look at what police are asked to do, focusing on Holistic Emergency Responses. This means tasking unarmed, well-trained civilians with responding to instances involving mental health emergencies, homelessness, or routine traffic stops that don't require an armed response. Our police department should focus their resources on serious incidents where they are most needed. We also need to make sure we are investing in a vibrant, sustainable community, which is essential to maintaining public safety. This includes investments in communal spaces that bring us together, such as after-school sports, libraries, arts programs, and public transportation. Whether this requires reducing the police budget should depend on city revenue and the changing needs of the community.

GREER STONE

I am in favor of reallocating, not defunding. There are examples of best practices from around the country including Southern California's PERT Program and Eugene, Oregon's CAHOOT program, where local police and community services collaborate to offer the proper service to 911 calls. When people call 911 a dispatcher triages the call and determines if the call requires a police response because it involves a legal matter or is an issue involving violence or threatening of property. However, if the call involves issues that have a heavy mental or behavioral health component, the 911 dispatcher will redirect the call to a social worker who is trained to deescalate and help provide the person the help they need. Not only has this led to a significant decrease in police shootings and incidents of police violence in Eugene, but it is estimated to save the city \$15 million a year. Not only is this reform effective in reducing police violence, but it is also cost-effective. By reallocating funds from our city budget, we will be able to save money and then reinvest that money into essential public safety services such as reestablishing the police department's traffic team that was cut due to the city's budget cuts. Traffic enforcement is one of our police department's primary responsibilities and is a key tool in helping keep our streets safe.

GREG TANAKA

In a police reform survey our office sent out, a majority of Palo Alto residents responded that the police department needs 100% transparency. Currently, Palo Alto's police open data source is limited and inefficient in providing information to the public on the city's law enforcement actions. I am advocating for more open data so we can join organizations, like [Stanford's Open Policing Project](#), where they provide publicly accessible information on police-stop data throughout the country. Ultimately, as a City Council Member, my goal is to echo the concerns and opinions of my constituents so I will continue to have open discussions with the people of Palo Alto.

Reform should also include a reallocation of responsibilities from the police to more appropriate staff. We need to look at other cities' public safety models that have seen success in their progressive police reform systems, like Eugene, Oregon's [CAHOOTS](#) model. I held a Zoom discussion with Sunnyvale Mayor, Larry Klein, on the Sunnyvale Public Safety Department, a model for conjoining both fire and police responsibilities under one umbrella department. This can be found at [Addressing the Sunnyvale Public Safety Department](#). This is just one of many examples in which I have continued to seek out all perspectives for comprehensive change.

CARI TEMPLETON

The recent George Floyd protests in Palo Alto, and resulting panel discussion, articles, and community input have demonstrated that the City must re-envision and modernize community safety and wellness, with particular attention to the needs of BIPOC and LGBT community members. To promote community safety and wellness for all, we must ensure that a portion of our public safety budget provides our city the variety of resources we need, including de-escalation training programs, mental health, and wellness programs.

I will work with the county to make on-call mental health first responders available in Palo Alto, and seek alternative methods to deal with nonviolent nuisance calls with unarmed officers. We should seek to expand facilities for youth seeking professional services, such as counseling, and increase mobile health outreach programs.

AJIT VARMA

We need to ensure everyone in Palo Alto is safe and we have a low crime rate. I think the key to this is proper training and using money in the most effective ways to do that.