



2018 City Council Candidate Questions

Tom DuBois Responses

REASON FOR RUNNING

What do you hope to achieve in the next four years on the city council?

I accomplished nearly all of my campaign goals when I ran in 2014. My priority is residents and overall I will continue to work hard to represent their interests.

As an experienced council member, I have a full slate of actions I want to complete in the next four years. I believe candidates have an ethical obligation to be specific about what their intentions – here are mine:

Housing

- Strengthen protections for renters
- Limit office growth and density to create space for housing and avoid adding even more pressure to demand
- Re-define mixed use zones as Retail and Residential (no office) to spur housing development
- Include a large % of BMR housing in the housing element of the Ventura plan
- Encourage and build BMR housing projects
- Encourage Stanford to house more of its staff

Transportation and Traffic

- Have businesses fund local transportation initiatives including train crossing improvements
- Better community involvement and communication for changes (like Ross Road)
- Focus on vehicle flow on our arterials to minimize local neighborhood cut through traffic
- Continue to reduce commuter parking intrusion into neighborhoods
- Expand our transportation management association city wide

Strengthen our City School working relationship

- Continue to work together on safe routes to school, traffic guards, Middle School sports, and train safety
- Develop Cubberley as a shared resource with school resources, a community center, and shared facilities.
- Get teacher housing built
- Have Stanford fund any impacts on our schools from their expansion

Invest in the Community

- Execute our capital infrastructure plan to build 2 new fire stations, a police station, a bike bridge over 101, 2 parking garages, the Baylands interpretive center and Cubberley
- Get the Palo Alto History Museum funded

- Revitalize the animal shelter
- Buy the ATT land to expand Boulware Park and look for other park expansion opportunities.

STATE VS LOCAL CONTROL

What is your philosophy when it comes to local versus state control over growth and development mandates?

I am a strong supporter of local control. We should trust our local elected officials to make the best decision for our local situation. As a small city on a long, narrow peninsula surrounded by water and protected foothills, one size fits all solutions from Sacramento often aren't the best solution for Palo Alto.

HOUSING

Given the cost of land and construction costs, how do we make it economically viable to create Below Market Rate housing for low income residents (80% of AMI or lower) in Palo Alto? (80% of AMI is \$66,150 for one person or \$75,800 for two persons.)

1. We need to increase our commercial development impact fees to the levels supported by the Nexus study and affordable housing experts. We need these funds to generate enough revenue to actually build BMR housing
2. We need to hold developers to building inclusionary housing as part of their project, rather than paying in-lieu fees.
3. Where possible, we need to consider creative uses of existing land, such as Joe Simitian's (one of more endorsers) proposal to use the land next to the Courthouse for teacher housing.

What changes would you make to the rules allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in single-family residential neighborhoods? Should denser housing development be allowed in single-family residential neighborhoods?

I would re-instate the City's staff recommendations on parking needed for these units. Parking requirements were rashly removed at a Council meeting without evaluation of the impacts. We need to give the ordinance some time and monitor impacts to see if further tweaking is necessary.

What stronger renter protections, including restrictions on evictions without "just cause" and limits on annual rental rate increases, do you support, if any?

1. We need to do analysis of the impacts of any proposed ordinances.
2. We should have an open and forthright discussion of ALL options.
3. Most stronger renter protections should only apply to large complexes – I do not support impacting small mom and pop rentals, with just a few units being rented.

I support stronger limits on evictions – I am open to what conditions would be considered just cause, such as an owner or the owner's family wanting to occupy the space. There could be a lengthy list of allowable "just cause" evictions – it requires careful study of similar ordinances around the state.

I would also support restrictions of only the most extreme rent increases, like a \$500 a month increase on a \$3000 a month apartment. That kind of increase is extremely hard to plan for and forces people out of our community. Analysis is necessary, but I think we should be looking at the only the most extreme increases, possibly 10% or more in a single year.

Do you support a law limiting loss of existing housing units? Explain.

Yes. Given our current situation, we should be looking at time-limited ordinances that penalize shrinking the number of housing units available by replacing existing units with fewer units.

Should Palo Alto adopt the “Palmer fix” that requires the inclusion of Below Market Rate housing in new rental housing projects? Please answer Yes or No.

Yes.

OFFICE DEVELOPMENT / USAGE

Neighborhood services, such as doctors and therapists, are being displaced by larger tech or R&D businesses (e.g., 550 Hamilton, 2600 El Camino Real, 385 Sherman). Would you make changes to zoning rules or enforcement to protect neighborhood services?

Yes, we need to strengthen our CN zones which our neighborhood serving services. We must also re-evaluate how our zoning is impacting small medical offices in particular.

Should transportation and parking standards be modified to reflect the realities of increasing office and R&D employee densities? If so, how?

Yes, this seem eminently logical, doesn't it? We do need to measure shifting transportation habits as well as increased densities. It's critical we fund our business registry and other data sources to get this critical data. For example, we really don't know how the downtown TMA is performing. They are comparing improvements to a fixed baseline from several years ago, without consideration for any increased business population during that time.

QUALITY OF LIFE

What two things would you prioritize to make Palo Alto and its neighborhoods more livable?

1. Create a Transportation department goal of minimizing cut through traffic through local neighborhood streets by maximizing vehicle flow on our major arterials along with our other transportation policies aimed at reducing commuter traffic on our roadways. Except where there are demonstrated safety issues, changes should not decrease vehicle flow.
2. Fund and execute on our Parks and Recreation Master plan which is filled with improvements to benefit all neighborhoods in Palo Alto.

How do we balance the pressure to build housing against the limits of infrastructure, such as transportation, parks, school capacity, and the environment?

The Citizens group that worked on our Comprehensive Plan did an outstanding job of striking some tough compromises to balance these sometimes competing goals. We need to make sure that Council respects the works of hardworking citizen groups like this one – rash decisions late at night have proven not to work for us.

We can not pursue any one goal to the exclusion of others. Some council members proposed building 10,000 additional housing units in Palo Alto as part of our Comprehensive Plan with no analysis on the impacts on transportation, parks, our Schools or the environment. We need thoughtful leaders who can make choices that let Palo Alto grow in a sustainable manner. This means considering all of these elements, making data-based decisions, and moving in moderation.

TRANSPORTATION

Should businesses be responsible for reducing traffic and parking impacts? Should the businesses pay for the remedies and how? What is the City's role?

Yes. Businesses need to help pay their fair share of the impacts caused by commuters. We are one of the few cities without a business tax. It's time we have one. The largest companies have the largest impact and I think we should work with Cupertino, Mountain View, and other nearby cities to design a tax that is scaled based on the size of impacts an employer causes with exceptions for small businesses.

According to the latest US Census Bureau data, 88% of Palo Alto renter households have at least one car. Do you support reduced parking requirements to promote building housing? Will renters in these developments park in the surrounding neighborhood? If not, explain why not.

I support unbiased analysis of parking requirements. Certain types of housing, such as disabled or senior housing could very well require less parking. We need to be very certain with hard data before assuming people will not have cars.

Wishful thinking by councils from 2000 – 2014 hurt us when many buildings downtown were approved with inadequate parking, generating 2000 unparked cars that began parking in the neighborhoods. We do not want to create more of these unintended consequences. We are still working on repairing the impacts of those previous decisions.

You should be able to park in front of your own home.

What are your ideas for solving our traffic problems (other than using Caltrain, which is over capacity even with planned expansions)?

Parking permit programs have worked. When we implemented RPP, the number of carpoolers we saw increased. We need to continue to decrease business parking in residential neighborhoods each year, as we fund our Transportation Management Association (TMA), to encourage companies to support the TMA and use it.

New commercial buildings need to be fully parked

We need to build a downtown garage and a garage on Cal Avenue as has been promised to the voters multiple times.

We should look at some transportation centers for parking, such as 280 and Page Mill with shuttles to the Research Park.

We need more express busses from the South and East

We need better measurement of Stanford compliance with the "no new net trips" agreement

GRADE SEPARATION

Describe a creative funding strategy you would employ to improve Palo Alto's grade separation options.

We should consider a multi-city Construction Authority that spans San Mateo and Santa Clara county to fund at the County, State, and Federal level as well as manage this extremely large and complex

public works project. This has worked well in Southern California to create a trench. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alameda_Corridor. The Construction Authority would have the ability to develop a sophisticated funding plan. The Cities would also be responsible for a portion which should include funding from businesses.

How should Palo Alto collaborate with other cities to coordinate options and obtain more funding for grade separations from regional, state, and Federal governments

See my answer above.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Are you satisfied with current Code Enforcement as a way of protecting neighborhood uses and quality of life? If yes, why? If not, how would you increase the effectiveness of Code Enforcement activities?

No, I am not.

We need to make sure our code enforcement department is adequately and properly staffed. We lost a productive member of the code enforcement team. Enforcement needs to be a higher priority and to get the funding it deserves. We have an audit planned to dig into this area by the City Auditor. Too many complaints appear to languish. We also need to tighten up code with stronger penalties for multiple violations.

CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

In light of the recent departure of several senior city staff members, what would you do to improve the attraction and retention of quality staff?

Many cities in California are experiencing a wave of retirements as the baby boomers reach that age. I am happy to have Ed Shikada on board to focus on hiring this fall before he takes over in January. We need to build up our bench strength to be able to promote from within – some of our current openings may very well be filled by internal candidates.

We need to make sure we have strong managers in place that are creating places that people want to work, without discrimination or bias, that provide opportunities for professional growth.

One of our biggest challenges for city staff, similar to teachers, is housing affordability.

There are other creative things we can do. One idea I've discussed with the City Manager is creating a remote Palo Alto office for staff that are not community facing, but purely "back office". Perhaps they could live and work in a more affordable part of California. We are already allowing people to work from home occasionally. Finally, there are private companies, such as Landed, that can help public employees with home purchases.

How would you improve communications and collaboration with the PAUSD and School Board?

I am endorsed by the entire PAUSD school board and the quality of our schools is extremely high priority for me.

The city and school district have a good working relationship but it can be improved. The city needs to avoid scheduling major construction projects right at the start of the school year, and we need to work together on traffic, transportation and parking.

The Council and the School Board are both ready to move forward on Cubberley. I'd like to see the next Mayor form a working committee to bring extra attention to this important collaboration.

The public points out that last minute and significant changes at the dais by Council members is lacking in transparency and not good public policy. Furthermore, last-minute changes do not allow for staff analysis or public input. How can we better ensure the public has a chance to review and comment on these matters?

By voting for thoughtful, moderate council candidates that have a track record of following through on what they say during election season after they are elected. By looking for council candidates with life experience and wisdom to make sure the city doesn't screw up and make a rash, late-night decision that will take decades to undo (like our unfunded pension liabilities). And by looking at past behaviors and voting for candidates that have shown respect to both the majority and minority opinions on issues and followed ethical and collegial processes to make decisions. We can disagree but how you disagree is a sign of mature leadership.

I have strived to focus on the issue at hand and debate the facts to come to good decisions for the benefit of Palo Altans.

I am a defender of open and transparent government. There have been occasions when it was necessary to speak up and I do speak up when needed. For example, after one particularly egregious last-minute change, I wrote this [editorial](#). The following week, apologies were made and the Comprehensive Plan was restored.

FINANCES

How do you plan to fund the shortfall in city's long-term pension and health benefits liability?

I have studied this issue during my four years, have had long discussions with Council member Filseth and attended a Stanford Symposium on the topic. It's complicated. We've taken steps to increase transparency that are a model for the rest of the state – pushing to make unfunded liabilities more than a footnote in our financial statements and for staff to have the ability to track it closer to real-time (rather than just annually). We need to pay down the unfunded liabilities over the next 40 – 50 years by:

1. Decreasing our budget to stop increasing the unfunded liabilities. We have about an \$8M gap. We asked staff to cut \$4M from the budget this year structually. We'll need to find another \$4M next year.
2. Make increasing payments into City fund above the payments that Calpers requires that reflect the true rate of return of pension investments. This is like making extra mortgage payments.

During the last economic downturn, Social Services funding was cut and has still not been restored. Do you support increasing the Social Services allocation to at least prior levels adjusted for inflation?

Yes, I have supported that and continue to support it. This is relatively a small amount of money compared to many decisions the Council makes.

ENVIRONMENT

Do you support dedicating as parkland those properties currently and long used as park space but not formally dedicated as such in order to protect from future development those spaces currently enjoyed by the public?

Yes, I absolutely do. Places such as Winter Lodge and Gamble Garden should be recognized and protected as City Park space.