



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

HOUSING

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

PAT BURT

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.

REBECCA EISENBERG

I am a tenant (also a landlord), and I strongly support tenant protections.

Having tried unsuccessfully for more than a decade to be able to afford to buy a house in Palo Alto, my husband and I ultimately recognized that the only way we could afford to live here is to rent. So we rent. Even though my husband and I both are licensed successful attorneys with more than half a century of experience between us, we are not embarrassed that we do not have several million dollars to purchase a home in the assignment area of the public schools we selected for our children. Approximately half of all Palo Alto residents are renters, and that number is higher (approximately 60-70%) for families with children in the public schools, like us.

With two adults whose incomes are essential to the family, two children, a rescue dog and a rescue cat, who rent our home, I represent a typical Palo Alto working family. I do not believe that is common for the city council, but it is a voice that deserves representation.

Even if I did not rent, I still would - and do - support the following tenant protections:

1. Eviction protection, allowing eviction only for “just cause.”
2. Enforcement and extension of anti-discrimination laws, ensuring that tenants are not harassed, discriminated against, or evicted on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, age, familial status, sex, gender, gender identity, disability, and membership in other protected class.
3. Production of more rental units, to lower prices as a result of supply and demand.
4. Protection of existing rental units in order to enable residents to stay in their communities, and to avoid gentrification and displacement.
5. Support of state and county rental protections.

LYDIA KOU

To protect residential renters from very rapid increases in rents, I wrote a "Colleagues' Memo" with Councilmember Tom DuBois to cap annual increases. Such memos instruct City Staff to draft a proposed ordinance and provide the intent and requirements. Subsequently, State Assembly Bill (AB) 1482 of 2019 ("The Tenant Protection Act") enacted similar protections ([Summary of Key Provisions](#)): a cap of 5% plus local inflation and no unjust evictions.

When the expiration of existing COVID-related protections are announced, the City must be ready to determine what protections for renters – both residential and small-businesses – are needed.

Regional housing policy is supposed to be based on "the 3 P": protect, preserve, and produce. However, the implementation of that policy is heavily focused on "produce", neglecting the other aspects. Pushing back on regional government (MTC/ABAG) to honor their own policies is something I have done and is something that needs to be done more by Palo Alto in cooperation with similar cities.

ED LAUING

AB 1482 was passed in 2019 and applies to Palo Alto with many additional provisions.

As a guideline (not always applicable to all of the many rental situations that exist), rents should not go up more than 5% a year. This is a new rent limit to protect people from very significant and rapid price increases.

But we also need to address the loss of rental unit supply as parcels are redeveloped. Much of our existing rental stock is in older, naturally more affordable, units that are ripe picking for real estate investors or redevelopment. With 44 percent of our residents living in rental units, the market incentives to convert that housing to high-end mixed use is a substantial threat to our community. At a minimum, we need to ensure no net loss of housing units and consider strategies to prevent displacement of existing renters.

STEVEN LEE

I strongly believe in the 3Ps -- we need to preserve housing, protect tenants and produce housing. As a renter myself, I think it is important that good tenants have stability and predictability when it comes to their housing arrangements, especially during COVID-19. As a city, we need to ensure that good tenants are not being taken advantage of or being treated unfairly by "bad-actor" landlords. Most landlords, including my own, are good landlords. They keep reasonable rents, with modest increases every so often, they only evict tenants for good reasons and they are generally responsive to the needs of their tenants. Renter protections aren't targeted at these good landlords nor would they be adversely impacted by them. But they will help protect good renters, who often have less power and fewer resources, against "bad actor" landlords.

My parents are literally mom and pop landlords (not in Palo Alto). I understand how difficult it may be for these types of landlords to make a profit, if any at all. As long as landlords are good landlords, we don't want to do anything that causes them to be negatively impacted, especially if their own livelihood or fixed income relies on their one or two rental units.

RAVEN MALONE

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.

GREER STONE

As a renter, this is an issue that my wife and I are all too familiar with. We are both teachers and rent a small 1-bedroom apartment in Midtown. We live with constant concern that the next rent increase could force us out of our home, especially given inadequate protections for renters.

I would immediately propose for the City Council to enact the Palmer fix to require a percentage of rental units to be reserved for low-income earners. This policy was in place in Palo Alto for many years with great success. City Council has had the ability for the last two years to enact this policy fix, but they have failed to act. This would be one of my top priorities.

Also, I would join some of my council colleagues in drafting a colleague's memo to study additional renter protections to help support the 45% of Palo Altans who are renters. Vice Mayor DuBois and Councilmember Kou authored such a memo in 2018 but were unable to gain a sufficient majority to study the issue. I would join them in bringing this issue back to council.

GREG TANAKA

I consider housing to be a human right and that encompasses the residents in Palo Alto already occupying rental space. This means funding for teachers and school employees housing so that those educating our children do not have to take a two-hour drive to get here. I also supported adopting renter protection policies, such as stopping eviction to protect tenants during the pandemic. It is of the utmost importance to ensure Palo Altans are not being displaced from their homes.

CARI TEMPLETON

We must protect those currently in stable housing and keep people housed, particularly in light of housing insecurity exasperated [sic] by the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, I believe we must work with regional, state, and national representatives to create a rental assistance and debt relief program for renters affected by COVID, to help them pay rent and/or pay off their back rent so neither the tenants nor the landlords are bankrupted.

AJIT VARMA

I support protecting tenants who get displaced by requiring proper compensation to find a new place.