



## 2020 City Council Candidate Questions

### TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

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

#### **PAT BURT**

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.

#### **REBECCA EISENBERG**

We are amongst the wealthiest cities in the world, and should have world class city services. Yet, each year our community services degrade rather than improve, even while the very wealthiest businesses and individuals grow wealthier (the rest of us, sadly, are more often stagnating or growing poorer).

I strongly believe that Palo Alto has the capacity to be a model city in terms of equity, inclusion, and climate action. All of these goals are related, given that climate change, and divestments in community services -- like the community services that our city council chose to defund rather than to tax our billionaire businesses -- disparately impact communities of color and other marginalized groups. One of the most proven methods of anti-racism involves investing in a safety net. Providing a strong safety net for our community also brings the advantage of transforming our neighborhoods into the genuinely best possible places to live.

In addition to restoring all the community services defunded by the City Council in spring (plus providing some extra to hire back the employees whom the Council fired with their decisions), I would improve our city services by investing heavily in the following:

1. affordable housing
2. healthcare for residents and workers
3. child care
4. better funded public schools
5. transit

How would I fund these things? I would explore the following possibilities, in no particular order:

1. Enact a business tax including on our largest companies and biggest employers, as well as on commercial developers, because Palo Alto is the only city in the state (if not country) with a material business presence that lacks any business tax ... and given that businesses make up 80% of daily users of city services, that is literally insane.
2. Raise commercial developer impact fees for office construction projects.
3. Revive Palo Alto's Office of Inspections and Enforcement, which has been almost eliminated due to budget cuts, despite the fact that it is revenue-producing. Use this office to enforce non-compliant commercial developers, e.g. near Stanford Research Park (where many large sites have sat abandoned mid-

construction for years, even prior to the coronavirus) and to collect code-defined penalties when due. At \$500 per violation per day, these penalties add up, which is why some cities collect tens and even hundreds of dollars year for city services by their enforcement offices. We must do that.

4. Potentially claim a billion dollars of city-owned real estate by undergrounding the train.

## **LYDIA KOU**

Based on my Budget Survey, the majority of residents responding wanted city services rather than Capital Improvement Projects to continue. Unfortunately, the City Manager and Staff recommended, and the majority of the City Council agreed, to slash city services and fund Capital Improvement Projects.

The City Manager's staff and the City's Organization Chart need to be carefully examined. It is, in my opinion, top-heavy. Jobs need to be evaluated and reduced.

Once we are through COVID, the Business Community, especially large employers, must start paying their fair share. Allowing developers to under-park their buildings passes the cost to residents. This means funds that could be used for City services go to Capital Improvement Projects, i.e. garages.

Palo Alto will be different post-COVID. We will need to proceed cautiously and make sensible changes where possible while adjusting to a new reality. Flexibility and "out of the box" thinking will be required. We must involve our residents at each step of the way.

## **ED LAUING**

"City Services" is a broad category! My broad answer is "listen to residents' problems" and take prompt action. Responses from the city on "little things" is quite important to our citizens. These things are no longer little if a resident has not had her dryer installation approved after three visits from the city. (An example I heard recently from a resident.)

## **STEVEN LEE**

Our council just had to cut approximately \$40m from our budget, including deep cuts to city services. If elected, I will seek to restore funding for these critical city services by looking more critically at our capital improvement plan, and evaluating which "nice to have" city projects can be delayed like our police building and parking garages in order to preserve and maintain critical city services and programs which are needed now more than ever because of COVID-19.

We also need to look at putting in place a progressive business tax, which asks only larger, still profitable businesses who are doing well even during COVID-19 to step up and pay their fair share, to help maintain and invest in critical services when nearly everyone else is being impacted financially.

## **RAVEN MALONE**

There are many services that are essential to keeping our community safe and healthy. Especially during shelter-in-place, we should have accessible mental health services available to all in our city, including our youth and unhoused residents. Additionally, as I mentioned above, we should make sure we're investing in programs that build and educate our community. We can fund improvements in all of these services with a business license tax.

## **GREER STONE**

The best way to improve our city services and continue to fund the essential city services we rely on as residents are to prioritize city services in our budget. I was disturbed in the Spring when City Council was considering cutting essential services before suspending unnecessary capital improvement projects. I believe we must always place people first. Protecting and promoting greater city services will be one of my top priorities.

## **GREG TANAKA**

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our city, state, and federal budgets. The economy will take time to recover, so fiscal pressures will remain for at least the next year. We must manage our newly-limited city resources wisely to ensure that Palo Alto emerges from the pandemic as unscathed as possible. Sensible spending and fiscal oversight can help the city continue to provide high levels of prized services such as our libraries, our parks, the Children's Theater, the Junior Museum & Zoo, and other much-loved City of Palo Alto amenities that have been receiving cuts. It is also crucial that we execute a recovery plan to enable a strong economy that can support the services and investments that make Palo Alto a great community.

## **CARI TEMPLETON**

The Mitchell Park Community Center is a great model to emulate elsewhere in the City. Having a place with a park, community center, teen center, library and cafe all on one site has been a godsend for our family and many others. I would love to see us view some of our community centers through this lens of utility and enjoyment for people of all ages. Youths and seniors, and all those in between should be able to make use of our community centers this way. Funding such projects on city land would be achieved through similar methods as Mitchell Park Library: ballot measures and charitable donations.

Additionally, the City should work to modernize our communications infrastructure throughout Palo Alto, so our residents can benefit from advanced metering on their electricity, water, and gas, and can choose a fiber internet connection to their home anywhere in the City. We should fast-track our current "fiber to the premise" exploration underway with City of Palo Alto Utilities.

## **AJIT VARMA**

I think we can provide more cultural and recreational activities along with events to increase the enjoyment of living in Palo Alto. These improvements can be funded by increasing tax revenues by encouraging more businesses and development in Palo Alto.