



2020 City Council Candidate Questions Raven Malone Responses

EXPERIENCE

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

I review the agendas every week and speak during public comment, support people who choose to comment, as well as advise others who also wish to engage.

GOALS

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

1. Creating infrastructure for our future
2. Housing as a human right
3. Reimagining public safety

PUBLIC SAFETY

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

PAPD has had several issues regarding transparency, racial profiling, and excessive force. Our city budget cannot afford to continue settling excessive force lawsuits, and we need to ensure accountable policing in our city so that all of our residents can truly feel safe. I would work with marginalized communities in Palo Alto who have been disproportionately profiled and the police department to create a shared understanding and more trust in the community. This will allow us to set better policies for everyone.

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?

One of my central platform planks is reimagining community safety, which means refocusing on community resources and taking a look at what police are asked to do, focusing on Holistic Emergency Responses. This means tasking unarmed, well-trained civilians with responding to instances involving mental health emergencies, homelessness, or routine traffic stops that don't require an armed response. Our police department should focus their resources on serious incidents where they are most needed. We also need to make sure we are investing in a vibrant, sustainable community, which is essential to maintaining public safety. This includes investments in communal spaces that bring us together, such as after-school sports, libraries, arts programs, and public transportation. Whether this requires reducing the police budget should depend on city revenue and the changing needs of the community.

CITY GOVERNANCE

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

While I recognize the difficult choices that needed to be made with the budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic, I do not agree with the services that the City decided to cut from the budget. During this time, we have to prioritize our most vulnerable citizens to ensure that their basic needs, such as housing, community safety, education, and nutrition, are met. I would prioritize asking city management to reduce their salaries temporarily before asking our other employees to take a pay cut to make up for budget losses, along with reviewing which services are most essential for the community in the short-term. We should not be browning out fire stations in the midst of this disastrous fire season. We need to make sure we are making budget decisions that truly reflect the community's needs and interests.

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 Proposition 15. In a time of budget cuts, this will help ensure that we have the funds to protect our schools and other essential local services.

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?

As a council member, I will do my job of direction and oversight. This means being specific in directing the City Manager and Staff to ensure that the outcomes accurately reflect the will of the people, and holding them accountable accordingly.

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 want to prevent contracting out city services and bringing outside consultants into our city as much as possible. We should be listening to the community directly to solve their own issues and take advantage of the talent and knowledge of our own residents.

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?

I know firsthand how difficult it is to afford housing in Palo Alto, having worked hard and saved with my fiancée to be able to rent a house here. We should make sure we produce housing at all levels of affordability, encouraging socio-economic diversity in our city. Streamlining the process for housing approval will ensure that we are able to produce enough housing to meet demand. We can also work with nonprofit developers to produce high quality housing for many of Palo Alto's essential workers such as teachers and first responders who currently cannot afford to live here, along with seniors, people with disabilities, and families.

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?

Getting developers to do land dedications would be one way to ensure housing can be affordable in these sites. I would also look into a business tax that has a percentage allocated for affordable housing.

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

It's essential that Palo Alto protect its existing housing and tenants, especially during the pandemic. I will make sure that we don't see apartments torn down and redeveloped into hotels or offices, or groups of small homes

torn down and replaced with single houses. Additionally, I support rent stabilization measures and just cause eviction protections for tenants to ensure that all Palo Altans are able to keep their stable housing. This goes hand-in-hand with making sure we have enough housing, both market-rate and affordable, to meet our demand and alleviate the housing crisis.

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

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.

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?

We've seen during COVID that a lot more people can work from home than we previously thought. The City should absolutely encourage this in the future in order to reduce parking and traffic impacts, and to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that come with commuter car trips. We should have stricter transportation demand management programs by employers and developers — not just suggestions. We can also support incentive programs, either run by employers or by Palo Alto Transportation Management Association (PATMA), and the Stanford Research Park TMA (SRPGo), that reward carpooling and working from home. The parking and traffic problems in Palo Alto are caused by jobs, not residents.

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?

Palo Alto's jobs/housing imbalance is bad for our middle class, bad for traffic, and bad for the environment. I don't think Palo Alto needs a lot more offices, especially with the number of vacant offices as a result of companies like Palantir leaving. Palo Alto should consider rezoning office buildings to mixed-use or exclusively housing. We should be focusing our energy and resources into developing new housing, especially around transit hubs.

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

We should encourage more housing development by reducing excessive parking requirements and raising density limits. Parking requirements are too high and not flexible enough for residential development — but too flexible for commercial development. These requirements make housing harder and more expensive to build. We should be encouraging less driving and more walking and biking. Density limits mean housing downtown like the President Hotel can't be built today. We need more housing like what the President Hotel was before a developer evicted all the residents.

TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

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

Many of the folks who work in our community are unable to live here because of the housing crisis, and have to make long commutes as a result. This, coupled with our continued reliance on automobile transportation and lack of adequate public transit, causes major issues for traffic congestion. Making sure that our workers can live here in Palo Alto by building housing that is affordable to all of them is the first step in solving this issue. We also need to make sure that everyone who lives in our city has a reliable way to get around on public transit. Building new housing around transit hubs will ensure the convenience of using public transit, along with developing protected bike lanes around the city.

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 should either pay for the parking they need, or reduce their need, but this shouldn't come at the expense of quality of life. Employers should encourage working from home and taking public transit, biking, or carpooling. The PATMA and SRPGo are both ways for businesses to work together, and the City should do more to push employers to work with them. I also support a business license tax on our larger employers to fund transportation improvements.

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

Instead of making it easier for commercial developments to reduce their parking requirements, we should make it easier for residential developments. Our current incentives are backwards. As for our RPP programs, we should make sure they are easier to use. I hear from residents and businesses that the online system for ordering permits is a hassle. Let's make it simpler. RPP is important because it keeps businesses and developments from just pushing their parking needs into neighborhoods.

COMMUNITY LIFE

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

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.

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

I would set clear guidelines as far as roles and responsibilities. I would also use one, efficient way to track complaints, instead of two. It's important that when receiving incomplete data, we follow up to get all missing information as well as more information that allows for a clear picture of the complaint. It is also important that we allow a clear way for the public to track their complaints. This not only shows the public that the City is taking valid complaints seriously, but also ensures the City will take action.

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

I'm supportive of suggestions to develop parts of Cubberley to provide senior services, education, gyms, community gathering spaces, and affordable housing for teachers and other workers. Additionally, building more densely would create even more space for new developments to support the community and allow for more open space at Cubberley in general.

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?

Every Palo Alto resident deserves a voice in our local government, and it's incredibly important to engage our residents as much as possible in our decision making processes. As I've been running and since I started learning about local government, I've been surprised at how many good people in this city have not been as engaged in these processes. The pandemic has made our City Council meetings more accessible, as public comment can be done from home, which shows how we change our engagement with the public to meet everyday people where they're at. Additionally, the Black Lives Matter movement has engaged a lot more residents in local issues, especially our marginalized communities. I hope that this engagement continues, and that my candidacy will inspire others like me to get more involved locally. If elected, I want to bring to the table residents who have either felt neglected by local government or felt that it doesn't matter.

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 hold commercial property developers fully accountable for their legal commitments to the community.

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?

Increasing Caltrain service will significantly reduce traffic in Palo Alto and the Peninsula and reduce the climate impact of commuting. New housing near transit, jobs, and services makes sense. That new housing also provides a stronger customer base for local community-serving-retail and restaurants. In order to maintain quality of life for residents, we should make sure to maintain and improve residential permit parking programs (RPP) so that new housing doesn't create competition for street parking.

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?

Grade separations are an incredibly complicated issue for our community, and we have to consider many different community concerns as we figure out solutions, such as: safety; limiting the number of homes taken and avoiding eminent domain if possible; not cutting people off from neighborhoods; cost and feasibility; aesthetics and privacy. City Council has reached too many impasses with this issue in the past, and needs to come up with a collaborative solution soon so that we don't miss funding opportunities. I am committed to listening to all of the community's concerns and working hard to collaborate with my colleagues as we come up with solutions.

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 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.

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?

In my conversations with business owners, I've heard that they're having trouble planning long-term or understanding the rules that they need to abide by. We need to provide leadership with clearer guidelines for these small businesses, and help them to navigate their way through state, county, and city regulations and ordinances. Additionally, as we eventually come out of shelter-in-place, we should make sure they have the resources and permitting to continue operating and recovering. Lastly, encouraging further housing development in our Downtown and around transit hubs will create a strong and consistent customer base for these businesses.