



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

EXPERIENCE

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BRYNA CHANG

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As Chair of the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) and as a commissioner since 2020, I have led or played a central role in some of Palo Alto's most consequential recent decisions. The accomplishments I am most proud of include:

- **Housing Element:** I helped lead the commission's review and recommendation of Palo Alto's state-mandated Housing Element — one of the most complex and consequential planning documents the city produces. Getting this right protected Palo Alto from Builder's Remedy exposure and preserved our ability to direct where density goes. As part of the three-person PTC Housing Element Ad Hoc Committee, I worked with city staff to define the specifications for the El Camino Real Focus Area, so that Palo Alto could accommodate state-mandated housing goals in a relatively transit-rich area, with minimal impact to low-density residential neighborhoods. **Result: Housing Element certified by CA state with policies that have led to significant housing development and has at times incentivized developers to move away from undesirable Builder's Remedy projects while preserving neighborhood character.**
- **Accessory Dwelling Units (granny units):** I recommended objective standards and policies that incentivized homeowners to build ADUs that respect neighbors' privacy and streamlined ADU approvals. **Result: Palo Alto has successfully implemented California's ADU laws and ADUs have become one of the most popular ways homeowners can realize financial benefits while also providing new housing.**
- **Renter Protections and Rental Registry:** I supported the commission's recommendation to establish a Rental Registry program and extended Palo Alto's renter protections beyond what was required by the state, including lowering security deposits, requiring just cause for evictions, and extending relocation assistance. I believe in data-driven policy — the registry will give us the information we need to understand whether additional protections are warranted. **Result: Rental registry is now operational and renter protections were adopted by City Council.**
- **Environmental Protections:** I led efforts to strengthen Palo Alto's dark skies protections, tree canopy ordinance, stream corridor protections, and bird-friendly building standards, without creating onerous requirements for homeowners. **Result: Updated tree ordinance and new dark skies and bird-friendly buildings ordinances adopted by City Council; updated stream corridor ordinance to be considered by City Council.**
- **Active Transportation:** I recommended that Palo Alto adopt the **Safe Streets for All Safety Action Plan** that unlocks federal funding to target improvements for high injury corridors and protects pedestrians, seniors and students with infrastructure designed to prevent severe injuries and deaths. I

helped update the new **2026 Bike and Pedestrian Transportation Plan** and pushed for safety improvements including protected bike lanes on East Meadow between Alma and Middlefield, improvements to the JLS path, and safer pedestrian crossings at dangerous intersections.

- **Retail Protection and Revitalization:** I successfully advocated against the conversion of retail space at Town & Country to medical offices, protecting neighborhood-serving business. I served on the PTC Retail Revitalization Ad Hoc Committee, which resulted in an updated retail ordinance that will reduce retail vacancies on University Ave. and California Ave by broadening the definition of retail and relaxing the most onerous zoning requirements, while still preserving retail elsewhere in Palo Alto, such as Midtown, El Camino Real, and Charleston Center.

YUDY DENG

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.

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not answer.

GARY GECHLIK

Did not answer.

RAYMOND LEE GOINS

Yes I have, I have spearheaded the campaign to Remove a racial Mural that sat between two courtrooms in the Palo Alto court house. It depicted the native population here in Palo Alto in a subservient position. The result was that the mural was covered up as it still sits, and we are looking for a way that the community can paint over it to be more reflective of a community we live in. I also spearheaded a campaign to get our current council to call out the racial graffiti that has been scrawled all across the city in neighborhood parks. This resulted in the school district acknowledging that they needed to teach ethnic studies, and the histories that we all faced.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

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.

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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.

VICKI VEENKER

As an incumbent, I included my more community-focused activities here and listed additional issues in response to the next question.

Cubberley negotiations: Many hands over many years got us to where we are today. But when negotiations were at an impasse between the City and PAUSD, I reached out to a school board member and the two of us gave it a final try – and shortly thereafter the parties reached agreement. While it was a group effort, I was glad that my years of professional negotiations helped get the deal over the finish line.

Hosted Neighborhood Town Halls and engaged first-hand with residents on topics they selected.

Heat Island project: participated in heat mapping project that provided the city with data on where heat islands and warmer parts of the city are so that we can add tree canopy and other mitigation measures

Sibling Cities USA: held 6 town halls over the last few years, co-sponsored by numerous community groups such as Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Palo Alto Weekly and more. These allowed for facilitated community dialogue on topics including Housing, Climate, Race & Belonging, Polarization, and Democracy

Sustainable Data Centers: I conceived of and led a conference co-hosted by the City and Stanford's Doerr School of Sustainability analyzing how cities can exercise local control and exert their zoning powers to require data centers to operate in ways that are sustainable and do not impact utility ratepayers either financially or by reducing capacity.

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

Electricity Utility Enhancement: I have served as Palo Alto's Commissioner on the Northern California Power Agency Board for 3 years; it is the joint powers authority that provides electricity to the city. During that time I 1) pushed for utility-scale battery storage that we now have, 2) successfully ensuring that federal cuts to hydropower staffing would not threaten our power supply, and 3) promoted new power generation projects, so that our electricity is reliable, affordable and green.

I learned that key policy direction came from the Commission's Executive Committee. So, after 12 years of Palo Alto not having a seat on that body, I gained a seat on the Executive Committee to ensure that Palo Alto's voice is heard in matters critical to our city's municipal utility.

Climate & Sustainability progress: I have served on the City's Climate committee for four years and chaired it for three. During my tenure we achieved several milestones. Some are:

Nature-based horizontal levee: We cut the ribbon last week on this pilot that is an adaptation to sea level rise and the first of its kind on the San Francisco Bay. I

Tree Protection Ordinance: We strengthened our tree protection ordinance

GHG reduction: We reduced our GHG emissions by over 50% compared to 2019 levels

Pro-Housing Designation: I pushed the City to apply for this starting last year. We submitted an application to the State in July and if we succeed, we will be eligible for additional grant funding for affordable housing.

Project Homekey: This was a collective council effort; I pushed publicly, starting on the night I was selected as Mayor, to get it done this year and we opened it several months ago.

United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: After years of work by others, I pushed last year as Policy Committee chair to get a CEDAW ordinance to Council and then pushed this year as Mayor to agendize it. We adopted it last spring.

Pride Event: I was glad to join forces with a community group led by youth to ensure that the City held its first Pride event this year. I was honored to issue and present a Proclamation at the celebration.

Unity Statement: Two years ago when the City was experiencing a lot of public comment about the War in Gaza, I was selected by then Mayor Stone to facilitate dialogue sessions with the principal public commenters having opposing and strongly held views. We were able to hold constructive dialogue sessions and crafted a Unity Statement.