



2024 City Council Candidate Questions

Pat Burt Responses

EXPERIENCE

What experience with Palo Alto community issues would you bring to the council?

I've been a city Councilmember 2008-2016, 2020-2024, Mayor 2010, 2016, and 2022

And I've served on the following committees:

- Current Chair, Finance Committee
- Current Chair, Rail Committee
- City/School Liaison Committee
- Sustainability and Climate Action Ad Hoc Committee
- Retail Ad Hoc Committee
- Cubberley Ad Hoc Committee
- Stanford Ad Hoc Committee
- VTA Board Member
- Caltrain Board Member
- Bay Conservation and Development Commission Board Member

Regionally, I served on the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Board Member (and former Chair), the Caltrain Board, Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) Director, and as a former Delegate to the California Democratic Convention. I've also been in former leadership positions on a number of regional, state, and national environmental organizations including:

- Santa Clara County Pollution Prevention Committee
- California EPA Pollution Prevention Task Force
- Vice-Chair, Sustainable San Mateo County
- California EPA Comparative Risk Project

In my career, I'm a former tech founder and CEO. I began my involvement in advocacy by serving as the President of the University South Neighborhoods Group (leading the SOFA Coordinated Area Plan), a co-founder of the Community Center Neighborhood Group, and then served 9 years on the Planning and Transportation Commission, including two terms as Chair.

I have extensive experience in leading the city through a variety of economic upturns and downturns which I think will serve the city well.

My candidacy has been endorsed by the Sierra Club and 350.org along with many community leaders, and local and regional elected officials including Joe Simitian and Josh Becker.

GOALS

What do you see as the biggest problems facing Palo Alto and how would you address them?

1. Housing affordability, particularly for low and moderate income workers. How to meet our Housing Element requirements while retaining community character and meeting the infrastructure and

community service needs of those new residents. Contending with Builders Remedy projects (including our legal opposition to the extent allowed and advocating for changes to these state laws) will be among our biggest problems going forward. Contending with AB2097 (which prohibits us from requiring any parking for new projects within a half mile of major transit) will have potentially very detrimental impacts.

2. Public safety. Completing the full restoration of police and fire staffing, providing full fire station staffing/water trucks, and completing the rebuild of outdated police and fire buildings.
3. Retail revitalization. How we adjust to changing retail conditions from greater remote work and online shopping by modifying, rather than eliminating, our Retail Protection Ordinance.
4. Governance. Ensuring that the Council determines city policies and provides oversight of staff.
5. Environmental protection, climate adaptation and climate protection.

Do you have any interests, such as ties to Stanford or other entities that would cause you to recuse yourself on issues that are before the council? If so, what are they?

No.

HOUSING

What does the term “affordable housing” mean to you?

“Affordable housing” refers to housing that is deemed financially accessible to individuals or families based on their income, without causing them undue financial strain. The general benchmark used to define affordable housing is that a household should not spend more than 30% of its gross income on housing costs, which can include rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and other housing-related expenses.

Affordable housing is defined for households earning a certain percentage of the Area Median Income (AMI), with different tiers like extremely-low income (up to 30% AMI) very low-income (30-50% of AMI), low-income (50% to 80% of AMI), and moderate-income (80-120% of AMI).

Four proposed developments along El Camino will create about 1100 new housing units, with only 15-20% of these being below-market-rate housing.

- **How are we to meet HCD’s requirement for low-income housing by requiring only such a low percentage?**

We will not meet our HCD only through “inclusionary zoning. As we have done historically, we will need to provide much of our low income housing through 100% affordable projects in collaboration with nonprofits, and through ADUs.

- **How do we ensure units will include a range of bedrooms, so they are feasible for families?**

We need to continue to support market rate and affordable housing proposals that provide a range of sizes. However, those projects work against our compliance with RHNA mandates.

The city’s housing element has almost 2000 houses in the San Antonio corridor. What is the most significant (new) policy that will increase housing in Palo Alto? Other than in the San Antonio corridor, where else should we look for housing?

I have supported ADUs (now~100/year). We have already moved to zone for more housing along the El Camino corridor and in the two downtowns. Going forward, I support significant housing in the Stanford Research Park (and Palo Alto Square) and Stanford Shopping Center.

We should be seeking to densify in areas that are already walkable, bikeable and have access to good transit.

Here are the housing policies that I believe will have the greatest impacts:

1. Inclusionary Zoning: It requires developers to include affordable housing units in new residential developments, ensuring a percentage of new housing is available to low- and moderate-income residents.
2. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and Junior ADUs (JADUs): ADU and JADU has been incentivized, making it easier for homeowners to build these units.
3. Density Bonus Programs: These state mandated policies allow developers to build more housing units than typically permitted if they include affordable housing, incentivizing the creation of more affordable units.
4. Streamlined Permitting: We have implemented streamlining the permitting process, especially for affordable housing projects, in alignment with state laws like SB 35.
5. Commercial Linkage Fees: I endorsed imposing full commercial impact fees, requiring developers of new commercial spaces to contribute funds to support affordable housing and address the infrastructure needs generated by new developments.
6. Upzoning: The city adopted necessary upzoning for higher-density development in strategic areas near transit hubs and commercial corridors to create more housing opportunities.
7. Affordable Housing Funding: I led the charge on Measure K to increase our Affordable Housing Fund and advocated for raising Impact Fees to ensure we have the necessary resources to finance and preserve affordable housing.
8. Public Land Development: The city is pursuing housing development above surface parking lots in our downtown area to utilize public land for affordable housing.

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

I supported lower the occupancy requirement for just cause eviction protections from 12 months to 6 months and advocated for capping security deposits at 150% of monthly rent for unfurnished apartments. Additionally, we secured relocation assistance for tenants facing no-fault evictions, made these eviction protections permanent, and introduced a rental registry to improve transparency and future planning.

In addition, we must ensure that our policies don't encourage the demolition of existing affordable housing, and displacing residents, many of whom cannot afford to move elsewhere in their neighborhood or the city. Palo Alto's rental registry will help increase transparency and accountability within the city's rental market. By collecting accurate data on rental properties, the registry enables the city to better enforce housing laws, protect tenants' rights, and preserve affordable housing. It also allows for tracking key trends, such as rent increases, evictions, and property conditions, helping to prevent unlawful practices and displacement while holding landlords accountable for maintaining safe, habitable homes. Most importantly, the registry will also support informed decision-making as Palo Alto plans for future housing needs and policies, ensuring that the city can effectively address its housing challenges and promote long-term stability for renters.

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?

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.

What are your ideas to help local small businesses, especially those that serve neighborhoods, to survive and thrive?

In addition to retaining an updated Retail Protection Ordinance, the most important thing we can do is invest in making our retail areas are clean, attractive, and vibrant. We must continue to refine and streamline our retail permitting process, provide financial incentives and grants where possible, and promote flexible zoning to help small businesses thrive. I would also back "buy local" campaigns, push for infrastructure investments that attract our residents and neighboring communities, and support business incubators or mentorship programs to give entrepreneurs the resources and connections they need.

Given that there are many empty retail business locations, would you support a retail business vacancy tax for properties that have been vacant for more than 1 year?

I think that 1 year is too aggressive, but I would be open to considering a graduated retail vacancy fine starting at two years, provided that those funds were reinvested in the retail areas where those particular vacancies exist, and provided that retail permit streamlining occurred concurrently.

COMMUNITY LIFE

What two things would you prioritize to make Palo Alto and its neighborhoods more livable?

Increased cultural special events (including live music) in the retail areas and better traffic calming/speeding enforcement.

What is your vision for the Cubberley site?

In the nearterm, sourcing up and activating the site with art, community events, and other activation of public spaces. Going forward, a rebuilt and renovated community center on 15 acres of city-owned land (including 7 acres to be acquired by the city from PAUSD).

Do you support any housing on the Cubberley site? If so, housing for whom?

No.

TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC

The City wants people to use their cars less, yet not everyone can or wants to travel by bicycle and we have few public transportation options. How would you reorient traffic in our city?

We don't need or expect everyone to use bicycles or other micro mobility means. By encouraging safe biking for those who would like to bike more, we free parking and roads for those who wish to or must drive. Also, we need to expand public transit and its use coming into the city and within the city, such as with electrified Caltrain (with its better schedules for non-commuters), expand VTA buses and their use and promote the free public use of the Margaritte bus system. Also, by expanding provision of transit passes to low income workers and city employees, we reduce traffic congestion and parking demands while increasing employee recruitment and retention in support of retailers and the City.

In addition to Palo's Alto's plan for the San Antonio/Charleston area, Charleston Plaza in Mt View is planning a development that will bring hundreds of vehicle trips to the same area, which is already severely stressed. What mitigation measures can and should be done?

The new Caltrain schedule provides significant increases to transit on that corridor. We, and MV, need to provide safe bike lanes and advocate for better VTA service, along with local retail services.

Regarding Grade Separation, what is your personal design preference (underpass, hybrid, trench, etc) for each of the three locations?

Based on the preliminary engineering performed to date, my preference is for the underpass at Meadow and Charleston, provided that property impacts can be minimized or eliminated. At Churchill, based on lower projections of future trains and commuter traffic, I believe that we likely do not need to proceed with a grade separation or closure for the foreseeable future. Instead, I believe that a combination of signal optimization, vehicle and pedestrian improvements (underway) to significantly improve safety, next generation technologies for track security, and quiet zones or wayside horns to drastically reduce or eliminate horn noise (in addition to the now far quieter electric trains will achieve over 80% of the need benefits of a grade separation without the negative impacts associated with the partial underpass and its construction.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Anything else you'd like the residents to know?

We are facing major challenges resulting from a myriad of state laws that make (often unfunded) mandates on cities. These laws will result in a range of challenges and impacts, many of which we are not yet able to predict.

Nearly all of the candidates have platforms and high level visions that sound similar on the surface. However, there are very significant differences in critical policy positions with some candidates who

have supported; the Builders Remedy including a 17-story tower at Mollie Stones, prohibiting the city from requiring any parking on new development within a half mile of Caltrain stations, eliminating our Retail Protection Ordinance, reducing our Impact Fees, and just painting bike lanes on El camino without true safety improvements for riders and students and without mitigations to impacts on businesses.

Knowledge and experience, valuing our community character, and effective governing skills matter in City Council candidates.