



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Yudy Deng Responses

Experience / Vision / Goals

In the last four years what issues in Palo did you take a leadership role in that you are most proud of and what was the result?

Over the last four years, I'm most proud of helping bring people together and making Palo Alto feel more connected. Through my nonprofit work, small business, and service as a Parks and Recreation Commissioner, I've focused on listening to residents and finding practical ways to improve our community.

I'm especially proud of my work on the Cubberley Community Center Planning Committee. I want Cubberley to be a place where families, young people, seniors, artists, and community groups can come together. That means getting the big vision right, but also focusing on the basics like safe access, parking, traffic, affordability, and spaces people can actually use.

For me, this work is really about belonging. I want Palo Alto to be a city where people can find community, celebrate who they are, and have a real voice in its future.

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

No.

What do you hope to accomplish in the next four years on Palo Alto City Council?

As City Councilmember, I want to help build Palo Alto into a place where people can build a career, raise a family, and actually stay. That means making housing, childcare, local businesses, and everyday community life more accessible.

My Green Lights approach is about making City Hall work better. Good housing and neighborhood-serving projects shouldn't spend years stuck in unnecessary process. I want clearer rules and faster decisions, while still maintaining the high standards Palo Alto expects.

I also want to invest in the things that make people love living here: our parks, libraries, trees, local businesses, safe streets, and gathering places. We can continue leading on climate while being thoughtful about affordability and reliability.

I want residents to feel like City Hall is a partner. Government should listen, communicate clearly, and actually get things done.

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

I really come back to two things: helping young families and longtime residents stay in Palo Alto, and making our neighborhoods places where people actually feel connected.

First, we need more housing that works for real families and the people who work in our community. Teachers, public employees, young families, and even our own kids should have a chance to put down roots here. That means making it easier to build good housing near transit, schools, and neighborhood centers, while also supporting things like childcare.

Second, I want to focus on the everyday things that make a neighborhood feel like home: parks, libraries, local shops, safe sidewalks and bike routes, playgrounds, and places where people can simply spend time together.

That's really what my Green Lights approach is about. When something makes a neighborhood better, whether it's housing, childcare, a small business, or a safer street, City Hall should be helping move it forward, not making it harder.

Housing, State Mandates, Local Control, Growth & Infrastructure

State government has increasingly limited cities' discretion over housing policy through laws including SB 79, the Housing Accountability Act, Density Bonus Law and other legislation. Palo Alto must simultaneously meet state housing requirements, accommodate substantial new housing and preserve the qualities residents value about their neighborhoods.

Where do you think the City should accommodate significantly greater housing density, and where—if anywhere—should it resist or seek to mitigate state requirements?

I believe Palo Alto should remain in the driver's seat when it comes to how our city grows. We have to meet our housing obligations, but we should be proactive about deciding where new housing makes sense rather than simply reacting to one-size-fits-all rules from Sacramento.

I support focusing more housing near transit and along areas like El Camino, California Avenue, Downtown, and other places where jobs, businesses, and infrastructure already exist. ADUs are also a great way to add homes gradually without dramatically changing neighborhoods, and my Green Lights approach would make them easier and faster to approve.

Growth should be thoughtful. We need to consider traffic, schools, utilities, trees, neighborhood character, and public spaces alongside housing rather than after the fact.

I also think Palo Alto needs to be much more active in Sacramento. We should work with our legislators and neighboring cities to protect local flexibility, address unintended consequences in state housing laws, and push for funding to support the infrastructure that comes with growth. The more effectively we plan locally, the stronger our position is to maintain meaningful local control.

How should Palo Alto ensure that housing growth is accompanied by appropriate infrastructure, transportation, parks and other public services?

As a Parks and Recreation Commissioner and a member of the Palo Alto Police Foundation board, I see these issues from a very practical perspective. Growth isn't just about how many homes we build. It's about whether our parks, streets, utilities, public safety, and other services can grow with them.

I don't believe infrastructure should be used as an excuse to stop housing. But we also shouldn't build first and figure everything else out later. When we add housing, we should be planning at the same time for safer streets, parks and playgrounds, transit, utilities, childcare, and emergency response.

I'm especially passionate about our parks and public spaces. Families need places to play, exercise, gather, and simply enjoy their neighborhood.

My Green Lights approach is about making good housing easier to build while planning responsibly for what comes with it. Growth should make our neighborhoods stronger, not simply put more pressure on what's already there.

Palo Alto has a significant number of truly affordable deed restricted housing units that were built over decades for households making between 30-60% AMI. Currently, most projects are at such high AMIs that most families in lower income brackets need the subsidy to reside in Palo Alto. As a councilmember, what solution would you put forward to create truly meaningful affordable housing in Palo Alto.

For me, this starts with the people who make Palo Alto work. Teachers, childcare workers, service workers, nonprofit staff, and public employees should have a real chance to live in the community they serve.

We also need to be honest about what "affordable" means. Housing at 80% or 100% of Area Median Income can still be out of reach for many working families. We need more deeply affordable housing in the 30% to 60% AMI range.

I would prioritize permanently affordable housing, particularly on public land near transit, schools, and jobs. I also want to make 100% affordable projects faster and less expensive to build by reducing unnecessary fees and creating a much clearer path through City Hall.

And we can't just focus on new construction. We need to preserve the affordable housing we already have and prevent displacement.

There's no single answer here. It will take public investment, nonprofit and private partners, and some difficult conversations. I'm ready to bring people together, find common ground, and get more of these projects going.

Palo Alto's Fiscal Solvency & the Future of Retail

Palo Alto entered FY 2026–27 facing a substantial General Fund deficit and adopted reductions affecting staffing and services, including library operations.

What do you believe are the underlying causes of Palo Alto's structural budget challenges? Describe your approach to balancing the City's budget over the next five years. Which services should be protected from cuts? Where would you reduce spending, increase revenue, change employee costs, defer capital projects or find efficiencies? Please be specific.

Palo Alto's budget challenge isn't just about one difficult year. Our costs are growing faster than our revenues. And you don't have to be a budget expert to see that too many things simply take too long and cost too much.

My priority is protecting the basics: public safety, utilities, streets, parks, libraries, and services for seniors and youth. Instead of across-the-board cuts, I want a real review of consulting contracts, duplicative studies, administrative costs, vacancies, and programs that aren't delivering enough value.

We also need to be realistic about major projects and what they will cost us long term. I want a responsible five-year plan that protects essential services, controls costs, and is straightforward with residents about the choices we have to make.

The loss of community serving retail is a source of frustration to many residents. What if anything would you do to retain and encourage retail in Palo Alto, particularly in Midtown, the burned-out Philz and Bill's lot, Edgewood Plaza, Charleston Plaza, Town and Country, San Antonio Road, and along El Camino?

Like I said in my previous answer, too many things in Palo Alto take too long and cost too much. For a small-business owner, those two things are directly connected. Every extra month waiting for a permit or getting conflicting answers from City Hall costs real money.

That's a big reason I developed my Green Light policies. I want to streamline the process, give businesses clearer timelines, and create a more customer-service-focused City Hall. Whether someone is opening a café, childcare center, neighborhood market, or simply improving an existing storefront, we should be helping them get to "yes" faster.

We also have too many important sites sitting vacant for years, from Midtown to the former Philz location. We should be more flexible about pop-ups, food vendors, markets, art, and other temporary uses while permanent plans move forward.

Our local businesses are part of what makes Palo Alto feel like Palo Alto. Saving them time saves them money, and that helps keep our neighborhoods vibrant.

Transportation

Growing numbers of people, including teens and children, ride personal electric mobility devices such as e-bikes and e-scooters on the city's streets, sidewalks, and trails in ways and at speeds considered dangerous.

At an April 2026 City/PAUSD discussion, Palo Alto police reported six collisions involving e-bikes and e-motos at PAUSD campuses in March 2026 alone, one involving major injuries. Police also reported increasing violations by student e-bike riders.

If you concerned about this issue, as a councilmember, what measures would you propose to make Palo Alto's streets, sidewalks and trails safe while not discouraging encouraging alternative transportation modalities?

This issue is very personal to me because I have children who need to walk and bike on our streets. Like so many parents, I want to know they can get to school, a park, or a friend's house and come home safely.

More than 58% of PAUSD students walk or bike to school, so safe streets aren't a side issue. They are basic public-safety infrastructure. We should continue working toward zero pedestrian and bicycle fatalities by improving crossings, adding protected bike lanes where they make sense, slowing traffic around schools and parks, and making sure our streets and trails are well-lit and maintained.

E-bikes also mean we have to adapt. I want the City, PAUSD, Stanford, families, and riders working together on better education, practical safety training, and responsible enforcement.

Palo Alto has a great biking culture and we should encourage it. But whether you're walking, biking, or driving, everyone should be able to use our streets safely.

Palo Alto has spent years studying how to separate streets from the Caltrain tracks at its rail crossings. The projects involve enormous costs, difficult engineering choices and potentially major impacts on nearby neighborhoods.

What outcome do you support for Palo Alto's rail crossings, and what tradeoffs are you willing—and unwilling—to accept regarding cost, neighborhood impacts, road closures, eminent domain, construction disruption and urban design? At what point should the City decide that a particular grade-separation alternative is simply too expensive?

I don't think residents should have to sacrifice their homes or quality of life simply because one design is easier. Each rail crossing is different, and we need solutions that reflect the neighborhood around it.

I support continuing the work on Churchill, Meadow, and Charleston, but I want to understand the full cost, funding, traffic, noise, and neighborhood impacts before committing to construction.

The final designs should be safe, attractive, accessible, and maintain neighborhood connections. Eminent domain and displacement should be an absolute last resort. This is a major, long-term investment, and we need to get it right.

Homelessness and Vehicle Dwellers

Palo Alto faces competing concerns surrounding people living in RVs and oversized vehicles on public streets, including the welfare of unhoused residents, neighborhood and business impacts, sanitation, public safety and the private use of public space.

What should Palo Alto's policy toward vehicle dwellers be? Describe the combination of enforcement, parking regulation, safe-parking programs, shelter, services and housing that you believe would be both humane and workable?

I agree with residents that the proposed pilot was the wrong approach, and I'm glad the Council rejected it. We already have laws addressing illegal dumping, unsafe vehicles, harassment, and threats to public safety. We should enforce those laws before creating an expensive new pilot that could take too long to address what residents are experiencing right now.

At the same time, enforcement alone isn't enough. We need a humane approach for people living in their vehicles. The City should work with the County, faith organizations, and community partners to provide safe parking with basic services and connections to housing and other support.

We can be compassionate while still setting clear expectations. Residents deserve safe, clean neighborhoods, and people experiencing homelessness deserve a real path toward stability.

Climate Goals and the Municipal Utilities

Palo Alto has ambitious climate goals and a municipally owned utility, giving the City unusual ability to influence electrification and energy use.

How aggressively should Palo Alto pursue building and vehicle electrification? How should the City balance climate goals against affordability, reliability, consumer choice and the financial consequences?

I strongly support Palo Alto's climate goals, but I want us to use more carrots and fewer sticks to get there. Long-term change works better when residents buy into it, not when they feel like City Hall is punishing them.

For new construction, we should build electric or electric-ready from the beginning. It's much cheaper to install the wiring and capacity while a building is being built than to retrofit it later.

For existing homes and businesses, I prefer incentives over mandates. That means rebates, financing, technical help, and making it easier for people to electrify when a furnace, water heater, or vehicle naturally needs to be replaced.

The City should lead by example with our own buildings and vehicles and be transparent about what works and what doesn't. If we make the cleaner choice easier and more affordable, I think we'll get much stronger community buy-in and better results over the long run.

As City policies encourage people to turn off the gas, an unintended consequence is that gas prices rise for those who retain gas. Some of the residents can't afford the steep cost of transitioning away from gas. How should the city address this conundrum?

I don't really see this as a conundrum. We know where we want to go. The key is getting there slowly, steadily, and thoughtfully so we don't put an unfair burden on residents.

Electrifying a home can cost thousands of dollars, especially when you add a heat pump, water heater, wiring, or panel upgrades. We shouldn't expect families, seniors, or renters to simply absorb those costs.

This is also where I think my relationships with state and federal officials can be helpful. Palo Alto should aggressively pursue rebates, grants, and incentive programs that bring those costs down, particularly for lower-income households and seniors on fixed incomes.

If we make the transition affordable and give people enough time and support to make it, we can reach our climate goals without leaving people behind.

To date, 28 years have passed since the 1998 flood event of record and little to nothing has been done at the Pope-Chaucer bridge to prevent creek overflows into the Crescent Park and Duveneck/St Francis neighborhoods. How would you determine what the hold-up has been at SFCJPA, what would you do to expedite implementing a solution, and how would you assure CPNA and DSFNA residents that help is on the way?

This is another example of projects taking too long and costing too much because we struggle to make decisions and move forward. Residents have waited long enough. What I can promise is that I will push for decisions and action much more quickly.

I want the City, Valley Water, and the San Francisquito Creek JPA at the same table, clearly identifying what is holding things up, who is responsible, what it will cost, and when it will get done. In the meantime, we should improve flood readiness, creek maintenance, inspections, and emergency notifications now.

As for rebuilding trust, there's really only one way to do it: bring residents along on the journey and show them progress after every win. Trust won't come back overnight, but momentum will build as we make commitments, deliver on them, and show people that their government can get things done.

Public Safety, Technology and Civil Liberties

Palo Alto's use of automated license plate readers has generated debate over the value of technology in solving crimes versus privacy, data sharing and government surveillance.

What principles should govern Palo Alto's use of surveillance technology? Discuss where you would draw the line between legitimate public-safety tools and unacceptable government surveillance, and what oversight, transparency, warrant, retention and data-sharing rules do you believe should apply?

My experience serving on the Police Foundation board and talking directly with our officers has given me valuable insight into how technology like automated license plate readers can help solve crimes. When used properly, these tools can give officers information much faster and help them identify vehicles connected to serious crimes.

At the same time, as an immigrant and a mother of two, protecting privacy and civil liberties is very important to me. I don't want technology that helps keep us safe to become a system that unnecessarily tracks where innocent people go.

My principle is simple: technology should be used to investigate crime, not to monitor everyday life.

That means surveillance tools should have a clearly defined public-safety purpose, strict limits on access, short data-retention periods, and strong restrictions on data sharing. Every search should be logged and auditable. Access should be tied to a legitimate law-enforcement purpose, with a warrant or other appropriate legal process where required by law. The City should regularly report to the public how the technology is being used, how often it contributes to investigations, who has access to the data, and whether there have been any violations of the policy.

I would draw a clear line against broad facial recognition, indiscriminate mass location tracking, or creating a permanent database of people's movements simply because they are going about their daily lives.

I also have concerns about relying on a vendor like Flock to control sensitive data. Stanford recently moved away from Flock to a system where its license-plate data is transferred to a server Stanford exclusively controls. That tells me we should examine our options as well. The question isn't just whether ALPR technology works; it's whether we can achieve the same public-safety benefit with stronger privacy protections.

And no technology should get a permanent blank check. We should periodically evaluate whether it is actually reducing crime and helping investigations. If the benefits don't justify the privacy risks, we should change the technology, change the vendor, or stop using it.

We're Silicon Valley. We should be able to use technology to make people safer while setting one of the highest standards in the country for privacy, transparency, and accountability.