



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Building and Vehicle Electrification

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?

BRYNA CHANG

Palo Alto's municipally owned utility is one of our greatest assets in the fight against climate change. Our utility already provides 100% carbon-free electricity, which means electrification in Palo Alto produces lower emissions than in most California cities. As a Planning and Transportation Commissioner, I have already worked to remove barriers to this transition by updating zoning ordinances to simplify residential heat pump and energy storage installations. On City Council, I support pursuing aggressive electrification goals pragmatically and urgently to meet our "80x30" climate targets, centered on these key pillars and caveats:

- **Affordability:** Transition incentives and rebates must be scaled to income. We must ensure that transitioning away from fossil fuels remains financially accessible for lower-income residents and renters so no one is left behind by upfront costs.
- **Reliability via Grid Modernization:** Grid reliability must be maintained as extreme heat events increase demand. We must accelerate our Grid Modernization Master Plan, ensuring Palo Alto Utilities (CPAU) upgrades transformers, substations, and distribution lines so grid capacity never becomes a bottleneck for residents installing EV chargers or heat pumps.
- **Consumer Choice and Streamlining:** Where possible, I prefer incentive-based approaches over mandates for existing buildings where retrofit costs can be substantial. On City Council, I will focus on cutting red tape by establishing a predictable, expedited "one-stop" permitting process for panel upgrades, solar, and storage, making it easier for residents to opt-in voluntarily.
- **Ending New Fossil Fuel Expansion:** We should recognize natural gas as a necessary transition fuel to maintain system reliability, but we must stop investing in new long-term natural gas infrastructure projects that risk becoming stranded assets.
- **Comprehensive Transit Approach:** True vehicle electrification requires reducing vehicle miles traveled entirely. This is why I will continue to champion the expansion of safe, connected active transit infrastructure, bike lanes, and pedestrian corridors to make walking, biking, and e-bikes viable daily alternatives to driving.

Ultimately, our pursuit must be comprehensive and responsible—matching our ambitious climate frameworks without outpacing grid readiness or financial feasibility.

YUDY DENG

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.

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not answer.

GARY GECHLIK

Climate equals Wildfire. In the next 20 years we are going to see a wildfire on the level of Pacific Palisades unless we take precautions. We are not going to see more than 4 cm of sea level rise.

RAYMOND LEE GOINS

I would follow the Mayor's lead on this one as the city is a leader in environmental concerns. I do agree that Palo Alto should continue to lead on with going green. Any new building and parking structure should have the focus of being electrified, so we can transition out of the use of the environmental harm production. I think the city can balance the climate goals against affordability, and the financial consequences, by making our ultra wealthy businesses feel like they are part of our community, and they have an obligation to help the city thrive, so they can thrive. As opposed just taking in our wealth, and not spreading it to help those around.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

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

ED LAUING

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.

VICKI VEENKER

Because Palo Alto has a municipally-owned electric utility and experience piloting electrification programs, we are able to actively support residents in building and vehicle electrification. Electrification serves not only our climate action goals, but has the co-benefit of improving public health. Natural gas use in buildings produced both indoor and outdoor air quality issues that reduce quality of life and can cause premature death. So we should support residents in moving toward electrification as quickly as possible. Because of my service on the Northern California Power Agency Board, I am confident that our electric utility has the capacity to support this without significant reliability or financial consequences.

Our city's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions is on-road transportation followed by natural gas use. That's why we should prioritize vehicle and building electrification as we strive to achieve our goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% from 1990 levels by 2030 (80x30 goal). Our progress toward this goal has plateaued, but we have encouraging new data on EV adoption that is helping us find new ways to continue our progress, including by adding EV charging infrastructure, including in multifamily dwellings.

To help residents with home electrification, Palo Alto provides subsidies for heat pumps and induction cooking appliances. We also offer a whole home electrification rebate for residents who transition fully away from natural gas. Electric appliances can be higher upfront than gas alternatives, but upfront subsidies and the efficiency of these technologies will support residents with the transition away from gas. We are working on solutions such as Electrification as a Service where we use on-bill financing to help with the upfront costs by spreading them over time as part of the electric bill. We should also invest in community outreach and education to ensure every resident knows about the environmental and health benefits associated with electrification.

Palo Alto's electricity rates are much more conducive to home electrification compared to surrounding jurisdictions served by PG&E. Palo Alto should continue to manage our utility in a way that supports electrification and work with the UAC on electrification-friendly rate design. We also need to ensure that residents who are slow to electrify aren't burdened by maintaining the high fixed costs of the gas distribution system as the whole customer base shrinks.

I do not seek a present city-wide ban on natural gas appliances because we need to give our community time to plan ahead, learn about electrification, and make choices that work for their households. However, we should continue to do what we can to guide our residents towards electrification. While our city's electrification programs are voluntary, regional mandates such as the Zero-NOx Appliance Standards from the Bay Area Air District are on the horizon that will require residents to replace burnt-out appliances with electric ones. Fortunately, they are becoming cheaper and smaller, with more choices and more trained contractors.