



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

Brian Hamachek 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?

I don't have as much political experience working within the Palo Alto government as many of the other candidates. That being said, I am the only candidate running that was born and raised in Palo Alto. To me, Palo Alto isn't just another city; it is my home. I believe this experience would allow me to bring a unique and valuable perspective to the Council.

I have been involved with the City in many other ways though. I was a judge for the Civic App Hackathon. To increase the transparency and accountability of the police department, I began broadcasting and archiving the Palo Alto Police's radio transmissions online in 2016.

I interviewed for Palo Alto Planning and Transportation Commission on three occasions but unfortunately was never selected.

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

When I talk to people around town, I hear the same concerns repeated over and over. People are concerned about a diminishing sense of community among their neighbors, the loss of beloved small retail stores, and the growing influence of outside developers. I would want to make meaningful progress toward addressing these concerns.

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

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.

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

I would be in favor of significant campaign finance reform. I believe that individual contributions should be capped at \$250. This would ensure that the candidates with broad community support are able to have their voices heard.

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 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.

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

I support expanded relocation assistance and security deposit limits.

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

While this sounds like an interesting idea, it is not one that I support. Families that have purchased a home within a single-family home neighborhood should not be expected to watch their neighborhoods change into something entirely different.

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

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

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

We should severely restrict new office construction; even further than the City already has. Palo Alto has a profound jobs-housing imbalance that needs to be corrected.

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?

It’s impossible for the quality of life to be maintained if we only focus on adding more housing units and neglect ensuring that we also keep an eye on maintaining the services and amenities to support the new residents. That means ensuring there are parks, tennis courts, dog runs, and vibrant retail options within *walking* distance of new housing. The focus should be on creating new neighborhoods, not just new housing.

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

Palo Alto’s traffic issues stem from the City’s huge jobs-housing imbalance. They can be fixed by building more housing, especially affordable housing, close to where people work.

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?

Businesses, especially those that don’t directly serve city residents, should definitely play a role in reducing their impact on the City’s traffic and parking. The city should significantly reduce the issuance of all-day parking passes to businesses. Low-wage workers should be entitled to parking garage permits at reduced rates.

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 City Council needs to stand up for residents, even when it goes against the recommendations of the City staff.

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

Palo Alto is known as the birthplace of Silicon Valley, yet less than 20% of residents say they are “very satisfied” with their current internet service. Fiber internet service will enable speeds far greater than what is currently available over existing coaxial cable lines. Beyond just faster internet, it’s hard to predict the sort of benefits and opportunities this would provide. When most homes were using dial-up to access the internet, it would have been impossible to predict many of the services that we now take for granted each day. Fiber has the potential to be just as revolutionary in our daily lives. I believe that if Palo Alto wants to continue to be seen as a city of innovation, it needs to be on the frontlines for these changes. Therefore I feel that pursuing municipal fiber is critical for Palo Alto.

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?

I would choose to prioritize the fiber-to-home service.

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

Yes, I think that underground utilities are an investment well worth pursuing. Beyond the obvious aesthetic benefits of undergrounding, there are numerous safety benefits as well.