



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

HOUSING

Where do you stand on the “one-size-fits-all” state unfunded mandates, like SB 9 and 10, that dictate land use and zoning in our City and why?

ALEX COMSA

In general, I don't like “one-size-fits-all” mandates, as I feel we need to have some input and control at a local level. Do SB9 and SB10 create more housing? Yes, and we need that to meet the housing element, but I also feel like we need to rely on our own ARB in order to approve projects that fit our neighborhood in order to mitigate tension between neighbors. My mom experienced something similar where the local government approved a ridiculous building next door, on the property line, and now she is not even saying hi to the neighbor next door; therefore, we don't need these types of conflicts in our neighborhood. We are all aiming for a welcoming city (-:

I believe that SB9/SB10 will have very little effect on our city as these mandates don't really fit our city: in most cases, the math doesn't work.

I can't emphasize enough that meeting the housing element is imperative, so we can keep control of the zoning at a local level, as we need input from our Planning Dept and ARB on our Palo Alto projects.

LISA FORSELL

I understand why the state passed SB 9, given that local governments across the state were not approving enough new housing to meet California's needs. SB9 is the new state law that allows a homeowner to divide their lot and build up to two units on each lot. The owner needs to live on the property. When I talk to people about SB9, the concern I hear most often is worry that their neighbors will build a tall building that encroaches on their privacy. However, SB9 does not increase height limits beyond what is already allowed. There is a fair amount of misinformation out there about SB9. I think SB9 will increase our housing supply only very gradually, because of the owner-occupied requirement. However I think it is a reasonable tool to have available for homeowners who want to tap into their home equity, provide a place for a family member to live, or generate rental income.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

I do not support “one-size-fits-all” state mandates. Land use decisions should be decided locally, by the people who possess the most knowledge of their city and have the most interest in the outcomes.

ED LAUING

They are state laws. Palo Alto will follow state laws.

However, I do not favor blanket, one-size-fits-all land use legislation for every city and every neighborhood in every city. Each neighborhood is wonderfully different in Palo Alto with unique traffic patterns, transportation infrastructure, mobility modes, and school locations. Blanket laws ignore these differences.

To make matters worse, as the question indicates, help from the state to act on these laws – and others - is zero dollars. Limited city staff combined with constant legislative changes makes it nearly impossible to keep up.

JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

I understand why the state is frustrated with municipalities such as Palo Alto that have lagged when it comes to building their fair share of housing. Most of Palo Alto's residential space is zoned for low-density, market-rate housing and our real estate is some of the most expensive in the country, which means that only Palo Alto's wealthiest can afford to live within the city. Denser housing is more affordable, so I believe that SB 9 (lot splits for ADUs/JDUs/Duplexes) and 10 (up to 10 units per parcel) represent steps in the direction Palo Alto needs to go in order to continue to thrive as a city. However, the current City Council and community attitude tends to oppose any kind of zoning modifications or changes.

DORIA SUMMA

I am thoroughly against them.

VICKI VEENKER

I generally oppose the state mandating that our City make expenditures without the state providing associated funding. In the case of SB 10 we can avoid this problem because the City maintains local control. The law allows cities the option of choosing to upzone in transit-rich or infill areas, in which case they avoid CEQA processes for the rezoning (however, the approval of actual projects may still be subject to CEQA). But ultimately, the decision regarding whether to upzone at all remains with the city. With SB 9, the state effectively transfers to the residents the decision as to whether to split a lot or build a duplex. If an application is filed by a resident who attests that s/he will live on the lot for at least the next three years, and it meets certain other criteria, the city must approve it. While the city must allow the split, the city is not the party obligated to build the housing and incur the associated costs.