



## 2022 City Council Candidate Questions

### Julie Lythcott-Haims Responses

#### EXPERIENCE

**What experience with Palo Alto community issues would you bring to the council? Describe your personal experience with Palo Alto City government and recent issues that have come before public hearings at the city council or other board and commissions. What was your role? (For example, did you send an email, speak to the Council, lead a group of citizens, etc.?) How extensively were you involved?**

As a lawyer and public speaker, I find oral rhetoric to be my most effective tool to advocate for what I believe in and to galvanize others. So I've tended to take the approach of speaking at Council rather than writing emails or leading a group of citizens.

Toward that end, I've spoken up at Council a number of times over the years, when matters really tugged at my heart. One example is the Stanford GUP hearing back in the early 2000s where I spoke up for the importance of working out the kinks as the city and the university are mutually intertwined and dependent upon each other and we ought to have a relationship of mutual respect and symbiosis. A second example was in 2012-13 when I spoke in favor of the Maybell/Measure D affordable housing. I spoke up for that project both because I will always speak up for more affordable housing, and because Maybell is my neighborhood so it felt very personal. Alas, we lost, and every time I drive out to the grocery store I see the housing that went up instead, and I'm reminded of our community's failure. A third example is when I spoke in favor of protecting the residents of Buena Vista.

Throughout my career, I've made it a priority to serve on nonprofit boards and advisory boards in order to support missions I believe in and to continue to grow my skills. Board service has helped me appreciate that a board's purpose is to set vision for staff, ensure that staff's policy, programmatic, and spending decisions are aligned with that vision, and to provide oversight to ensure that staff appropriately follow through on the various priorities that have been articulated. This is quite similar to the relationship between a city council and city staff.

I've worked for boards in myriad locales, including: Palo Alto (e.g. YWCA of the Mid-Peninsula; Palo Alto Community Fund; Partners in Education (PiE) Advisory Board; Community Working Group; LeanIn.org); East Palo Alto (e.g. Foundation for a College Education); Stanford (e.g. Challenge Success; Haas Center for Public Service; Stanford Alumni Board of Directors); San Francisco (Common Sense Media; Narrative Magazine; Harvard Law School Association of Northern California); Oakland (Global Citizen Year); and Atlanta (Black Women's Health Imperative). I continue to nourish my passion for undergraduate education by serving as a trustee for my alma mater, California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

I'm also an activist who speaks out when things aren't right whether locally or elsewhere. Since I was a kid, I've stood on street corners and marched for what I believe in. I've walked in Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, marched on Sacramento for more funding for higher education, stood up against Apartheid in South Africa, protested national injustices by standing on street corners with placards and signs right here outside Town & Country. I also organized a "Caravan to Clint" where I drove to Texas and invited others to drive or fly down to draw attention to the plight of migrant kids being kept in cages outside El Paso, Texas; by the time we arrived both local and national media were there to

cover our protest and by the end of our week democratic candidates for president including Julian Castro and Kamala Harris had flown in to give speeches.

A highlight of my experiences as a volunteer and activist was helping elect and re-elect Barack Obama to the presidency by canvassing and getting out the vote for him in three states in 2007-08, representing Anna Eshoo's congressional district as an elected Obama delegate at the 2008 Democratic National Convention, and co-leading the peninsula's Democratic Volunteer Center (DVC) in Menlo Park in 2012.

Since the early 2000s I've been a staunch advocate for our youth as I observed the rising mental health challenges they were facing. I drew attention to this issue as Stanford's freshman dean from 2002-2012, and as Gunn's graduation speaker in 2009. Since publishing a book on the subject in 2015 I've spoken on the subject over 300 times in communities like ours in every region nationally, and I am known for inspiring change in behaviors.

### **What are the top three goals you want to achieve in the next four years on the city council?**

1. **Housing for people at all income levels, including renters and owners**--My number one priority will be to get our Housing Element approved, and to build all of the housing units we need to build to ensure that everyone has a place in Palo Alto. These units should be in keeping with Palo Alto's character no matter where they're put up, and they should be distributed equitably throughout the city rather than stacked on the south side.
2. **Youth Mental Health**--Sadly, no city knows better than Palo Alto that our youth face serious mental health challenges. And in fact, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy named youth mental health as a crisis at the national level. I will partner with the PAUSD, and with nonprofits, clinicians, and parents to improve the climate of wellness for our youth including revising the way in which we speak to our youth about our values and metrics for success. I will also create a Youth Task Force on Mental Health to empower and amplify the voices of those growing up in this community, and I will be brave enough to listen to what they say. Notably, I have advised other communities how to have such conversations, and it's time that we do it here in Palo Alto.
3. **Urgent Climate Action**--Climate change is the single most urgent issue facing humanity today, and we must all do our part as individuals at the level of our homes, transportation choices, and other aspects of personal energy use to make the world more sustainable. I will message this with an "I'm doing it, so can you" approach as I have rather recently been convinced of the imperative to take urgent climate action – some contractors are replacing our gas furnace with an electric heat pump as I write this! At a city level, I will strive to fulfill our city's promises as outlined by the Sustainability and Climate action plan to ensure that we are on track to reach our 80x30 goals. By 2035 I'd like to see us stop using gas in our city entirely.

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

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.

## **What type of campaign finance reform, if any, would you support?**

For our campaign, I set a contribution limit of \$1000 per individual (well below the \$4900 maximum allowed). This ensures that I'm not relying on only a few wealthy donors to support my campaign; in fact, as of the June 30th filing deadline we lead the way in fundraising among potential candidates, and we have raised even more since then. This demonstrates that I have broad grassroots support throughout our community. While campaign finance reform is not a priority in this election (although I was glad to see the PA League of Women Voters recently take on this issue), I believe that setting a city-wide limit lower than the \$4900 limit imposed by the State on cities that have no limit would ensure that other candidates are also widely supported throughout the community.

## **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?**

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.

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

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* two 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.

### **What are your thoughts on limiting upzoning only for 100% affordable housing?**

I am pushing for more housing at both market and below-market rate levels, and upzoning is a great manifestation for both. While some feel 100% affordable housing is the ideal to strive for, the reality is that this community may be a little scared by the idea of turning a previously low-density market-rate lot into high-density, 100% affordable. Plus, 100% affordable is very hard to fund. And, I am wary of a city that has ultra-expensive market-rate parcels and 100% affordable parcels as that could ghettoize the folks who cannot afford market rate. Rather, I envision city streets and neighborhoods with mixed-density housing where people who work blue collar jobs are neighbors with people who work white collar jobs.

### **Given the housing shortage, would you support Palo Alto taxing 'ghost houses' via a vacant home tax?**

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.

### **What ideas do you have for incentivizing housing construction over office construction?**

Palo Alto has a 3:1 jobs imbalance. Too many people have to commute for hours to and from their jobs in our city. We need more housing HERE, not more office space. What's more, many office workers are able to work remotely now, so more offices could create even more of a ghost-town feel here. I would look at zoning overlays than incentivize developers to build housing in place of offices, or to add housing atop commercial lots.

## **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?**

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 it's 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.”

### **What do you see as our most serious traffic issues and how would you fix them?**

The traffic in Palo Alto stems from two deficits: a lack of affordable housing and a lack of public transportation. Many laborers, teachers, nurses, retail and service workers, etc. can’t afford to live in Palo Alto; as a result, they make grueling commutes from increasingly distant cities, adding to traffic throughout the bay and especially in Palo Alto. Not only is this system unsustainable and producing absurd and unnecessary amounts of greenhouse emissions, but it drastically reduces the quality of life for these thousands of people who spend a good fraction of their day driving. Producing affordable housing and relocating our workforce to within city limits will do wonders for reducing traffic.

To support this, of course, it will also be necessary to strengthen public transit within the city, so people can easily traverse the city without need for a car. While the abundance of bike lanes in PA certainly helps, I think we could explore electric bikes and scooters to help people get around. I also think reinvigorating the city’s now defunct shuttle system will also be essential. I would particularly like to get hundreds of cars out of school pickup and drop off lines by partnering with the PAUSD and Stanford to provide a green shuttle for all K-12 schoolchildren.

Unfortunately, worse traffic is coming – and it will likely be gridlock at times – when the CalTrain is electrified and our grade separation has not yet been completed. I hope city leaders will “get in front of” this predictable headache by recommending different detour routes for commuters and parents/school children.

### **Should businesses be responsible for reducing traffic and parking impacts? Should the businesses pay for the remedies and how? What is the City’s role?**

This is a tricky question; additional traffic and parking is caused by employees and any clientele who may need to physically drive to the business. While building affordable housing to help employees find housing in-town is crucial (and clearly falls to the City’s responsibility), the issue of clientele is trickier. While expanding public transit will help Palo Altans get to businesses in their own town, businesses must ultimately take responsibility for parking whatever volume of clientele they expect.

## **CITY GOVERNANCE**

### **Would you make any changes to the balance of power between the city manager and staff and the elected City Council entrusted to carry out the will of the people? If so, how?**

The main issue that concerns me in terms of balance of power is the inertia surrounding the planning of affordable housing projects. We are notorious for the “Palo Alto process” in which projects get clogged up in the approval system, discouraging developers and delaying the construction of much needed housing. On the one hand, I believe giving greater power to city council may help in this matter; on the other hand, I appreciate the importance of limiting city council’s power to be in balance

with other aspects of local government. In general, I believe the balance of power works for the city as is; we just have to find a way to expedite the processing and construction of affordable housing.

**Are you in favor of the Palo Alto Fiber project that proposes to build Fiber to the Home? Why or why not?**

Yes! Despite being in the heart of Silicon Valley, we have terrible WiFi here at our house – which was a source of great embarrassment to me when my public speaking career went virtual during the pandemic and my internet would lag. People would say “where ARE you” and I’d say “Palo Alto” and they’d say “PALO ALTO has bad internet???” Um, yeah, at least on my street! I have both AT&T and Comcast in the hope that one will be working when the other one isn’t! (Which is a privilege, I realize!) In an economy and culture that increasingly depends on the internet, I believe the city is responsible for providing its citizens with fast and dependable internet service. It’s the key to participation in our schools and in our democracy and it’s the way to ensure equal access to information. (I am also a “net neutral” person.)

**If you had to prioritize funding either to upgrading our city's electrical grid to support phasing out gas including adding a second electric power line of electricity geographically redundant or having the Palo Alto Utilities provide a competing fiber to home service, which would you choose?**

To be clear, I think it is the role of the city council to raise sufficient money to fund *both* projects. We need faster wi-fi, but the truth is we also need to reduce our dependence on gas fossil fuels; climate change is one of the greatest existential threats facing the world today, and I believe that every community is responsible for reducing its greenhouse emissions to the greatest extent possible. That being said, in a situation where one project must be chosen, I would have to support phasing out gas over the fiber project. We have only a limited time to act to reduce our greenhouse emissions; we need to start *now*.

**With the planned fiber expansion, should we fund more districts to be undergrounded?**

Yes. Most importantly, undergrounding is safer for our community and can even improve town character. Power lines are unsightly and even dangerous, and relocating them underground is a better option for our community. Furthermore, underground power lines are less likely to be interfered with by storms or other natural phenomena. That being said, undergrounding is not my first priority as far as city operations go. The fiber project and the phasing out of fossil fuels from our electric grid are crucial and urgent projects; ideally, we would be able to accomplish a little bit of undergrounding in tandem with the fiber project and the shifting of the electric grid to sustainable sources.