



2024 City Council Candidate Questions

Greer Stone Responses

EXPERIENCE

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

As a longtime Palo Alto resident and public servant, I bring a deep understanding of the community's needs to the City Council. I grew up in Palo Alto and attended our city's venerable schools from Duveneck to Paly. I worked in the District Attorney's Office in the Palo Alto Courthouse and even taught at JLS, Gunn, and Paly. Prior to being elected to the Palo Alto City Council, I served as chair of the Midtown Residents Association, the city's largest residents association.

Having served as mayor and a council member since 2020, I've worked on issues ranging from housing affordability to environmental sustainability. I've also led initiatives on youth mental health and wellbeing, helping to advance policies like establishing a new teen center in north Palo Alto. My experience as a public school teacher further grounds me in the concerns of families and youth, allowing me to advocate effectively for all residents.

GOALS

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

One of the biggest problems facing Palo Alto is the severe lack of affordable housing. As housing costs soar, it creates an imbalance that drives middle-income families, teachers, and essential workers out of the city, contributing to a growing inequality in our community, and the loss of beloved small businesses. To address this, I've worked to advocate for commonsense renter protections and the development of truly affordable housing, while balancing the impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and advancing sustainability goals to protect our environment.

Another pressing issue is youth mental health. As a teacher and public servant, I've witnessed firsthand the toll academic pressure and social isolation have taken on our young people. I helped lead the city's efforts in creating a Youth Mental Health Taskforce and have continually pushed for policies that foster well-being and ensure that youth voices are integrated into city decisions.

We also face significant environmental challenges. Palo Alto must continue to lead in sustainability efforts, which is why I've been actively involved in the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) to push for strong environmental policies that address climate change while promoting the health and well-being of our entire community.

Finally, Palo Alto has fallen behind on creating social opportunities for residents to connect with each other. That's why I've created the Palo Alto Connect initiative that aims to help connect Palo Altans to nature, art, their government, and to each other. Neighboring cities have outpaced us when it comes to offering community events and we are outsourcing residents to those cities to enjoy their events and businesses. We should reinvest in our own community assets and create new opportunities for our residents to connect.

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?

To me, “affordable housing” means creating opportunities for people of all income levels, especially low- and middle-income families, to live in our community without spending an excessive portion of their income on housing. It means housing that is within reach for essential workers, teachers, first responders, and others who are often priced out of Palo Alto’s market. A key part of this is increasing the number of Below Market Rate (BMR) units, particularly those deed-restricted for households earning between 60% and 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). Affordable housing must include a variety of housing types — from rental units to homes for purchase — that allow diverse groups to stay and thrive in our city. It’s about ensuring economic diversity, fostering community stability, and reducing the need for long commutes, which impacts both environmental sustainability and family life. As a renter myself, I understand these challenges firsthand and have consistently worked to support policies that prioritize truly affordable and inclusive housing.

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?**

Meeting the California Department of Housing and Community Development’s (HCD) low-income housing requirement requires more than just increasing our inclusionary zoning percentages in housing developments. The current approach, with BMR requirements ranging from 15-20%, reflects a balance between encouraging development while ensuring inclusion of lower income units. However, this approach alone will not be sufficient to meet our city’s quota of producing over 3,000 new below market rate housing units.

To address this, we must focus on increasing the overall supply of affordable housing by incentivizing developers to include a higher percentage of Below Market Rate (BMR) units, particularly those targeting lower income brackets (60-80% AMI). I’ve championed this by advocating for special zoning districts where developers receive variances in height and density in exchange for more affordable units at lower AMI. Additionally, we can explore alternative funding models and partnerships with nonprofit affordable housing providers, Santa Clara County, and the state. I’m currently exploring various funding strategies to help us reach our goals, one example is a housing vacancy tax (also known as a “ghost house” tax). Approximately 2,000 housing units are vacant in Palo Alto, which is a 7.5% vacancy, which is double a healthy vacancy rate. By passing a housing vacancy tax we can both disincentivize the practice of purchasing homes to be used as an investment tool and raise much needed funding for new affordable housing construction.

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

Ensuring that new affordable housing developments include a range of unit sizes suitable for families is crucial to meeting the needs of our community. However, the deluge of state housing mandates has encouraged micro units at the expense of family units because cities’ housing quotas are based on number of units and not number of bedrooms. In passing our recent Housing Element, I advocated for ensuring we were not only passing policies that would promote micro

units, but also creating a diverse range of different sized units, but more work is necessary. To achieve this, we must continue to implement policies that require developers to build a mix of bedroom types, including two- and three-bedroom units. This can be done by:

1. **Incentives for Family-Sized Units:** Offering density bonuses or other incentives to developers who include a significant percentage of family-sized units, ensuring developments meet the needs of larger households.
2. **Zoning Updates:** Revisiting zoning regulations to mandate a portion of units in new developments be reserved for family housing. This can be especially important in BMR (Below Market Rate) units where family-sized homes are often lacking.

By focusing on a balanced approach and ensuring that incentives align with the development of family-friendly housing, we can ensure that the affordable housing created is not only sufficient in quantity but also appropriate for the diverse needs of our population.

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?

There is no one single policy that will act as a panacea to solve our city's affordable housing shortage. Instead, we require a multifaceted approach with a variety of policies as identified in our recently certified Housing Element. One of the most significant policies to increase housing in Palo Alto is expanding zoning for higher-density residential development, particularly near transit hubs and commercial corridors like El Camino Real, California Avenue, and Downtown. This can help create mixed-use developments that offer housing close to services, reducing the need for cars and promoting sustainability.

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

As a renter myself, I deeply understand the challenges tenants face, especially in a high-cost city like Palo Alto. During my first term, I've been a strong advocate for renter protections, working to prevent unjust evictions, limit excessive security deposits and rent increases, passing the city's first rental registry, and ensure access to relocation assistance when necessary. Additionally, I would work to protect older, more affordable rental units from redevelopment or conversion to luxury apartments, ensuring that these options remain available for lower-income tenants. We must also explore rent stabilization measures, while continuing to invest in affordable housing developments, particularly Below Market Rate (BMR) units, to ensure that rental options remain accessible to all.

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?

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.

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

Supporting small businesses, especially those in neighborhood centers, requires a combination of direct assistance and community engagement. I would advocate for streamlining the permitting process to make it easier for small businesses to open and operate.

A key strategy to help these businesses thrive is expanding community events to attract more shoppers. Hosting local events like street fairs, farmers markets, and seasonal festivals can draw in not only residents but also visitors from across the region, increasing foot traffic to neighborhood shops. Collaborating with neighborhood associations to organize these events will help build a strong, loyal customer base for these businesses while creating a sense of community. We currently export too many Palo Altans to neighboring communities to shop, eat, and play, we need to keep their business here in Palo Alto and I would prioritize that work by reinvesting in Palo Alto events.

Additionally, ensuring that zoning and planning policies support diverse neighborhood retail—without displacing existing businesses—will keep our neighborhoods vibrant. Neighborhood centers, along with University and California Avenue, must have the necessary infrastructure, like parking and transportation, to make it easier for residents to support these businesses regularly. By focusing on these combined efforts, we can help our local small businesses survive and thrive in a competitive market.

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'm keeping an open mind regarding the retail business vacancy tax for properties that have been vacant for over a year, and I'm interested in learning more about both the potential benefits and drawbacks of such a policy. While this tax could encourage property owners to fill vacant spaces and support local businesses, I want to explore its impact on landlords, tenants, and the broader economic environment in our community before making a final decision. Input from small business owners, property owners, and community stakeholders will be key as I weigh the pros and cons of this policy.

COMMUNITY LIFE

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

To make Palo Alto and its neighborhoods more livable, I would prioritize enhancing community engagement and investing in sustainable infrastructure. First, fostering a strong sense of community is essential. This can be achieved by creating more inclusive spaces for residents to gather, such as parks and community centers, and expanding programs that encourage local involvement. A new initiative I'm focusing on in my campaign is called Palo Alto Connect where I'm aiming to better connect Palo Altans to their community by increasing community events and providing additional opportunities to connect residents to nature, art, and their city government. Engaging residents in decision-making processes ensures their voices are heard and helps to address the unique needs of diverse neighborhoods.

Second, investing in sustainable infrastructure, such as improved public transportation and safe walking and biking paths, will enhance accessibility while reducing traffic congestion and environmental impact. Sustainable infrastructure must also include protecting our natural environment such as our tree canopy which provides a cooler and more aesthetic streetscape that encourages more walking and biking. This aligns with broader goals for sustainability and equity, making our city more welcoming for families and individuals alike.

What is your vision for the Cubberley site?

My vision for the Cubberley site is to transform it into a vibrant, multi-use community hub that serves the diverse needs of Palo Alto residents, with a strong emphasis on education, arts, recreation, and essential community services. I see Cubberley continuing to be a space where people of all ages and abilities—youth, seniors, and families—can come together to learn, engage, and grow. Recognizing its long-standing role in providing below-market space for nonprofits, I am committed to ensuring that these organizations, which deliver critical services to our community, have adequate, affordable space to operate. I also envision incorporating sustainability features, such as green spaces, energy-efficient designs, and flexible infrastructure, to adapt to the evolving needs of Palo Alto while promoting environmental responsibility.

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

I do not support the inclusion of housing on the Cubberley site. We have already identified locations for over 6,000 new housing units, which represents a 25% increase to our current housing stock. This significant expansion makes it unnecessary to incorporate housing at Cubberley. Instead, I believe we should focus on utilizing the site for community-centered initiatives that enhance educational, recreational, and social services, ensuring we meet the diverse needs of our residents without further straining our already limited resources. Prioritizing these community functions will provide greater benefits to Palo Alto's residents.

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?

To effectively reorient traffic in Palo Alto while encouraging less car usage, requires a multifaceted approach that enhances public transportation options, promotes walking and cycling, and prioritizes new housing in areas near public transit.

First, improving public transportation is crucial. This could involve collaborating with regional transit authorities to expand bus routes, increase service frequency, and provide real-time tracking to make public transport a more viable option. I've been a supporter of our affordable and convenient ride share service called Palo Alto Link, and I support efforts to continue funding this program, or to identify more efficient and affordable alternatives.

Additionally, enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure can encourage those who might otherwise rely on cars. Expanding bike lanes, improving sidewalks, and ensuring safe crosswalks are essential steps. Cities that prioritize walkability not only reduce traffic congestion but also promote healthier lifestyles .

Lastly, I will continue to prioritize new housing in transit rich environments in order to promote less car dependent development and encourage new residents to use alternative methods of transportation. However, we must also recognize that not all of these residents will be able to live car-free, and so some parking requirements will continue to be needed.

By integrating these strategies, we can create a more sustainable, accessible, and livable city for all residents.

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?

To mitigate the impact of the proposed Charleston Plaza development in Mountain View, which is set to increase traffic in an already congested area, several measures can be considered:

1. **Enhanced Public Transportation:** Expanding public transit options to serve the San Antonio/Charleston area can help reduce reliance on personal vehicles. Increased bus frequency and new routes connecting to major employment centers can encourage more residents to use public transport, as seen in other communities that have successfully implemented similar initiatives. We must continue to advocate and collaborate with the VTA to ensure adequate coverage in this area and to help them plan for the increased demand in south Palo Alto due to the anticipated development both here and in Mountain View.
2. **Traffic Demand Management:** Implementing strategies like carpool incentives, and ride-sharing programs can help decrease single-occupancy vehicle trips. I would advocate for increased funding to the Palo Alto TMA to ensure that we continue to have a robust TMA program throughout the city and to help mitigate these anticipated impacts.
3. **Complete Streets Initiatives:** Creating a “complete streets” approach can enhance the infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, making non-motorized forms of travel safer and more appealing. This can include wider sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and improved crosswalks. This work must be done through the San Antonio Coordinated Area Plan which I have been a strong supporter of. We must ensure that we are developing a neighborhood that will be safe, attractive, and welcoming for all.
4. **Green Infrastructure:** Implementing measures such as green roofs and permeable pavement can help manage stormwater runoff while also enhancing the aesthetic appeal of new developments, making the area more attractive to pedestrians.
5. **Community Engagement:** Ongoing dialogue with local residents and stakeholders can ensure that their concerns are addressed, and that any mitigation strategies are responsive to the community's needs. The community must be engaged during the coordinated area planning process.

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

I'm maintaining an open mind regarding the grade separation alternatives currently under consideration. While I lean toward the underpass option at the Meadow/Charleston crossings, I do have concerns about potential property takings associated with this plan. As it stands, the designs are only at 5% completion. To better understand the impacts on our neighborhoods, including property implications and traffic conditions, I supported advancing both the underpass and hybrid options to 15% preliminary engineering design. The hybrid option raises additional concerns for me, as it could create a significant barrier that divides our community without demonstrably improving traffic flow at these crossings.

For the Churchill crossing, I backed the advancement of the partial underpass alternative. During this design phase, we aim to refine plans for Churchill, Meadow, and Charleston to minimize property impacts, enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity, and optimize infrastructure improvements. This includes mitigating the traffic circle impacts of the Charleston Road Underpass Alternative and ensuring compliance with environmental documentation requirements.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Anything else you'd like the residents to know?

I'm running for re-election to continue the progress we've made over the past four years. As Mayor, I've prioritized youth mental health, leading efforts like the Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce and expanding access to mental health services and teen programming. I hope to continue

this focus and effort by earning another term. I have consistently prioritized issues that matter most to our community—affordable housing, environmental sustainability, economic vibrancy, and, more importantly, I have a record of getting the job done and ensuring our community remains vibrant and resilient for Palo Altans today and tomorrow. Despite the challenges ahead, I believe Palo Alto's best days are yet to come, and I hope to earn your support in being part of that future.