



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

Pat Burt Responses

EXPERIENCE

What experience with Palo Alto community issues would you bring to the council?

Past experience:

- Environmental leader
 - Santa Clara County Pollution Prevention Committee
 - California EPA Pollution Prevention Task Force
 - Vice-Chair, Sustainable San Mateo County
 - California EPA Comparative Risk Project
- Neighborhood Lead
 - President, University South Neighborhoods Group
 - Co-founder Community Center Neighborhood Group
- Planning and Transportation Commission for nine years
- City Council Member 2008-2016 and Mayor in 2010, 2016
 - Chair, Finance Committee;
 - Chair, Policy and Services Committee
 - Chair, Council Rail Committee
 - Chair, City/School Liaison Committee
 - Chair, San Francisquito Creek flood protection agency
 - Representative, Santa Clara County Emergency Preparedness Council
 - Chair, Peninsula Cities Consortium on Rail
 - Chair, Advanced Water Recycling Committee

Since leaving the Council in 2017, I have played an active role in advocating publicly through op-eds, advocating to and advising council members, addressing the council, including through joint letters of community leaders and former mayors.

GOALS

What are the top three goals you want to achieve in the next four years on the city council?

1. Preserving valued city services through the economic emergency while addressing additional needs of local serving businesses, nonprofits, and residents.
2. Building a consensus for and implementing a sustainable plan for more housing than job growth with a greatest focus on low and moderate income housing while investing in transportation and infrastructure to meet evolving needs.
3. Strengthening our preparedness and resiliency while protecting our environment.

PUBLIC SAFETY

How would you help set policies for PAPD to address racial profiling and use of excessive force?

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?

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.

CITY GOVERNANCE

Do you agree with how the City recently cut its budget? If not, what would you have done differently?

The COVID emergency and its economic impacts have forced the city to make tough budget decisions. Rather than merely moderating the pace of an all-time record capital budget, the city chose to slash our city services: fire and police, libraries, parks and open space, community centers, transportation, Children's Theatre, and youth services. Less visible, but vital, functions like code enforcement, parking management, emergency services, and development oversight have also been chopped.

Staff proposed a bureaucratic approach, cutting departments across the board, including emergency services during a pandemic. They didn't offer many alternative options to the Council and the Council didn't challenge them to do so.

The council should be more actively engaged in the budget planning process. That means sometimes challenging staff recommendations which requires institutional knowledge, critical thinking, and leadership to identify and build support for feasible alternatives.

By just modestly reducing investments in big capital projects, re-bidding contracts, and curtailing raises, we could retain the services that define our community. Capital investments shouldn't be at the expense of critical services.

When I served on the Council, we adopted a 3-part strategic solution to our overdue infrastructure investments based on recommendations of the Infrastructure Blue Ribbon Committee. The plan was to grow new revenue, primarily from hotels, for capital projects rather than these projects coming at the expense of the valued

services. Instead, the budget adopted by City Council prioritizes paying for new facilities and capital projects over services in this critical time.

In addition, some of the reductions in this year's capital budget should be reserved for contingency planning including:

- Increasing foothills fire prevention and response capabilities
- Contingency reserves for further declines in revenue and to meet emerging needs from the pandemic and economic aftermath

What is your position on Proposition 15, the constitutional amendment to require commercial and industrial properties to be taxed based on their market value, rather than their purchase price?

I support Prop 15.

Would you make any changes to the balance of power between the city manager and staff and the elected City Council entrusted to do the will of the people?

Yes. Certain of those changes would be through amending city policies, including to the City Council Policies and Protocols. Equally or more important is for the Council to understand how to and to reassert its full authorities in policy setting and oversight. In addition, needs a greater foundation in institutional knowledge, understanding of governing effectiveness.

Palo Alto has a wealth of talent and knowledge in its residents, but often hires consultants with little expert knowledge of the city. Should the city utilize the talent and knowledge of its residents differently, and if so, how?

I have long been a believer in and committed to leveraging, enhancing, and empowering community resources and intellectual capital.

I began my community engagement through leading the University South Neighborhoods Group through the successful SOFA Coordinated Area Plan. As Mayor in 2010, I co-initiated the IBRC infrastructure task force. I also: led in embracing community expertise during the High Speed Rail period, led in establishing a multi-stakeholder group (contrary to staff objections) for the Comprehensive Plan, advocated for a CSS based multi-stakeholder group on grade separations (and opposed a very expensive staff/consultant driven process), supported the NVCAP process (and advised community members on how to wrestle their proper authority from the staff and stakeholders), created a community group to advocate for a business tax to fund transportation and affordable housing, facilitated consensus on the Winton Ct affordable housing project, and led a group of community leaders advocating for a series of collaborative initiatives in response to the COVID emergency.

HOUSING

RHNA states that Palo Alto's greatest housing need is for units affordable by those earning 80% and below Area Median Income. Do you support this goal and, if so, how would you accomplish it?

Yes. I also support greater focus on moderate income housing which Palo Alto has had even greater difficulty adding since the "market" will not provide it and it is not currently subsidized. I would:

- Convert selected areas from "office" zoning to higher density "residential" so that housing does not compete with the higher investment returns of offices.
- Affordable housing needs sites and reasonable land costs. Allow affordable housing on city-owned surface parking lots above the parking.
- Reinstate higher impact fees on new offices that were reversed by the Council in 2017. Palo Alto fees are doubly important because they are also used by the county uses for Stanford's fees.
- When the economy begins to normalize, enact a business tax, focused on big developers and big business. Despite the highest office values in the country, Palo Alto is one of the few California cities without a

business tax. A tax modeled on what East Palo Alto adopted in 2018, and at only a quarter the rate of San Francisco, would fund transportation needs, and TRIPLE our affordable housing funding.

- The Trump administration recently reversed the Obama era AFFH requirement that cities adopt plans for fair housing practices in their communities. Palo Alto should enact the Obama rule as a city policy, setting an example for other cities to follow.

PAN has officially endorsed Alternative M, which was brought to the NVCAP working group by several PAN members. What innovative ways might you explore to pay for low income housing and BMR housing in North Ventura and other sites in Palo Alto?

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What would you do to protect existing rental housing and its tenants?

I would bring back the 2018 colleagues memo by DuBois, Holman and Kou (which I helped draft) to strengthen renter protections in Palo Alto to determine what measures are needed beyond the AB1482 state protections from 2019. I would convene a multi-stakeholder group, including renters and HRC members, to evaluate needed measures. I would also pursue regulatory measures to protect existing rental units and assure "no net loss" of units.

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

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.

OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

Would you as a councilmember encourage more working at home to reduce commuting, traffic, pollution, and climate change? If so, what specific steps would you take?

I would encourage greater WFH. Despite the "visionary" leadership of the tech community having been unable to foresee the benefits of WFH/remote work until it was imposed on them, we and they now see the multiple benefits of it long term in various forms: less traffic and pollution, lower office demand and office cost, and improved quality of life for workers.

The city (potentially in collaboration with other cities regionally) should explore remote work as a major component of significantly expanded TDM programs and through the city TMA, in combination with full enforcement mechanisms.

Regarding the Jobs/Housing Imbalance, how much, where and what kind of new office space can Palo Alto sustain? Should Palo Alto consider rezoning office properties to reduce the amount of future office development?

I led in the creating the annual office cap. I also supported maintaining a Downtown office cap and supported the citizen led revised office/commercial limit under the Comp Plan.

I have advocated for rezoning selected areas from “office” zoning to higher density “residential” so that housing does not compete with the higher investment returns of offices, including in designated areas of the Stanford Research Park. Affordable housing needs sites and reasonable land costs. Allow affordable housing on city-owned surface parking lots above the parking.

What other ideas do you have for incentivizing housing construction over office construction?

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TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

What do you see as our most serious traffic issues and how would you fix them?

Our traffic issues need to be divided between what we were facing before the pandemic, what we now face, and what we anticipate for the future.

Prior to the pandemic, we had massive traffic congestion on all of our arterial streets and traffic/safety issues in many of our neighborhoods. In addition, congestion at our at grade crossings was severe and scheduled to become overwhelming once additional train/gate downtime occurred. Now, those issues are on hold and, due to remote working, we may not see a full return to the prior level of congestion. This gives us an opportunity to plan for and move forward on a sustainable, comprehensive transportation system for our future that will create fewer parking impacts, less atmospheric pollution and GHG’s, and better mobility for all forms of transportation.

We should move forward with completing our “smart signal” system, grade separations, better biking (not at the expense of traffic flow) and off street bikeways, and better transit (including emerging and exciting 21st century technologies).

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?

Big businesses and developers should pay their fair share of the impacts they primarily create, including a portion of the the impacts of the housing that is being developed as a result of their employess. The city should re-instate the higher impact fees and re-initiate pursuit of a significant business tax focused on big business once the economy recovers.

What changes, if any, would you make to our city's parking requirements and residential parking programs?

Parking impacts are likely to be less in the future due to remote work. Nevertheless, the city should continue to limit commercial parking in neighborhoods. Restricting parking not only addresses the neighborhood quality of life, it incentivizes traffic and pollution reduction.

COMMUNITY LIFE

How would you improve our city services and how would these improvements be funded?

1. We should slow the rate of our capital projects during the fiscal emergency to maintain more of our services.

2. We could then re-bid capital projects at costs that are falling from inflated costs during the boom period to deflated costs during the downturn.
3. We should fund expansion of transportation (Transit and TMA) programs through the future business tax.
4. Staff should limit and have significantly greater oversight of consultants.

How would you improve the city's code enforcement department?

1. We should re-instate the full code enforcement department staffing.
2. The city Attorney should more vigorously enforce fines.
3. Conditions of approval on projects should require detailed self reporting and certification by corporate officers upon penalty of perjury. Those reports should be readily available on the city website and should be automatically provided to neighboring impacted parties. These measures can significantly leverage and expand the effectiveness of city enforcement staff.

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

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.

Many organizations are having a difficult time recruiting volunteers, including many Palo Alto commissions. What would you do as a council member to encourage more people to participate in city government and civic organizations?

We should proactively engage community organizations to recruit: non-profits, neighborhood groups, service organizations, parent organizations, and ethnic groups. We should also initiate a several meeting, less formal abbreviated version of Leadership Palo Alto to familiarize residents with the opportunities and how to become more engaged.

Neighbors who were following the two supermarkets, first at Edgewood Plaza and then at College Terrace were dismayed that the City did not enforce the promises made by developers to provide for a grocery store. The City then did not fully collect the penalties that were due the City when the developers failed to provide the grocery stores. How the City should handle such matters?

The city should tighten the conditions of approval and penalty triggers for such projects. The City Attorney should pursue such fines more aggressively.

Given that some neighborhoods are closer to the train stations and to services than others, how would you balance the recommendation by housing agencies to concentrate growth in those areas with the livability of those neighborhoods?

The residential growth near train stations should be designated for the core areas near the stations; the downtowns and along El Camino. That development should be coupled with RPP to assure that parking does not overflow into the neighborhoods. The business tax should fund a citywide TMA that would subsidize transit passes for low income workers who are the ones who drive the most, but can't afford a rail pass. With electrified Caltrain, that service will be even more efficient at frequent.

GRADE SEPARATION

Palo Alto is considering grade-separation designs with a wide range of price tags. What are your preferred solutions? How important is project cost in selecting grade-separation designs?

Based on information to date, the most promising alternatives are the “partial underpasses” for Charleston, East Meadow, and Churchill. Because these were citizen initiated concepts, contrary to assertions by the consultants and city manager that no such additional alternatives were possible, their designs have not yet been as developed as the other alternatives. Particularly, the pedestrian and bike crossings need refinement. In addition, the Churchill alternative requires awaiting Caltrain’s upcoming grade separation study and new standards which begins next year.

If buying residential properties allows the City to improve a grade-separation design and/or reduce its cost, should the City acquire these properties? Or should the City only consider designs that require no property acquisitions?

The city should continue to only consider designs that minimize or eliminate the need for property acquisitions. If limited acquisitions are required for a superior design, that trade-off should be considered transparently.

LOCAL ECONOMY

As economic impacts from the pandemic increase, what are your ideas to help local small businesses, especially those that serve neighborhoods, to survive and thrive?

First, the city needs to convene a stakeholder group of local serving businesses, community members, and large businesses/property owners to identify needs, recommend strategic actions, and build council/community support. Currently, city staff is the convener, filter and vehicle for soliciting input. The community is willing and able to support the survival and thriving of local services and retail. The city should also re-hire an economic development manager whose focus would be on local serving businesses, and attracting tech companies with business purposes benefit the region and society.