



## **2022 City Council Candidate Questions**

### **COMMUNITY LIFE**

**Residential satisfaction with quality of life in Palo Alto has steadily decreased in recent citizens surveys. How do you envision keeping true to the character of Palo Alto? How would you balance parks, local amenities, etc., as Palo Alto's population grows?**

#### **ALEX COMSA**

Well, the pandemic didn't help, but definitely, public safety is a major contributor to the decreasing quality of life. We also need a more vibrant and prosperous DT or similar areas, so a master plan to address the DT needs to happen sooner than later. Housing projects are to be placed where it makes sense, and I am addressing that through a very comprehensive and itemized proposal to address the housing element, as I truly believe that we can achieve both: preserving the character of Palo Alto but also meeting the housing element. Although I feel like we are in a good spot regarding parks and local amenities, I would support the addition of bike lanes to connect the parks and the open space.

Also, I got some feedback re adding more tennis courts and also the need for more open space, so I will definitely look into those if elected. As an active person, I really feel like we need a community gym in DT as it is such a nice way to interact with other community members through exercising and sports. The only DT gym, Form Fitness, will close doors in December and I have to find a new community gym, just like other dozens/hundreds of members, but there is no such thing around DT anymore. I can talk about this story for hours, but many PA residents have similar stories, so we really need local amenities like community gyms in our neighborhood.

Our Community Center may need to be a bit more vibrant, and perhaps we can have an extension of the Community Center in the City Hall building after the Police Department gets relocated by Cal Ave: a new community gym, coffee shop, a lounge, and other amenities.

#### **LISA FORSELL**

We should continue to maintain our parks. New development should include new green space, parks, trees, and plazas. I'd like to return Palo Alto Library hours to at least pre-pandemic hours of operation. Local businesses that provide items key to quality of life - groceries, drugstores, hardware, pet supplies - will benefit from additional customers as they continue to compete with Amazon and other online retailers.

#### **BRIAN HAMACHEK**

It's impossible for the quality of life to be maintained if we only focus on adding more housing units and neglect ensuring that we also keep an eye on maintaining the services and amenities to support the new residents. That means ensuring there are parks, tennis courts, dog runs, and vibrant retail options within walking distance of new housing. The focus should be on creating new neighborhoods, not just new housing.

## **ED LAUING**

I am committed to keeping the true value and character of Palo Alto. It is a wonderful community with unique amenities. It is critical that our parks, local amenities, green infrastructure, grow along with our population. I believe CC must insist on keeping parks, open space, urban canopy, sports fields, safe bike paths, transportation and stormwater infrastructure as requirements for all neighborhoods. New neighbors want to come to Palo Alto FOR the amenities and quality of life! Developers will naturally object because land that does not have an office or home reduces a developer's revenue. But City Council has to make this an essential and ongoing part of our urban planning.

## **JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS**

This decrease in resident satisfaction is certainly a response to a number of issues in Palo Alto. Number one, the country and especially the bay area is experiencing a youth mental health crisis, and the history of suicides in this town is evidence of the deadly and tragic seriousness of the problem. This health crisis weighs heavily on the community as a whole and is partially responsible for increasing dissatisfaction in this town. We need to start prioritizing health and wellbeing over profit, and we need to teach our children that there are myriad pathways to a happy life well beyond landing a cushy tech job at a local tech company.

Local amenities are everything. Every new development should be in keeping with our true character. Every resident should be able to walk to parks, schools, grocery, retail, jobs, and green transit. Our city can be a beautiful 21st century ecosystem.

We've also become uncivil toward one another. The notion that a homeowner has the right to tell another homeowner what to do has its place, but things can get out of hand. My personal story is case in point. When our son Sawyer was born in 1999 we dreamed of being able to raise him in Palo Alto with its storied history and excellent schools. My partner Dan and I approached my mom, Jeannie, about an unconventional solution: We'd pool our resources, and go all in on a house. We found a house in the cul-de-sac at the end of Maybell Way that we were able to buy because nobody else wanted it. The house was truly damaged and had to be completely rebuilt. Although the City's voluntary design review committee gave us an enthusiastic thumbs up on our plans, some neighbors watched the stucco go up on the frame and decided they didn't like the shape of it. These neighbors circulated a petition to get us to change it, saying our house was "ugly" and including drawings of what we should do differently. They got over a dozen signatures on the petition, and stuck it in our mailbox. I felt like a pariah when I opened the letter. Like everyone was looking at me, and hating not just my house but me. Our architect suggested calling a neighbor meeting in our driveway, and on the designated day a crowd gathered. Sawyer was now two and a half and his baby sister Avery was an infant in my arms. Neighbors began to tell us what was wrong with our house. They were gruff and unkind. Dan, Mom and I, along with our architect, did our best to explain what we needed to do and why. But the meeting wasn't going very well. Then a neighbor named Eva stepped forward. An Octogenarian with a deeply wrinkled face and a twinkle in her eye. "This doesn't feel like the Christian thing to do," she announced to the crowd. And with that, the negative energy of the crowd dissipated. We began speaking cordially, as neighbors should do. We finished the house. I became friends with Eva. But I was left with some deep wounds inflicted at the hands of "local control."

## **DORIA SUMMA**

This will be my focus as a City Council member. We need to make sure as a city that we are investing in open spaces, parks and bike corridors and maintain a healthy retail presence within neighborhoods. This requires enforcing existing regulations and not providing exceptions without corresponding benefits

## **VICKI VEENKER**

I care deeply about our community where my husband and I have lived for 30 years and our daughters have benefited from exceptional schools, beautiful parks, and an innovation culture unique in all the world. Despite our many assets, Palo Alto is falling short of its potential with cut backs in a wide array of city services, including reduced library hours. Libraries promote equity and are a beloved common space where all can gather regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or other considerations. They promote learning and support those seeking advancement, free of cost. Families often enjoy them together. Yet none of our libraries are open on Sunday and most are closed for 2-4 days per week, including our beloved Children's Library.

I'll work to address budgeting, revenue, and other issues that stand in the way of greater access for all residents to libraries, parks, and other community assets that enhance our quality of life. These are important for new and old residents alike. Together we can be a successful and welcoming community for the marvelously diverse residents who enrich Palo Alto.