



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

HOUSING

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

ALEX COMSA

Rental market is confusing and 46% of the Palo Altans are renters. More affordable units would create a pool for renters to have access to as alternatives in case tenants need to be relocated. If the City would have affordable housing within its portfolio, then assistance to renters in need could be provided very effectively. Also, I feel that the small business owners are hanging by a hair since the rent is so expensive and their revenue is still not at the pre-Covid levels, mainly because office people have not returned to offices in a full-time manner, and most of them are still working from home. Working from home or in a hybrid mode changed our needs for housing as everyone is seeking larger homes/condos/apartments, and renters, in this case, may feel cramped in their current houses and on the other hand, may not afford to upgrade for a larger place. Again, more affordable houses would alienate some of these issues.

LISA FORSELL

46% of Palo Alto rents. I appreciate the work of the recently formed Palo Alto Renters Association and would listen to PARA's input. Palo Alto should implement the rental registry required by a 2005 ordinance and never implemented. We need data in order to create good public policy. Palo Alto should actively educate renters about their rights, and provide free legal advice for renters who face unjust evictions. Palo Alto should not tolerate tenant harassment in any form.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

I support expanded relocation assistance and security deposit limits.

ED LAUING

I have already analyzed and voted for many rental protections on the Planning Commission which are moving toward council approval including:

- Relocation assistance for no-fault eviction tenants in properties with >10 units.
- Rental registry in the city
- Caps on security deposits

JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

We need to protect renters, preserve renter communities, and produce more rental housing. I turn to renters and leaders in the renter community for advice on how to make this happen. For example, on July 30 I attended a picnic co-sponsored by the Palo Alto Renters Association and Palo Alto Forward. On August 26 I attended a presentation by Silicon Valley@Home on "Advancing Anti-Displacement Policies in the Housing Element" featuring Husacar Castro of WPUSA and Lauren Bigelow of PARA. There, I learned that Palo Alto is doing more to support renters than most North County municipalities

but that we could still do more, such as create a renters' registry so we know where our units are, what they cost, the demographic of who rents, who owns them, etc

While Palo Alto needs to strengthen its tenant protection policies, there are a few important policies we do have in place. We recently amended our laws to include relocation assistance for "no-fault" evictions, which provide renters with monetary assistance to help attain new housing. We have also have a few rent control measures. As of 2020, in a 12-month period, total rent increases cannot exceed 5% plus the change in cost of living* (CPI), or 10%, whichever is lower, and a maximum of 2 rent increases in any 12-month period (the total of which cannot exceed the rent cap). Where permitted, rent increases over 10% require 90 days' written notice (formerly 60 days). While this measure does a lot to protect renters from unreasonable increases, the reality is that current rents are already too expensive; they need to be actively lowered, not just controlled.

I also support the city's plans to extend the "just cause" evictions loophole to cover housing projects that were built between 0-15 years ago, at capping security deposits, and giving renters the right to counsel.

DORIA SUMMA

Almost 50% of our community is renters and they deserve better protection. I strongly support strengthening renters' rights. I support a renters' registry so we have good information about renters. The city should enforce the lease law.

VICKI VEENKER

- I am proud to have served on the Board of Directors of the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley for twenty years, and am a former President of the Board. The Law Foundation provides a range of legal services to low income families, including renter protection services to tenants facing wrongful eviction or housing discrimination, and legal support for renter organizing. During my tenure, the Law Foundation provided free legal representation for five years to the tenants of the Buena Vista mobile home park in Palo Alto and succeeded in saving this source of affordable housing, and the community who calls it home.
- Additionally, I support the existing renter registry/survey program in Palo Alto but believe more can be done to expand its capabilities. For example, it could track rents/rent increases (to ensure compliance with AB1482's rent cap), eviction notices (so we can see how many are occurring and where), and type of property owner (how many units are privately owned vs. corporate ownership).