



2020 City Council Candidate Questions

Cari Templeton Responses

EXPERIENCE

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

I'm running for City Council to make the promise of Palo Alto available for everyone in our community. My experience prepares me for this work in a variety of ways.

As first Commissioner and now Chair of the Planning and Transportation Commission, I've worked with Planning and Transportation staff on the PTC itself, as well as the Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP), and prior to that, the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan (NVCAP). I learned about different projects and operations work our staff takes on to run this city. I also worked at Google for over 10 years on numerous projects: I ran a global customer service team for Google Analytics, managed projects with hundreds of team members and tens of millions of dollars in budget, ran the online communications for Nest, and more. I was brought into most of these projects to turn them around, and I'm happy to share that each turnaround was successful. I have also participated in activism at the local, county, state, and national levels, with a primary focus on Medicare for All. Finally as a parent of kids (now aged 10 and 12), I have learned that nothing prepares you as well to make the most of what you have like being a parent.

So, to summarize how all of these experiences prepare me to be an effective City Council Member: I bring proven leadership experience at City Hall, strong communication and budget management skills, a robust regional and statewide network, and the resourcefulness needed to advance our community's goals. I will bring a thoughtful, measured approach to Council, relevant experience on land use policy and on recovering from crises, a record of promoting underrepresented community voices, and a dedication to our community's values.

During my tenure on the Planning and Transportation Commission, I have had the opportunity to review development proposals, transportation plans, program and policy initiatives, and more, that prepared me for work on Council. We heard and recommended on housing (affordable housing combining district, RHNA updates, and BMR program), environmental sustainability (Green Stormwater Infrastructure Plan, CEQA updates, and Sustainability and Climate Action Plan), infrastructure (Newell Bridge Replacement to prevent flooding, EV charging accommodations in parking lots), and major projects (Cubberley Master Plan and the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan/Fry's Site redevelopment). In addition, I have participated in emails and public comment on the Human Relations Commission and City Council on several matters over recent years, including police reform and land use

GOALS

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

1. *A swift and intelligent COVID-19 response to public health concerns and economic consequences of the pandemic*

I will champion swift and intelligent action to support the resilience and dignity of our community as Palo Alto strives to manage this pandemic. We need more PPE, more free testing, and more programs to support businesses and employees. With the added economic burden of the COVID recession, I will support delaying evictions, flexible and frequent adjustments of policies to mitigate the financial burden on community members, and proactive regional outreach to take advantage of financial and mental health relief programs that benefit the community.

2. *Secure housing accessibility through healthy sustainable land use planning and practices, paired with investment in local and regional transportation*

I will push the city to meet the goals set in the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan and Housing Element so we can end exclusionary zoning, ensure more affordable and missing-middle housing, and reduce traffic congestion through adequate public transportation. We should also increase our investment in subsidized housing.

3. Community justice, inclusion, and diversity

I pledge to make changes to modernize our city to end structural racism, to rethink public safety, to update infrastructure throughout the city, and to make Palo Alto the best city to work for in the Bay Area. As a city, we must commit to anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We can start by ensuring that our city panels, boards, and commissions are diverse and representative of our community; modernize public safety and rethink policing by focusing on and providing funding for mental health first responders and social workers; ensure all future public meetings, from City Council to boards and commissions, are available for public viewing and participation on video conferencing services; and create a posi

PUBLIC SAFETY

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

We must re-envision public safety in such a way that reduces violence in our city overall (including from police) and prevents hate crimes in our community. When officer involved violence does occur, we must hold the officer to account with a full investigation and potentially dismissal or criminal charges, depending on the result of that investigation. We should allocate some of our current public safety funding to alternative public safety measures, such as mental health first responders and social workers to respond to nonviolent situations.

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?

The recent George Floyd protests in Palo Alto, and resulting panel discussion, articles, and community input have demonstrated that the City must re-envision and modernize community safety and wellness, with particular attention to the needs of BIPOC and LGBT community members. To promote community safety and wellness for all, we must ensure that a portion of our public safety budget provides our city the variety of resources we need, including de-escalation training programs, mental health, and wellness programs.

I will work with the county to make on-call mental health first responders available in Palo Alto, and seek alternative methods to deal with nonviolent nuisance calls with unarmed officers. We should seek to expand facilities for youth seeking professional services, such as counseling, and increase mobile health outreach programs.

CITY GOVERNANCE

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

Although the Council must seek to balance the budget, particularly in light of the pandemic-related revenue shortfalls, I believe that our budget cuts must not come at the expense of community wellness and safety. Therefore, I appreciate the efforts to retain budget for youth services, Baylands staffing, libraries, and the arts, despite the city-wide budget reductions.

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?

The most important tax reform we need right now is to fix corporate property tax loopholes. That's why I supported the Schools and Communities First campaign, which reforms funding for local government and schooling, to be on the ballot this November. Today, I continue to support it in its current form as Ballot Proposition 15.

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?

I believe that the City Council must always listen to the diverse voices of all of its constituents, and ensure the City Manager and executives do as well. Through the recent shelter-in-place and other pandemic-related actions, we have identified opportunities for staff overreach, and the Council should close those loopholes immediately.

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?

Outsourcing can often be driven by the project's budget rather than its requirements, or by the need to compensate for unfilled vacancies in staff, but these approaches are not always going to bring the best outcome for the city. Whenever possible, it's best to ensure the City is properly staffed by experts who are familiar with the specific needs of Palo Alto.

Our City's panels, boards, and commissions are a great way to tap into our residents' immense creativity and bring their innovative voices into government decision-making. Our campaign focuses on improving the way that the Council recruits and appoints these bodies so that we hear from more diverse voices as we work to improve our City.

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?

It's extremely important for Palo Alto to build more affordable housing, as well as the "missing-middle" income housing. The City should update the Housing Element to identify reasonable sites for housing and consider policy updates that will help us meet housing goals. By doing so with local action, we may be able to avert the need for the state to step in. I have heard a number of options presented at discussions around housing that may work well for Palo Alto, including using previously commercial land for housing, as has been proposed on a recent project along San Antonio Road which would offer both market rate and affordable homes. We should also increase our investment in subsidized housing, while making the project approval process more predictable and cost-effective.

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?

Alternative M proposes some wonderful amenities to the North Ventura area, including cafes, affordable housing and parkland. Creating affordable housing requires a combination of raising the funds and reducing the costs. Both can be pursued. Raising the funds could come in the form of land trusts, government grants, and potentially fees collected by the city from businesses and other developments. Lowering the costs could come from streamlining the approval process, which the Planning Department is working on.

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

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.

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

Such a great question, because this exact talking point is being used in fear-mongering rhetoric from Washington this election season, and I completely reject this line of thinking. We will not have important City business used by some politicians to escalate fear and disrupt discussion of zoning changes that may be beneficial for the neighborhood and the City. There are times when zoning changes make sense, and there are

times when it may not make sense. I prefer to make zoning decisions based on the needs of the neighborhood and the City.

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?

Not all jobs are suited for working from home, but we should still take steps to reduce commuting and traffic to reduce pollution and climate change. One important way would be to improve public transportation so that it is ample, frequent, electric, regionally-interconnected, and fare free in the region. We could encourage companies to purchase transit passes for their employees, for example, rather than funding private buses. Similarly, students and seniors could ride fare-free to encourage independence and reduce traffic associated with drop-off and pick-ups.

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?

Any new office space that would draw significant commuting traffic would be best built near a transit hub, such as one of our train stations, though in these locations, we already have space constraints. Rezoning outlying areas to reduce sprawl and discourage single occupancy vehicle commuting traffic would be an important aspect of our Sustainability and Climate Action Plan.

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

When elected, I will promote development of housing through both construction and conversion approaches. Converting existing office locations to housing will simultaneously increase the capacity for housing and reduce the capacity for office construction.

TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

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

The intermixing of bike riders with vehicular traffic is dangerous and unfortunately occasionally deadly. Because our city is so bike friendly and pedestrian friendly, we must also design our travel paths for bikes and pedestrians. Our Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan includes many ideas on how we can improve, and we can look for more inspiration for creative pathways throughout the Bay Area. I also appreciate the Shared Streets program that we are piloting during the pandemic as a way to reduce vehicular traffic in neighborhoods to make it safer for bikes and pedestrians.

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?

The City should propose solutions that they devise with input from businesses and residents.

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

Residential Preferential Parking (RPP) programs are helpful to ensure that residents can park near their homes, but can be costly for small businesses whose minimal parking space must be reserved for patrons. I would like to see transit options made available within the city so that workers may more easily choose transit rather than commuting. I would like to see permits for those who choose to commute and park be purchased in monthly increments rather than larger commitments, to help make the costs manageable. I would also like to see more automation and online self-service options available for those who purchase permits to more easily monitor and renew their permits.

COMMUNITY LIFE

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

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.

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

Code enforcement in Palo Alto is distributed amongst numerous departments. We should talk with staff to determine if they are experiencing inefficiencies in how they are organized, and see what improvements they request could be quickly implemented. Because they are primarily complaint driven (subjective enforcement) rather than objective, this may also tend toward inequitable application of code enforcement. I would like to see reports on the enforcement to determine what types of inequities are currently present and try to fix them.

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

A community group has formed to help with the visioning process for this space, with the goal to create a space for all Palo Altans. I am excited to see what they propose, based on community input, and believe we need to encourage this kind of community engagement. I want to see this space ultimately continue to serve all residents, with a mix of education, community, and open space.

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?

One of my goals is to increase inclusion on commissions, by actively recruiting and selecting diverse applicants, and creating environments of respect and support. In time, these organizations will take on issues and steer engagement in projects of interest to more members of our community.

Moreover, we must work to make City Council meetings accessible to all community members. We must do this by ensuring all future public meetings, from City Council to boards and commissions, are available for public viewing and participation on video conferencing services, even after the pandemic.

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?

We must reimagine what it means for a development to offer a "public benefit," especially since the concept of a grocery store continues to fail in these sites. Perhaps offering a selection of secondary options that would be acceptable if the primary option fails, would be a better way to structure our agreements. However, when agreements between the City and developers are not met, the City should collect fines unless a preferable alternative solution can be negotiated.

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?

The goal of any development should be to improve the livability of surrounding neighborhoods. For example, growth may mean additional vitality, services, and amenities for neighbors, in addition to new neighbors. It must be the goal of our civic process to ensure an optimal outcome for all concerned, whenever possible.

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?

As a member of the XCAP, I am currently deliberating recommendations to the City Council. Costs must be feasible for an alternative to be considered. My preferred solutions minimize acquisition of private property and maximize public benefit as defined by the requirements outlined by Council, including improving public safety and minimizing environmental impact.

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?

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.

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?

I will seek to preserve existing businesses in Palo Alto by closely listening to their needs and working together to find solutions for them throughout the pandemic, and beyond. I will also advocate for better support services for our local businesses who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and might struggle with access to government relief programs.

I will also partner, via our Economic Development office, with organizations such as our local Chamber of Commerce to promote the needs of local businesses. I will also make sure our Economic Development office does specific outreach to local businesses to provide them information on microloan and small business loan programs, and supports them in preparing applications.