



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

Greg Tanaka Responses

EXPERIENCE

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

- As City Council Finance Chair, I worked to eliminate excess spending, frequently being the lone vote against excessive staff raises.
- I worked to minimize city tax & fee increases while ensuring funding support for critical priorities, such as for safety and youth.
- I worked to add more parklets, the development of these parklets encouraged outdoor dining. This allowed businesses to operate through the pandemic and enhanced customer experience. I have championed this development and worked hard to ensure its success. Also, I supported the street closure of both California and University Avenue. This encourages walking and for people to patronize local businesses. Especially during the pandemic, sidewalks do not allow residents to sufficiently practice social distancing.
- I was directly involved in pension reforms which accounted for the unfunded liability. I allocated funding to prevent unfunded liabilities from increasing. On the issue of unfunded pension liabilities, I have used my office hours to reach out to Palo Alto residents to gain their perspectives.
- I also worked for small business grants. This helped 50 businesses which were incredibly important during the COVID-19 recession. The unprecedented challenges that have been brought as a result of the pandemic are one of the many issues I will address if re-elected.
- I also voted yes on the development of Wilton Court. This was an affordable housing project for disabled residents of Palo Alto. This extended compassionate and safe areas for those in Palo Alto who are developmentally disabled.

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As Planning Commission Chair, I championed the popular Cal. Ave. Streetscape Project. As President of the College Terrace Residents' Association, I led the creation of Palo Alto's first Residential Permit Parking Program. I also led the successful traffic program in the neighborhood. I recognize the concerns of Palo Altans in addressing the congestive traffic in the city and will continue to work to bring comprehensive solutions.

As a parent with kids at Paly and Greene, I understand the needs of working families and the critical importance of our schools, parks, and cultural community. As a homeowner, I know the importance of affordability, diversity, and public safety reform. And as CEO of a small retail technology company, I fully empathize with the challenges faced by our home-grown business community.

GOALS

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

One of my major goals, if I were to be elected for another term on the city council, would be to address the challenges that came as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Supporting local businesses and addressing city revenue shortfalls has long been a top goal of mine. Additionally, I am dedicated to addressing and supporting programs that will create a more equitable Palo Alto. If I were given four more years I would also take on new approaches to solve the prevalent concern of residents regarding traffic congestion and parking in Palo Alto.

PUBLIC SAFETY

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

As a City Council liaison for Palo Alto's Human Relations Commission, I have been afforded the opportunity alongside my colleagues to directly engage with the Black and Brown communities. I acknowledge how crucial it is to effectively and comprehensively address racial profiling and excessive force in Palo Alto. The summary videos my office makes on the HRC meetings highlight both public comments from our residents and conversations between community leaders about creating proactive solutions around these issues. These conversations can be found at [City of Palo Alto: Police Reform](#), [Palo Alto HRC Meeting on Police Reform \(7/22/20\)](#), [City of Palo Alto: Human Relations Commission meeting on 8 Can't-Wait police reform](#), and [Palo Alto HRC Meeting on Police Reform \(7/22/20\)](#). There are many perspectives on what the best course of action is and they all need to be heard. By taking these perspectives, we can effectively bring about long term solutions. I am directly able to help out with this because, since 2017, I have held office hours and have been allowed to hear the many concerns of Palo Alto residents.

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?

In a police reform survey our office sent out, a majority of Palo Alto residents responded that the police department needs 100% transparency. Currently, Palo Alto's police open data source is limited and inefficient in providing information to the public on the city's law enforcement actions. I am advocating for more open data so we can join organizations, like [Stanford's Open Policing Project](#), where they provide publicly accessible information on police-stop data throughout the country. Ultimately, as a City Council Member, my goal is to echo the concerns and opinions of my constituents so I will continue to have open discussions with the people of Palo Alto.

Reform should also include a reallocation of responsibilities from the police to more appropriate staff. We need to look at other cities' public safety models that have seen success in their progressive police reform systems, like Eugene, Oregon's [CAHOOTS](#) model. I held a Zoom discussion with Sunnyvale Mayor, Larry Klein, on the Sunnyvale Public Safety Department, a model for conjoining both fire and police responsibilities under one umbrella department. This can be found at [Addressing the Sunnyvale Public Safety Department](#). This is just one of many examples in which I have continued to seek out all perspectives for comprehensive change.

CITY GOVERNANCE

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

No, I was the only one who voted against it. Being the only dissenting vote, the City Council voted to cut more than 70 full-time positions from city hall to dig out of a financial hole left by the coronavirus pandemic. The city approved a budget with \$196 million in general fund expenses, a 20 percent reduction from the budget the council expected to consider before the start of the pandemic. I voted against this because there were better ways of handling the revenue drop instead of cutting libraries, youth programs, fire, and other community programs. These services are fundamental to the city and community of Palo Alto, they should not be sacrificed without exhausting every other option. For instance, the city is very top-heavy and would function the same or better with fewer expensive managers leaving more budget for the workers providing the services. I also do not believe that so much should be allocated to public relations and marketing utility bills. If a more representative approach is taken, it is possible to not have to sacrifice all the things that the people of Palo Alto love.

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?

This measure would impose a split roll property tax so that commercial and industrial properties in California would be assessed on current market value. There could be several consequences for the California economy: taxes would become unpredictable for employers that operate in commercial and industrial properties;

compliance expenses would increase; taxes would increase significantly for many businesses. 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. With our economy heading into one of the deepest recessions on record, local businesses are facing major unprecedented challenges. As a business owner, I understand how small businesses are being impacted. From adapting to quarantine restrictions to adjusting to the lockdown lift, to re-establishing their former customer bases and revenues we face an economic recovery that could take up to 10 years. Given the current situation, many local businesses will fail if they don't receive immediate help, hence the reason why one of my top priorities is to support local businesses here in Palo Alto.

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?

If the residents in my community communicated or indicated that they would like to see a change, then I would look into it and listen to what my community wants. In general, I think the un-elected city manager and staff have too much power relative to elected officials. However, the nature of elected officials is to be a reflection of the thoughts of their constituents and therefore I would continue to build strong community connections to act 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?

Yes, the City should definitely utilize the knowledge of its residents. One way that I stand out as a councilmember is that I have consistently held office hours every Sunday for the past 4 years. I value true dialogue and listening to all perspectives of a topic. This allows me to make better decisions. I highly encourage residents to speak up to be heard by our City. I, who has lived in Palo Alto for the last 16 years, recognizes the diverse experience and talent of Palo Alto residents. By continuing community outreach, I believe that these talents can be more effectively used, in a team, to improve the quality of life for all 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?

Actions that I've taken to support affordable housing during his term:

- I voted for the Eviction moratorium that ensured renters weren't forced out due to the pandemic ([3/23/20](#))
- Wilton Court, a housing project for 57 units, of which half were dedicated to those with developmental disabilities ([2/10/20](#), [1/13/20](#))
- Environmental review exemption for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) ([1/13/20](#))

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?

I would like to explore innovative ways of balancing climate and housing concerns in Palo Alto. With the current pandemic it needs to be discussed thoroughly what the best course of action is given the newly limited city resources.

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

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.

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

In regards to ending single-family residential zoning, I believe it is best to have sensible discussions on it. Bringing in all perspectives and gaining new insight on this issue will ensure that we reach a comprehensive solution. This has been one of my goals throughout my 4 years on the City Council, mainly through my office hours every Sunday.

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 more working at home to reduce commute, traffic, pollution, and climate change. I am an avid biker and skateboarder, and I am known to rarely drive. I highly advocate for and encourage others to use alternatives to driving cars.

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 should consider rezoning office properties to reduce the amount of future office development under certain circumstances. This would also be a crucial decision that should directly reflect the will of Palo Altans. Again, I will continue to be transparent through my many office hours.

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

One of the best approaches to addressing construction in Palo Alto is to hear the concerns of the people of the city. By encouraging discussion we can ensure that action is balanced with resident concerns. That is the standard for Palo Alto's elected officials and I will continue to encourage residents to be vocal about their concerns.

TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

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

Palo Altans have consistently expressed concern about increased traffic and congestion on local streets and ever-harder-to-find parking, as well as the growing impact of development on both issues. [According to a ballot measure survey in 2020](#), 53% of respondents said that traffic and congestion on local streets and roads are a concern. The city is charged with preserving the quality of life in Palo Alto. Post COVID-19, with the rise of remote work, we need to revisit that equation and look for innovative new approaches that meet the need of residents.

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?

I believe it is important for the City to work with neighborhoods to mitigate impacts. When I was President of the College Terrace Resident Association, the neighborhood suffered from cut-through traffic. I worked to get a traffic calming program successfully implemented. Businesses have a role in reducing their traffic and parking impacts.

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

Ever since moving to Palo Alto, I've firmly believed that residents should be able to park in their neighborhoods. As head of the College Terrace Resident Association, I developed the [College Terrace parking program](#), a

forerunner of Palo Alto's popular Residential Parking Program (RPP). I've consistently voted to expand and support this program to ensure residents can reliably find parking.

COMMUNITY LIFE

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

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.

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

Many cities have implemented smartphone app-based solutions to streamline the process. Palo Alto could do a lot better. I've been pushing for this. I would also like to hire more individuals to complete inspection promptly.

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

My record on development and local projects reflects my commitment to listening to residents and community feedback. Unafraid to be the lone vote, I listened to the community and voted against placing housing at [Cubberley Community Center](#). Cubberley brings back many memories for the residents of Palo Alto and what happens to its 8 acres should be a reflection of their thoughts.

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?

By holding office hour discussions every single Sunday since I've been a council member, I have highly encouraged residents of my community to attend and speak up on issues so that I can listen to them. I post on my social media about events and office hour discussions. I also have Facebook lives where most of my discussions are recorded and available for residents to watch. If re-elected, I will continue to host my office hours discussions because it is a crucial way in which people participate in our local government.

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 first step is to make sure that grocery stores can survive. They are a part of the fundamental functioning of the city. The City needs to ensure that high levels of scrutiny and accountability are applied.

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?

It is critical when development projects can impact residential neighborhoods that their perspectives are heard and the cumulative impact of projects is truly understood. In general, I've only supported such projects when there is neighborhood support.

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?

The importance of this project is best reflected by the thoughts of residents. Before making a comprehensive decision I would continue to get the input of Palo Alto's residents.. Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of the project should be scrutinized and discussed.

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?

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.

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?

Vacancy signs were already appearing in local retail and restaurant locations before COVID-19. But with our economy heading into one of the deepest recessions on record, local businesses are facing major additional challenges. Palo Alto is home to over [7000 businesses](#) and data shows that [92% of small businesses have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crisis](#). As a business owner, I understand how small businesses are being impacted. From adapting to quarantine restrictions to adjusting to the lockdown lift, to re-establishing their former customer bases and revenues we face [an economic recovery that could take up to 10 years](#). Given the current situation, many local businesses will fail if they don't receive immediate help.

Additionally, I believe actions should be taken by the city that efficiently delivers assistance to both residents and business owners. At the June 8th, 2020 Council meeting, I urged that [speed is of the essence](#) to provide support for local businesses. Before the meeting, I had met with different business owners on the best ways to support them during this pandemic. We also spoke with many community members to consider and understand the different benefits of the Summer Streets program as well as keeping the streets convenient to the community.