



## 2020 City Council Candidate Questions

### COMMUNITY LIFE

**Do you support ending single-family residential (R-1) zoning? Why or why not?**

#### **PAT BURT**

I don't support ending R-1 zoning. I believe in the new urbanism vision of design where core areas have highest density, transitioning to moderate density and then lower density neighborhoods. Today, lower density R-1 neighborhoods allow two ADU's.

I agree with the renowned urban planner, Peter Calthorpe who was influenced by his upbringing in northern Palo Alto, that it is unnecessary, bad planning, and politically counter productive to pursue dismantling of predominantly single family neighborhoods (through SB50, SB1120, and other related bills).

I am also very concerned that vilification of those who support retaining predominantly single family zoning is opening the door to dividing the community. I have also proposed that the city adopt on its own the AFFH rule on non discriminatory housing that the Trump administration recently rescinded. I believe the city will be doing that as a result.

#### **REBECCA EISENBERG**

I support the end of exclusionary zoning, in the context of the 3 P's: Production (of housing), Preservation (of existing housing stock), and Protection (of tenants as well as owners facing financial challenges who need liquidity or income to stay in the neighborhood). A couple illustrations:

1. R-1 zoning is not a singular concept: sometimes it allows additional units as long as they meet certain lot size minimums. Also, sometimes it allows automatic conversion to RH-2. Those R1s are great.
2. Although R1 designations can create challenges for neighborhoods, I think that the more nefarious zoning limitation is minimum lot sizes and/or the inability to subdivide extremely large lots, even for the surrounding neighborhood. In my neighborhood -- Old Palo Alto -- lot sizes run up to an acre (or more). If the owners of these lots were able to subdivide the lots, our quality of life would be so much improved! There are hardly any children in our entire neighborhood, and half of our nearby homes are empty most of the year (a couple of them empty always). I grew up in a town where every house had a family or grandparent in it, and people looked out for each other. I remember Palo Alto being that way in the 1980s. Ghost towns are not 'neighborhood characters' worth preserving.
3. Although Palo Alto needs to build more housing, it really needs to start by addressing the ghost house problem first. Our city council has done a terrible job preserving housing stock. Many cities are exploring vacancy taxes, and I believe we should look into that as well. Alternatively, we have a potential option of enforcing our zoning code against owners of empty homes: if a home is being used as a passive investment, it is not being used for its zoned purpose - residential - and thus in violation of the zoning codes. Penalties for code breaches under our muni code are \$500 per violation per day.
4. Arguments against loosening density restrictions and height restrictions are often silly. I have been an attorney for the majority of my life. I know how to draft a code ordinance that allows a duplex to be three stories but does not allow the same for a MacMansion.
5. Finally, for clarification, laws like California's proposed SB 1120 do not ban R-1 housing. Rather, it would have given property owners the right to subdivide once and/or convert to a duplex. This is a popular approach that enables homeowners to stay in their homes despite poor economic conditions. I think our residents would have benefited from having this option, especially homeowners who purchased their homes

within the past 10 years, who are shouldering far more than their fair share of the property tax burden due to Prop 13.

## **LYDIA KOU**

NO! We need to preserve single-family residential (R-1) zoning.

In this pandemic, there are numerous articles, backed up by loan data, about large numbers of people moving out of metro areas. When surveyed, more than 90% of buyers want more space to work, a bigger yard, more recreational space, more home learning space, more space period, and a less expensive home.

Eliminating single-family zoning will only increase speculation and investors who will purchase, demolish, and build high density. Do you want your next-door neighbor to be a 5-story apartment house with insufficient parking?

A city determines its land use. It zones different areas for different densities and uses and provides the necessary infrastructure and amenities to complement to ensure a balanced community. However, regional and state forces are working hard to strip local municipalities from their land use and zoning controls and give that power to developers to plan our cities and communities.

Our Assembly Member Marc Berman recently votes "YES" to pass Senate Bill 1120 (SB1120). This allows a city's bureaucrats to overturn single-family residential zoning on requests to have two units on the property. Input from the neighbors and other members of the community? Optional. Oversight by our elected representatives? Prohibited.

We need to learn from this pandemic and ensure that your elected officials are working and enacting laws in the best interest of their constituents, not the special interests.

"The government closest to the people serves the people best" ~Thomas Jefferson

## **ED LAUING**

The argument to end R-1 zoning presumes that this action will create affordable housing. It does not. The presumptions are that (1) additional supply/density, alone, will reduce prices; and (2) that those lower prices will make the incremental units affordable. Supply/demand math in Palo Alto does not work that way. Market demand will price these new units at MARKET RATE – in the millions of dollars – not affordable at all.

Recent studies show that upzoning approach actually raises the value of the land, further undermining efforts to produce truly affordable housing as non-profit housing developers will struggle to compete.

Of course infill development is necessary to increase our housing supply (across income categories), but a blanket upzoning of R1 districts overwhelmingly benefits market rate developers and high-income residents, while diminishing our ability to tie scarce zoning incentives to affordability.

Given the ugly history of using single-family zoning to advance racial exclusion, interest in eliminating the R-1 zoning designation is understandably strong. However, the more meaningful corrective is to focus on affordability of housing for populations the free market doesn't serve, not just units of housing. That requires a strategic approach focused on a specific goal. Rather than targeting our influence to produce subsidized units where most feasible, the blanket elimination of R-1 is in complete contradiction of that goal.

## **STEVEN LEE**

I support getting rid of exclusionary zoning. I think there are ways to encourage and build duplexes, triplexes and quadplexes that compliment and blend in well with existing single family neighborhoods. This will help us to also tackle our housing crisis and enable young and diverse families to live in Palo Alto, something we'll need to maintain and enhance the stability, diversity and vibrancy of our neighborhoods, and help reverse declining enrollment in our schools and other impacts experienced by our community due to lack to housing.

## **RAVEN MALONE**

Yes, I support ending exclusionary zoning. I think middle-density housing like duplexes and cottage clusters enhance our neighborhoods, and provide needed middle-class homes. We can maintain other neighborhood protections like lot-coverage, design requirements, and height restrictions. However, I still think we should focus on high-density housing in places like Downtown or the Stanford Research Park.

## **GREER STONE**

I would support not further expanding single-family zoning, but I would not support ending existing single-family zoning. I believe the feel and character of a city should be determined by the residents. This way people can choose the type of community and neighborhood they want to live in. There are few decisions as personal and important as where a person wants to live. I believe in local control and a city's right to determine what zoning best suits their community's character. I also find it fundamentally unfair to rescind R-1 zoning on homeowners who may have purchased their homes with the expectation that they were purchasing a home in a single-family neighborhood.

## **GREG TANAKA**

In regards to ending single-family residential zoning, I believe it is best to have sensible discussions on it. Bringing in all perspectives and gaining new insight on this issue will ensure that we reach a comprehensive solution. This has been one of my goals throughout my 4 years on the City Council, mainly through my office hours every Sunday.

## **CARI TEMPLETON**

Such a great question, because this exact talking point is being used in fear-mongering rhetoric from Washington this election season, and I completely reject this line of thinking. We will not have important City business used by some politicians to escalate fear and disrupt discussion of zoning changes that may be beneficial for the neighborhood and the City. There are times when zoning changes make sense, and there are times when it may not make sense. I prefer to make zoning decisions based on the needs of the neighborhood and the City.

## **AJIT VARMA**

I do not support ending R-1 zoning. Residential neighborhoods are critical to Palo Alto and having yards and low-density areas are key to making Palo Alto a great place to live for all people. We have more than enough space in areas that are underdeveloped where we can build much denser housing and office space that can accommodate all our needs well into the future without changing the character of our neighborhoods.