



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

HOUSING

Given the housing shortage, would you support Palo Alto taxing ‘ghost houses’ via a vacant home tax?

ALEX COMSA

Don't get me started on this topic. Young families are leaving our district due to high home prices driven by the small supply of homes, and we can't afford, as a community, to have ghost houses around us. Also, it is not safe either to have empty houses next door, since our community is known for neighbors that are looking after each other. I dealt with ghost houses throughout my real estate career, and I am supporting taxing "ghost houses", but the code enforcement department within our city is known to be less proactive. Also, some of these "investors" are very wealthy and they can actually afford to keep these houses empty, so the taxation needs to be very substantial in order to incentivize those owners/investors to either rent those houses out or occupy them.

LISA FORSELL

I would consider a vacant home tax. As a first step, we need to quantify the problem. The City will need to identify the vacant homes, so we can use data to drive effective policy.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

I would not support this tax, as it would be nearly unenforceable and incredibly complex

ED LAUING

This issue has a lot of underlying nuance and some valid legal tentacles around private property rights. I understand the reason this has been considered in San Francisco and other communities. A vacant home is a lost housing resource in our city. I would consider this, especially for corporations and speculators, but we have to evaluate the cost, manpower and feasibility of home identification, monitoring and enforcement of what counts as a vacant home, and the desirability of a sliding scale (longer vacancy, higher tax).

JULIE LYTHCOTT-HAIMS

Yes! Homes are first and foremost meant to provide humans with safe and secure shelter. And that home should be lived in by people who will frequent nearby shops and businesses, and send their children to our public schools. So, I am troubled by 'Ghost Houses' i.e. the practice of using Palo Alto real estate as a speculative investment because such behavior completely undermines our community. A vacant home tax is a great way to discourage those who would purchase market-rate housing for the sole purpose of selling it at a profit a few years later.

DORIA SUMMA

I support in principle but would need more information to understand how it would be enforced.

VICKI VEENKER

I would support a policy that taxes “ghost houses” via a vacant home tax. Houses should shelter people, not assets. I have made inquiries to determine how big of a problem this is in Palo Alto and have been unable to find out. Quantifying the problem would help us in crafting a tax.