



2024 City Council Candidate Questions

Cari Templeton Responses

EXPERIENCE

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

During my 6+ year tenure on the Planning and Transportation Commission, I have reviewed development proposals, transportation plans, program and policy initiatives, and more. Some example projects from my tenure include:

- Housing
 - Affordable Housing Combining District
 - RHNA updates
 - BMR program
- Sustainability
 - Green Stormwater Infrastructure Plan
 - CEQA updates
 - Sustainability and Climate Action Plan
- Infrastructure
 - Improvements in bike safety infrastructure (bike lanes and paths, and most recently the addition of bike lanes on El Camino Real)
 - Stormwater drainage improvements to protect the Baylands and flood safety
 - Bike and pedestrian safety and accessibility
 - Parking lot exceptions to allow more EV charging stations in existing lots to accelerate adoption of electric vehicles
- Major projects
 - Cubberley Master Plan
 - The North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan/Fry's Site redevelopment
 - Housing Element Ad Hoc Committee
 - Expanded Community Advisory Panel (safer rail crossings)

Beyond the City of Palo Alto, I have also had the opportunity to work for other agencies:

- State Senator Josh Bekcer
 - Worked in State Senator Josh Becker's office, running events for Sen. Becker which focused on consumer education.
- Valley Water's Measure S Oversight Committee
 - Vice Chair of the Renewed Safe, Clean Water & Natural Flood Protection: Independent Monitoring Committee

GOALS

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

- **Inclusive Communities:** Ensure that the 6k new homes that Palo Alto has agreed to create include affordable housing, create an inclusive sense of community, and foster retail recovery. New Palo Altans deserve the same status and amenities as existing Palo Altans.
- **Safer Streets:** Invest in safety-related bike, pedestrian, and road infrastructure that keeps residents safer while protecting against climate change and simultaneously creating quality construction jobs. Palo Alto should be a safe, walkable city that prioritizes the welfare of its residents, including students biking to school and seniors using the sidewalks.
- **Green Spaces:** Improve open spaces and parks by expanding such that new homes will have ample access to open space just as our existing residents. Palo Alto's relationship with nature is a significant part of its identity. As we expand housing, we should also expand access to nature.

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?

In use at the City Council, “affordable housing” is a specific term defined by the United States government, further objectively quantified by the state of California on a regional basis, and is not subject to discretionary or arbitrary definition by local entities or individuals.

In Palo Alto, we consider housing at or below moderate-income as affordable. The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) publishes annual tables of official federal and state income limits for determining these maximums for a variety of programs. State statutory limits are based on federal limits set and periodically revised by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD's limits are always based on surveys of local area median income (AMI), ranging from extremely low-income (under 30% of AMI) to above moderate-income (over 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?**

The only way for Palo Alto to meet our below market rate (BMR) housing requirements is to make it easier for developers and/or the City to create more below market rate housing. Currently it is not financially feasible for developers to include more BMR housing in their projects, and that's why we are not seeing a larger number of projects with more BMR housing being proposed in Palo Alto. Requiring up to 20% of homes to be BMR in order for a project to go forward will reduce the number of projects that are brought to the City without addressing our urgent need for more affordable housing.

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

If the Council desired to do so, it could enforce these range requirements by updating the building and zoning policies to require greater variety of home size and bedroom quantities in development projects. That said, Palo Alto also has requirements about the size of bedrooms and about the floor to area ratio (FAR) which might complicate factors for builders

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?

Incentivising new housing in Palo Alto is a complex issue, and no single policy will resolve the problem. Creating incentives, analyzing timelines, and understanding development obstacles are areas the City can explore with developers to streamline the process and make building here more attractive. We should be looking for opportunities to build new homes throughout the city, not just on the edge near San Antonio and definitely not in the Baylands.

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

Secure and sustainable housing access is one of my top priorities. I will push the City to meet the goals set in the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan and Housing Element so we can ensure more affordable and missing-middle housing, and reduce traffic congestion through adequate public transportation. To accomplish this, I will support policies that ease or adjust regulations that unnecessarily obstruct the City's progress toward housing objectives, including converting commercial land for housing. The City should also increase our investment in affordable housing, while making the approval process more predictable and cost-effective. I have recommended approval of the renter registry so we can track compliance among landlords with the policies governing renters' rights, which is being rolled out this fall.

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?

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.

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

The City has recently hired a staff person to work with small businesses and help them get what they need from the City as far as support. In addition, the City should work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage the formation of small business associations, especially for businesses which are located near each other, such as Downtown, California Avenue, or Midtown.

Having more interactive and fun events that draw people into these small business centers would also be wonderful. Currently programs like 3rd Thursday on California Avenue are independently operated and very successful. However, we should consider how the City can promote and participate in programs like these that draw larger and more consistent crowds to our business areas to support our retailers.

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 am not in favor of a vacancy tax on retail/office vacancies at this time. We recently imposed a tax on medium and large sized businesses. We are seeing many companies leave the city, and a reluctance of some businesses to consider locating in Palo Alto. Overall, we have not seen Palo Alto's businesses fully recover financially from the Pandemic and need to see that more robust recovery before we could consider additional taxes.

COMMUNITY LIFE

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

1. Create an inclusive sense of community, in part by fostering retail recovery so we have more places to gather.
2. Increased safety measures for cars, cyclists and pedestrians, especially school children and seniors.

What is your vision for the Cubberley site?

Cubberley is already a central hub for many city recreational activities. As we envision the best way for Cubberley to be developed to meet the demands of the city now and in the future, we need to imagine that the complex could be rebuilt as a multipurpose development with housing, retail, offices and a park/recreation space.

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

Yes. I am open to creating inclusive housing on the Cubberley site, among other purposes. Ideally, because Cubberley is on public land, I would like to see any housing there be affordable housing. That said, we mustn't forget how important the fields and other outdoor space at the Cubberley center are to Palo Altans, and we need to make sure we retain access to these public fields to the maximum extent.

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?

I encourage our city to incentivize the use of buses and bikes by our school children to reduce school-related traffic, to increase students' comfort with public transportation, and to encourage a life-long use of energy-efficient public transit as they enter adulthood.

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?

This development presents an excellent opportunity for an inter-agency project between the City of Palo Alto, the City of Mountain View, and VTA. It's very evident that we need more support on San Antonio Road for bike lanes and public buses, but it's not as simple as saying it's so. We would need to work with the different agencies to figure out a way to sufficiently support this area for additional modes of transit other than just personal vehicles.

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

The City of Palo Alto has been working on design options for grade separation for the rail crossing for a decade and a half, and has recently narrowed down to two options for the south Palo Alto crossings, both of which many residents find undesirable: the hybrid and the underpass (Charleston roundabout). Both of these have flaws that many Palo Altans would find unacceptable, including the large number of property takings the City would have to conduct. There is one option the council did not fully consider or explore, which is the viaduct, which will not require takings of properties and could be quieter and cheaper in the long run. I would like to see us explore that option and at least the level of detail we're looking at for the hybrid and the underpass options.

For Churchill, I prefer no change for now, because the road will remain accessible for school buses without creating additional dangerous intersection elements for vehicles and bikes crossing Alma. However, we should explore what relationship a viaduct in South Palo Alto would have to options for Churchill to inform our longer term approach.

For the crossing at Palo Alto Avenue which has been put on the back burner for some time, the City should study options and make a decision as soon as feasible, because the infrastructure supporting the railroad tracks at this site is deteriorating rapidly.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Anything else you'd like the residents to know?

I've called Palo Alto home for nearly 20 years—first Ventura, then Barron Park—and raised my family here—at Preschool Family, Ohlone Elementary, and Fletcher Middle school. I earned my master's degree at Stanford University and spent a decade as a program manager in high-tech. Since then, I dedicated myself to community service: joining nonprofit boards, local and regional groups and City-appointed commissions.

I spent 6+ years on the Planning and Transportation Commission, promoting more favorable zoning for our small business communities to fight vacancies during the pandemic, safer streets, wildlife protection, and more. On the PTC, I worked to improve the Housing Element, fought for safe and practical train crossings, and delivered a plan to develop the North Ventura site. I also served on Valley Water's Measure S Oversight Committee keeping our creeks safe, clean, and natural. I successfully campaigned for increasing Palo Alto's available funds via the business tax. Most recently I served in the office of State Senator Josh Becker liaising with the Chambers of Commerce and civic leaders in Mountain View and Los Altos.

In my private life, I have also worked on nonprofit boards and political boards, including organizations to support students and teachers, to educate voters, to elect more women, to advocate for personal rights, freedom, and bodily autonomy, and to bring our electeds and candidates closer to the voters.

These experiences have given me broader insights into the experience of living and working in Palo Alto. I have a meaningful understanding of the challenges faced by residents, business owners, employees, parents, students, seniors, and more.

I ask for your vote, and encourage you to reach out if you have any questions. Thank you.

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