



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Brian Hamacheck 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?

My public advocacy has focused on sensible growth, transparent government, and practical improvements to city services. In my 2022 City Council campaign, I advocated for restoring public access to police radio communications, supporting local businesses, and giving residents a stronger voice in decisions affecting their neighborhoods.

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?

I have ties to Stanford University. I would disclose that connection if it created a conflict of interest.

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

My priorities are to protect single-family neighborhoods while directing housing to appropriate locations, adopt a five-year financial plan that protects essential services and reduces unnecessary overhead, and advance flood protection and neighborhood retail.

In my first year, I would seek Council agreement on specific commitments, each with a responsible department, an approved budget, and clear milestones. Residents should be able to track progress on library access, permitting, infrastructure, and City finances through existing reporting tools.

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

First, preserve neighborhood character by protecting single-family neighborhoods, maintaining trees and parks, and supporting groceries and other local businesses. Larger developments should have appropriate transitions to existing homes.

Second, improve everyday safety and access. I would prioritize safe school routes, accessible sidewalks and crossings, and practical loading and customer access for businesses.

I would use existing capital and maintenance budgets for a neighborhood improvement program shaped by residents. Staff would evaluate proposals for safety, accessibility, cost, and feasibility, and Council would publish the projects it funds.

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 would focus greater density on suitable commercial and parking parcels in the San Antonio Road area, selected portions of El Camino Real, and appropriate sites near transit. Building scale should reflect each site's infrastructure, access, and relationship to neighboring homes.

I favor site plans that make better use of larger parcels, with courtyards, open space, and appropriate transitions, rather than relying on substantially greater height.

I would use enforceable development standards, infrastructure planning, and negotiation to protect single-family neighborhoods. I also support voluntary accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, and other lawful housing options.

I would pursue a state-approved alternative plan for implementing SB 79 and support legislative changes and well-founded legal challenges with clear objectives and budgets.

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

I would coordinate housing and infrastructure planning through a public delivery schedule for each major growth area. It would identify expected development, available utility capacity, required improvements, funding, and completion dates.

The schedule would cover water, sewer, electricity, drainage, transportation, parks, and emergency services. It would account for the combined demand from multiple projects and the ongoing costs of staffing, maintenance, and operations.

Developers should pay their legally supportable share through properly justified fees and improvements.

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.

I would prioritize long-term, deed-restricted housing for households earning 30% to 60% of area median income or less, including seniors, people with disabilities, and lower-income families.

I would pursue public and nonprofit partnerships like Mitchell Park Place, use eligible public land through long-term ground leases, and seek county funding and tax-credit financing alongside local investment. I would also evaluate acquiring and rehabilitating existing apartments to preserve affordability and prevent displacement. Parks and protected open space should remain protected.

I would test a small, capped program that helps willing homeowners create affordable ADUs in exchange for enforceable affordability restrictions, with a nonprofit managing tenant eligibility and the units. The program should proceed only where its costs and participation make it competitive with other affordable housing options.

Each proposal should disclose rents, income limits, family-sized units, public subsidies, the length of affordability restrictions, and completion risks. Any needed rental assistance or operating subsidies must have an identified funding source.

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.

I would protect emergency response, essential infrastructure maintenance, sanitation, basic park upkeep, library access, and services for children and seniors.

I would adopt a rolling five-year budget that separates recurring costs from one-time spending, shows deferred maintenance, and tests lower-revenue scenarios. Every proposed saving would identify its implementation cost, service impact, and whether it is already included in the budget.

I would review management layers, nonessential administrative vacancies, overlapping consultant contracts, repeated studies, underused software, and overlapping departmental reviews. Automation would have to demonstrate savings and accuracy while protecting sensitive information.

I would address employee costs through workforce planning and collective bargaining, comparing compensation, turnover, vacancies, and overtime. I would seek affordable future compensation agreements and consolidate work through attrition while honoring existing obligations.

Safety and maintenance should come before discretionary capital expansion. Major projects should be phased where practical, with lifetime staffing, maintenance, and debt costs disclosed before approval. I would pursue restoring reduced Children's Library hours using verified recurring savings.

For revenue, I would focus on retaining businesses, filling storefronts, accurate collection, and appropriate cost recovery. Any remaining budget gap and proposed voter-approved revenue measure would be presented openly. Restricted utility and capital funds would not be treated as general operating revenue.

Approved changes should begin by the second budget. In years three through five, I would track actual savings, service quality, reserves, and forecast accuracy.

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?

I would give each small business opening or expansion one accountable City contact, coordinated permit reviews, a clear checklist, and a way to resolve conflicting instructions. Businesses should understand foreseeable permitting requirements before signing a lease.

For Midtown and the former Philz and Bill's site, I would bring the owner, nearby merchants, and City departments together to identify obstacles and publish next steps and dates. With the owner's agreement and safety approvals, I would explore temporary markets, food vendors, or community uses to bring activity back to the site.

At Edgewood Plaza and Charleston Plaza, I would focus on everyday neighborhood services. At Town and Country, I would support a useful mix of businesses, safe access for students and pedestrians, accessibility for customers with disabilities, and practical deliveries and parking.

Along San Antonio Road and El Camino Real, retail spaces should have visible entrances, flexible floor plans, suitable utilities, and workable loading.

I would simplify outdoor-dining and temporary-use rules while preserving noise, accessibility, and cleanup requirements. Any financial incentives would have a defined public purpose, clear eligibility, a funding cap, and measurable results.

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?

Yes. I would combine clear rules, safety education, focused enforcement, and street improvements.

Families need a simple guide explaining the differences between e-bikes and electric motorcycles, along with rules for helmets, passengers, streets, and school campuses. I would coordinate with PAUSD and expand hands-on training with schools, police, and local bicycle shops.

Enforcement should target dangerous behavior: running red lights, unsafe passing, excessive speed around pedestrians, and unlawful devices or modifications. Drivers who endanger children should receive the same attention.

I would prioritize safer school crossings and gaps in bicycle routes. Shared paths should make pedestrian priority clear and separate users where space and demand justify it, while preserving disability access.

Success should be measured by fewer injuries, fewer conflicts, and better compliance, not simply more citations.

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 propose keeping the existing rail crossings.

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?

Public streets should not become permanent, unmanaged RV parks.

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 do not support the City's approach to building and vehicle electrification.

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 do not support the City's approach.

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?

Within my first 90 days, I would seek a public work session with SFCJPA, Palo Alto Public Works, Valley Water, and the other responsible agencies.

I would ask for one delivery plan identifying unresolved engineering, environmental, property, funding, and approval issues. Each issue should have a responsible party, a next decision, and a deadline.

The construction sequence should protect downstream neighborhoods before increasing capacity at Pope-Chaucer. Design, easement discussions, funding applications, and permitting should advance together wherever legally and technically possible.

Council and affected residents should be able to see the schedule, committed funding, grants at risk, and approvals still needed.

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?

I oppose an automated license plate reader network that routinely records the movements of people who are not suspected of wrongdoing.

I support targeted investigations, adequate police resources, and technology tied to a specific public-safety need. I oppose indiscriminate data collection that allows people's movements to be reconstructed later.