



2022 City Council Candidate Questions

RETAIL

What is your position on ground floor retail? Should it be eliminated? Should permitted uses be revised? And should any changes apply to just downtown and Cal Ave or neighborhood centers as well?

PAT BURT

Palo Alto's Retail Protection Ordinance is designed to support the city's local retail businesses which contribute to Palo Alto's unique community atmosphere by preventing the displacement of retail stores in favor of more profitable offices and non-retail uses. I believe keeping retail businesses in place encourages walkability and ensures vibrant, active streets, particularly in downtown and neighborhood commercial areas, which improves the quality of life for residents and visitors. And it promotes local economic growth by encouraging consumers to shop locally and helping keep dollars circulating within the community.

However, post-pandemic, we no longer have the influx of daytime workers frequenting our stores and restaurants, and online shopping has changed consumers' habits, therefore we must modernize our program, not eliminate it. Elimination (as supported by three Planning Commissioners) will lead to the conversion of retail spaces to other uses, such as tech and office space, which would quickly dominate our unprotected retail districts and limit the diversity of our business offerings.

These changes shouldn't be limited to just downtown. We should evaluate how the retail protection ordinance impacts other areas of the city, particularly neighborhoods that rely on resident-serving businesses like those along El Camino, for example, where retail plays an important role in maintaining walkable neighborhoods across the city. This is especially true as we continue to grow. We must focus on having retail to create neighborhood centers to reduce car trips.

KATIE CAUSEY

I support ground floor retail, but believe we should relax zoning and permitting to include medical offices, gyms, etc. and would support this being implemented city wide.

ANNE CRIBBS

We should actively utilize the recent findings and recommendations of the consultants examining our local economy and retail uses.

I support policies that incentivize retail serving neighborhoods throughout the city. For University and Cal

Ave my vision is an area with local serving retail, neighborhood services, activities and gathering places. To do this I support allowing alternative activities to fill our vacant retail spaces—activities that bring customers and cannot be done online. I do not envision Downtown, Cal Ave, or the neighborhood centers as competing with Stanford Shopping Center or Town & Country. I support housing near services, shopping and jobs to support local businesses and reduce the need for car trips.

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not respond.

GEORGE LU

Ground floor retail is critical, and there is no world where we should consider eliminating it. The answer is to expand retail through incentivizing mixed-use retail and housing.

I joined the Planning Commission, and I am running in large part because I want retail to succeed. I care about getting energy in our streets, and supporting a diversity of businesses.

That said, we do need to become more flexible as a city. We have strong protections for retail on University, Cal Ave, and Midtown, but need to allow retail to evolve. For example, extremely rigid retail preservation ordinances on El Camino can contribute to blight.

It's also important to expand permitted uses. On Cal Ave for example, we effectively don't permit new hair salons, nail salons, tutoring centers, many fitness facilities, etc.. At a time where there are so many vacancies pulling energy from the street, we should be liberalizing our rules to enable more demand.

KEITH RECKDAHL

Ground floor retail is vital, not just in our downtowns, but in all parts of the city because it allows neighbors to walk and bike to meet their retail needs. I do not believe Ground Floor retail should be eliminated, instead the existing retail rules must be updated to allow greater flexibility but still retain the resident-serving retail that brings needed vibrancy to our city.

Unlike some other candidates, I oppose abolishing the Retail Preservation Ordinance, as its elimination would convert our ground-floor retail to tech offices, which would damage our retail environment by both reducing retail foot traffic and further increasing retail rents. A far better option is to selectively expand the permitted uses to include other resident-serving businesses, which may not provide the same foot traffic as traditional retail but would be more beneficial than general office.

As the City focuses on building density in Palo Alto, we must plan for nearby retail that serves those new residents, such as groceries and general merchandise.

El Camino and our neighborhood centers are different environments than California Ave and University Avenue. Many of the changes may be appropriate for both, but we cannot blindly apply changes citywide.

GREER STONE

I believe ground floor retail is essential for maintaining the vibrancy and walkability of our community, especially in key areas like Downtown and California Avenue. While I do not support eliminating ground floor retail, I am open to revising permitted uses to ensure we allow for flexibility in response to economic trends, especially post-pandemic. Supporting a mix of small businesses, service-oriented uses, and experiential retail can help adapt to changing market demands while preserving community character. Any policy changes should also be considered for neighborhood centers to enhance accessibility and support local businesses throughout the city, while recognizing that our various shopping areas are unique, so what works in one neighborhood center might not work in another.

DORIA SUMMA

I support retaining ground-floor retail requirements across the city. The definition of retail uses should be broader to allow some uses that don't fit into existing categories. I support loosening the restrictions on formula retail on California Avenue. (These restrictions do not currently apply to

downtown or neighborhood centers). I will work with local businesses and property owners to support neighborhood centers throughout Palo Alto.

CARI TEMPLETON

This year the planning and Transportation Commission heard from City staff and experts about how to improve retail in Palo Alto, which has been suffering significantly in recent years under the current leadership. One area that the staff report highlighted as particularly discouraging for retail tenants and potential retail tenants in Palo Alto is the redundancy in the current retail protection regulations. For this, staff recommended that we remove these redundancies to make retail protection easier and better, and I voted in favor of this recommendation to tidy up our ordinance. Our City's property owners, retailers and potential retailers deserve clear and easy to follow regulations so they can feel comfortable running their businesses in our City. Our City deserves a council that listens to businesses' feedback on how to improve our rules, especially during a time when we are losing so many of our retailers.