



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

GRADE SEPARATION

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?

PAT BURT

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.

REBECCA EISENBERG

The latter -- the city should not consider designs that resort to forced acquisition of residential properties -- aka, eminent domain -- as a cost-saving method. I am not even convinced that using eminent domain to save money, when you are one of the wealthiest cities in the world, is constitutional.

Regardless, legal or not, eminent domain only should be used if there is no other option. Forcing our neighbors to live in fear that the city may take their homes is a horrible way to treat members of our community! If there is anyone who lives near the train that is experiencing the anxiety of possibly losing their homes, I think we owe it to them to remove that option from consideration. Of course it's worth the money.

We can afford to do better. Which is the very least that our community deserves. The very existence of this question concerns me -- and I think it should concern all of us. Here in Palo Alto, taking a person's home to save a dime is not something we should be considering.

LYDIA KOU

I cannot support eminent domain. No amount of money can justify property acquisitions when a homeowner is not ready to part with their home. A home contains priceless memories of children growing up, events that have taken place at the home, loving pieces of art, and landscaping that the homeowner has done through the years. I would encourage careful planning which does not seize private property.

ED LAUING

At this stage of study for the project, there is no justification for property acquisitions.

STEVEN LEE

[Answer includes both Grade Separation questions – this one and “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?”]

I am not in favor of any grade separation proposals that involve the taking of entire properties. We should not be displacing families or reducing our housing stock, especially given our current housing crisis. If residents were voluntarily interested in selling their property that would be a different question, but I doubt that enough homeowners would be willing to make that sacrifice.

Grade separation will likely be one of the most expensive capital projects in our city's history. While we need to be thoughtful about the various solutions in front of us, we do need to get moving on making a decision. There are no perfect solutions and there will be tradeoffs. So we need to evaluate the options based on which ones

have the most serious impacts to our most vulnerable segments of our community -- and make a decision accordingly. Assigning relative weights to each design criteria will help us eliminate some of the noise associated with each plan and focus on the options, which while imperfect, provide for the best outcome for the most people in our community over the long term. We also need to make a decision soon so that we don't miss out on funding from outside the city.

RAVEN MALONE

The solutions for each grade separation shouldn't follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Whether it makes sense to acquire property is dependent on evaluating the costs compared to the safety benefits of any particular design.

GREER STONE

I am uncomfortable with eminent domain, but do believe there are situations where the city should acquire private property when it would not involve a full taking of the private property and/or when the homeowner is willing to sell their property. The city should avoid this and pursue options that would require no property acquisitions, but there are some limited circumstances where it may be necessary to acquire private property to provide substantial benefits to the community as a whole for a project that will be with our city for decades to come.

GREG TANAKA

I don't think solutions that require eminent domain are an appropriate solution. All other alternatives should be explored first. I believe opting for the tunnel option as it is the least disruptive and allows the city the opportunity to create parks where train tracks used to be.

CARI TEMPLETON

Not all property acquisitions will affect the whole property or diminish a person's ability to live in or enjoy their home. Some alternatives that XCAP is considering may acquire a "sliver" of the property, which might be acceptable depending on the situation. My preference is that we promote alternatives that minimize property acquisition.

AJIT VARMA

It's likely that all options will require some acquisition of properties (even if temporarily for shoofly tracks) but some designs require much lower property acquisitions and those are the options that should be prioritized.