

2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Transitioning Away From Gas

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?

BRYNA CHANG

This is a genuine equity problem. As more residents electrify, fixed gas infrastructure costs are spread across a shrinking customer base — pushing prices higher for those least able to afford conversion. To protect fixed-income seniors, renters, and lower-income households, I support:

- **Targeted Transition Assistance:** Implement a city-funded transition assistance program for low- and moderate-income residents, expanding CPAU's on-bill financing and incentives to directly subsidize upfront heat pump, panel upgrade, and induction stove installations.
- **Tiered Utility Protections:** Establish tiered utility rate structures and clear financial hardship waivers that protect low-income gas customers as gas prices rise, ensuring they are not penalized while relying on gas as a transition fuel.
- **Proactive Outreach:** Direct an accelerated outreach and enrollment campaign for existing rebate programs, which are currently underutilized by the very households most in need.
- **Transparency and Honest Communication:** Maintain honest, clear communication with residents regarding the cost trajectory of natural gas so families have the predictability they need to plan ahead.
- **Affordable Transportation Alternatives:** Recognize that reducing emissions cannot depend solely on the ability to purchase an expensive electric vehicle. We must invest heavily in affordable transit options and robust walking and biking infrastructure to provide low-cost, zero-emission transportation alternatives for everyone.

We must carefully evaluate who bears the costs and who receives the benefits of our climate programs, ensuring that the alternatives we ask our community to use are genuinely available, practical, and affordable to all.

YUDY DENG

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.

HENRY ETZKOWITZ

Did not answer.

GARY GECHLIK

I am not in the energy industry. I have no idea how to manage forward contracts in this area, and I doubt other candidates understand the details of gas price regulation. The city made a specific policy that was not under my watch, dealing with the challenge will require outside council.

RAYMOND LEE GOINS

Progressive Tax on the wealthy. Removing the cap from measure K for those who make a significant amount of money.

BRIAN HAMACHEK

I do not support the City's approach.

ED LAUING

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.

VICKI VEENKER

I am definitely concerned about the risk of the "Gas Death Spiral" that this question refers to. The costs of maintaining our gas infrastructure system will remain as households electrify and disconnect from the gas system. We are examining these risks through our Gas Transition Study and are exploring pilots to strategically decommission portions of our gas system. We should invest heavily in our electrification pilots that focus on electrifying blocks or neighborhoods so that we can cap service lines and limit our continued investments in upgrading the gas system.

In addition to our current work, I support the creation of a program that gives homeowners a financial incentive to electrify their homes and disconnect gas service instead of having Palo Alto Utilities automatically replace an aging gas service line. This program would further help us minimize new upgrades and continued investment in the gas distribution system that will be hard to pay off over time in the form of increased gas rates.

These efforts will help minimize this unintended consequence of electrification. However, we need to continue studying this issue and learning from nearby jurisdictions also grappling with this challenge.