



## **2022 City Council Candidate Questions**

### **EXPERIENCE**

**Which issue facing Palo Alto concerns you the most and why?**

#### **ALEX COMSA**

Public Safety: the posts I see on Nextdoor and the feedback I get from business owners in Downtown are just depressing, and that needs to be stopped. We need to restore Public Safety in our town, whether by hiring appropriate Police staff and/or by using more technology. I personally interacted with PA Police and Menlo Police when my son's bike got stolen last Fall, and I felt like I was on my own. First, we were told to just file a police report, but as we found our bike being sold online, a couple of days later, I contacted Police again and let them know that I found the thief and that he is actually selling 20 other bikes too. Police's story didn't change: "we can't do anything if you don't have the serial number, and your bike is around \$600 anyway, so we can't arrest that person even if we prove that it is your bike". I told the officer that I have pictures of the bike with the specific lighting items that were custom installed, and that I even know the combo code of the locking system too, but that was not enough. I didn't feel it was right to just buy my bike back, so although I had cash with me to buy it back, I decided to walk to the seller's location, about one hour of walking from my house and called Menlo Police on my way there. Same story as I got from the local Police, so I mentioned to the officer that I am actually minutes away from meeting with the seller, and that if I have a chance to test drive the bike, I may just take off, and the officer said that it is dangerous, so said "that's why we are having this conversation", so he agreed to meet with me in a few minutes. I showed him pictures of the bike, he went to the seller's place, retrieved my bike in two minutes, and met with me two blocks away with the bike. He spent ten minutes on the phone with me explaining why he can't help instead of actually spending two minutes to retrieve the bike. The officer gave me a ride back, with the bike on the Police car too, and we chatted regarding the challenges they have within the department, which was really being understaffed. At the end, I was glad I got the bike back, but I don't want other community members to have similar experiences. We simply need to improve our Public Safety

#### **LISA FORSELL**

Most issues that I study, ultimately lead to our regional lack of housing as a significant root cause. Power outages? Our utility is understaffed and can't attract & retain workers because of the local cost of living. Line crews live in central California and can't respond quickly to power outages. Have trouble getting a medical appointment? Our healthcare providers are understaffed and are having trouble hiring assistants, nurses, and MD's because of the cost of living. Local businesses we depend on are having trouble paying a living wage, and have to raise prices for basics like a sandwich or a haircut, to make the business pencil out.

Not everyone that works in Palo Alto needs to live in Palo Alto. It's a regional problem. But Palo Alto needs to do its part in solving this issue.

## **BRIAN HAMACHEK**

The City needs to be more responsive to the concerns of residents. The interests of outside developers are being prioritized above the interests of residents. As a result, quality of life is decreasing and Palo Alto is losing some of what makes it such a special place to live.

## **ED LAUING**

Housing is my highest concern because, like climate, time is running out to course correct for truly affordable housing. But unlike for climate mitigation, Palo Alto has begun to fall below the curve. Given lead times for planning and construction of new housing, and escalating costs of construction, it will soon be nearly impossible to have rental and purchase options for low-income residents. Prices will be out of reach. Meanwhile, the penalty and incentive structure of state housing mandates overwhelmingly encourages cities to target their incentives to high-rise, market-rate, and micro-units – homes that cannot support families and are still unaffordable. The challenge is to figure out how to build required units of types and prices that meet the needs of our community - without overwhelming our neighborhoods and infrastructure

## **JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS**

Whereas Palo Alto once led the state when it came to building affordable housing, in recent years we've begun to lag behind in that effort. Thousands of people are on waitlists for affordable housing and it can take years if not decades to get off the list. Seniors can't afford to downsize. Youth who grew up here can't afford to stay. People who fall upon hard times resort to living in their cars.

If we don't act with intentionality and urgency, I fear we will exacerbate our local housing crisis, making Palo Alto unattainable, and hollowing out the very human center of our magnificent city. A lack of housing in our downtown and Cal Ave districts is also hurting our retail and other small business owners who count on local customers to patronize their stores (which have been particularly hard hit because of the pandemic and virtual working.) Unaffordable housing in our single-family zoned neighborhoods has led to a decline in enrollment in the PAUSD. We need to take a visionary and inclusive lens to our zoning practices and fashion a mutually cohesive residential, business, schooling, transit, shopping, and recreational ecosystem in which humans and businesses can prosper and thrive

## **DORIA SUMMA**

Managing growth and density while retaining the quality of life in Palo Alto.

## **VICKI VEENKER**

Housing in Palo Alto is a big and complex issue that intersects with many others like transportation, city services, climate, and economic development. Palo Altans are divided on how to address the issue, holding a wide range of views. There is some consensus that we need more housing, especially affordable housing, to have a balanced community. However, we do not have a common vision on how we get there, in other words, what good growth looks like. I have a track record of bringing people together on tough issues. I am a mediator for the federal courts and the US International Trade Commission and I've convened opposing Sacramento policymakers to create a plan to rein in healthcare costs that became law this year. I hope I can assist our city in coming together to find a way forward on housing.