



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Ed Lauing 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?

DELIVERED MORE HOUSING

As Housing Committee Chair, I led the work to create the zoning and programs Palo Alto needs to meet its state housing requirements. Among other programs we created the new *El Camino Real Focus Area* which requires **20% of project units to be below-market-rate affordable housing—well above the state’s 13% Builder’s Remedy requirement**. The result to date: 600 homes permitted since 2023 and a pipeline of 3,000 more. It’s working.

If you are an incumbent, what did you personally accomplish while on Council for the last four years.

In addition to the previous answer:

BROUGHT CITY HALL TO OUR RESIDENTS

As Mayor, I created monthly town halls (recorded for online viewing) where residents and the press could engage directly with me and department leaders responsible for city services. Residents got updates, raised concerns, and got answers—a **level of two-way dialog not allowed in Council meetings**. Many residents thanked me for the format and noted they loved the accessibility.

STRENGTHENED OUR RETAIL ECONOMY

In 2023 when I joined council, Staff was not moving fast enough on improvements for our local retail businesses. I proposed a council Retail Ad Hoc Committee to get council members in the trenches and driving the necessary changes. Over the past three years, the committee has worked with retailers across Palo Alto and helped build stronger business districts. Today, that effort has grown into a permanent Council committee focused on economic development, business retention and recruitment, and public/private partnerships.

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS +Renter Protections, +Transitional housing, +Parks and open space, + Grid modification, +Youth mental health, +Railroad quiet zones, +Accessory dwelling units, +Housing developer negotiations, +Protection of the natural environment.

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. None.

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

FUND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Double down on funding for more affordable housing to increase the economic and ethnic diversity of our city. Further, state mandates dictate that 40% of our new housing units (2452) must be below market rate. But they have not given us a dime to build them.

INVEST IN PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety is the fundamental obligation of an elected official. We have to keep our people safe. This includes having the best police, fire and emergency services departments in the region. It also includes much of the work done by public works. It extends to the transportation departments on our streets and grade crossings. And it embraces initiatives for youth mental health. Safety is Priority One for investment decisions.

DELIVER EFFECTIVE & RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Increase proactive communication and accountability to residents with clear and timely information and easy access to city services and department leaders. Big decisions impacting neighborhoods should not be a surprise to neighbors. Residents should have meaningful opportunities to shape city decisions.

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

- + Existing neighborhoods should preserve and enhance their own distinct identities. New neighborhoods - formed by new housing growth - should be "created equal". They should be developed with the same breadth of amenities as existing neighborhoods - such as parks, safe roads and road signs, walkability, etc..
- + Restrict lived-in RV parking to non-residential areas for a select number of income-verified families in specially permitted transitional-housing-areas.

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?

We have already created housing sites in massive new spaces in PA led by the Housing Committee which I chaired. Notable new areas are the *El Camino Real Focus Area* and the *San Antonio Corridor*. With reference to new state laws like SB79, we have chosen to do an Alternative Plan over the next few years. A Housing plan is underway for the downtown area which will certainly include substantial height and density.

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

See my above comment on Neighborhoods. It should be required by policy and financed in part by developers. The requirement for new infrastructure is a given with this massive development.

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.

TRULY AFFORDABLE HOUSING is the fundamental housing need in the city. We need to lead efforts to develop sources of serious funding for this core need. The units built must be deed-restricted units which are the hardest to get built. This often requires developers who specialize in affordable housing.

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 was Chair of the Finance Committee in 2026. We managed the creation a balanced budget – erasing a \$17m deficit - which council passed unanimously. Space here does not allow a full answer on long-term budgets by departments. But Public Safety should not be a target for cuts. In fact, as our city grows, we need to add staff in public safety.

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?

With the strong assist from the council retail committee, there has been great progress in the retail picture in the last 3 years. Each of the above geographical areas requires a different approach. Execution on Cal Ave improvements has been poor by city staff. Downtown is doing very well. Town and Country is doing extremely well. The future of Phils and Bills is fully in the hands of the land owner.

With new growth, we will encourage developers to meet the retail needs of tenants from coffee shops to hardware stores.

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 needs a very detailed review of the many different modalities. Overall, speed is the core problem regardless of the classification of E -bikes and even regular bikes. We need new ordinances to lower speeds and raise fines.

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?

This issue has changed radically in the last 10 years due to multiple changes in CalTrain ridership from the pandemic, CalTrain changing their technology, and doubling of construction costs.

On rail committee, which I am on, we have advised council that Churchill should be placed on indefinite HOLD. We are working Charleston and Meadow right now at the 35% engineering phase. We will likely recommend one of those move forward, and not the other, due to total costs and length of construction.

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?

This is a problem nationally and we see it in many areas of our region. My plan is this:

- + Restrict lived-in RV parking to non-residential areas for a select number of needy, income-verified families in specially permitted transitional-housing-areas.
- + Extend the city's definition of "residential areas" immediately to include multi-family projects.
- + Other than #1 above, post a ban on large overnight RVs in the city
- + Continue ongoing outreach to county and federal governments to find space for RV dwellers.

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?

We cannot change the world's behavior. But we can change ours. And we are doing it.

We should be very aggressive on building and vehicle electrification. Doing that in existing homes and businesses (not new ones) is hard to do from an equity standpoint. Asking low-income folks, or even middle class folks, to spend \$15,000 on new electric heating when the gas furnace is fully functional will not work. Fundamentally, subsidies will be required for a large proportion of residents and multifamily landlords.

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?

NOBODY likes the gas increases we are all feeling. In the finance committee I voted for a lower gas increase for this year, but the committee and council voted against my position.

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 remains an ongoing issue. The core problem is that the JPA requires the full agreement of five separate entities. All five are not aligned. There are also downriver changes that have to be made in advance of the JPA "fix". Lastly, all the involved city managers and executive teams have been meeting to figure out a financing plan.

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?

Flock failed its customers and the citizens of many cities with their policies and software flaws. They need to go.

This tool for solving crimes is highly valued by our police department who have many positive results for ALPR. And, in general, I am highly supportive of our police dept. But we will have to re-start a review of other possible vendors to see IF there is one with fail-safe software we can trust. As of now, I don't know of a valid alternative.