



2026 City Council Candidate Questions

Vicki Veenker 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?

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.

Electric 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.

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 been outside patent counsel to Stanford since 1989. However, I have been winding that down and have not done work for them for about six months. Therefore, I expect the conflict to abate once the one-year period following the last work expires.

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

HOUSING: Palo Alto needs thoughtful new housing for workers and families by:

- increasing density on transit corridors
- Improving ADU options that retain neighborhood character
- Holistic planning for safe neighborhoods with access to schools, shopping, transit and more
- Improving our permitting process so that it is more efficient and predictable.

CLIMATE: I'll work to accelerate progress toward our climate goals by

- Innovative greenhouse gas emissions reduction
- Promoting our Whole Home Electrification program
- working to make electric vehicle charging more readily available, including for multi-family homes

FULL-SERVICE CITY: Promote excellence and keep close oversight of key services, including:

- City-owned utilities
- Municipal Police and Fire departments
- Parks and Open Space
- Libraries

CUBBERLEY COMMUNITY CENTER: If the sales tax passes, striving to move the project forward in a phased, responsible fashion, focusing first on rehabilitating the infrastructure that is at the end of its useful life. If it doesn't pass, exploring options to see if there is any other path by which the city could purchase the land from PAUSD so we can make it a place where our community can gather, learn, create, and play.

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

It's challenging to pick only two, but my top priorities for neighborhood livability include:

- oversized vehicle (OSV) abatement in our city, and
- improving retail vibrancy and availability throughout our communities.

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 should accommodate greater density along our transit corridors like El Camino Real and San Antonio Road, and in the University Avenue and California Avenue areas. The El Camino Real Focus Areas are a very good example of this.

Because the SB 79 areas include low density residential areas, especially near the San Antonio Road and California Avenue stations, I believe we should do an Alternative Plan that relocates density to sites where the context is more compatible.

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

We need to both plan for it and secure the resources to pay for it.

With respect to planning for infrastructure, transportation, parks and other public services, we should use area plans when growth is concentrated in a particular part of the city. The San Antonio Road Area Plan and the Downtown Housing Plan are key examples. This way we can look holistically at neighborhoods both as they are and as we would like them to be when they are supporting additional housing.

The plans should include infrastructure like bikeways, safe pedestrian routes, delivery access, bike parking, sufficient utilities, access to transit, parks, schools, emergency services, and shopping.

With respect to resources, the City currently has a half dozen development impact fees, including library, parks, and public impact fees. We need to keep them and possibly re-assess their sufficiency. We also have in-lieu fees that can be paid in some instances instead of creating affordable units. Because of the difficulty of creating affordable housing units, we should limit these to the extent possible.

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.

A little less than a third of recently permitted units in Palo Alto are affordable. Only about 18% are Very Low Income units (and even less are Moderate and Low Income units).

To create truly affordable housing, we should continue to seek funding partners and experienced affordable housing development partners, like Alta, Eden and others. Recent affordable housing projects were made possible by funding partnerships with a broad set of funders, including philanthropists like Sobrato, county and state funding (hopefully our options will increase if we achieve a Prohousing Designation), and city funding or land. If Proposition 1 passes, additional state funding may become available.

We have a lot of work to do, but things are looking up. I have had the pleasure of cutting quite a few ribbons this year – including for 100% affordable Mitchell Park Place and Project Homekey; and we broke ground for an all-affordable project at 3001 ECR and a mixed-rate project across the street with BMR units. Alta Housing submitted an application for an all-affordable project on a downtown parking lot and we will be issuing an RFP for another one near Matadero Creek on the old Fry's site.

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.

Palo Alto's structural budget challenges come from reduced sales tax allocations from the state, slowing property tax growth, and increases in pension, and retiree healthcare costs. The city's recurring costs for services and infrastructure are outpacing dependable revenue. In addition, over the last fiscal year, we had unexpected budget demands due to the need for increased safety measures at track crossings and OSV enforcement and program costs. Fortunately, on the revenue side, our TOT increased by almost 10%, or a few million, but that is only a fraction of the budget gap we had to close.

My priorities for the budget over the next five years are to protect essential city services such as police and fire staffing, reduce unnecessary consultant spending, defer lower-priority capital expenses, and increase revenue. One way of doing the latter is through our new economic development program.

Essential city services that should be prioritized included emergency response, utilities, youth mental health, crossing guards, and affordable housing support. I would seek to cut costs by prioritizing in-house studies and improving the efficiency of consultants and contracts through mechanisms such as reviewing all contracts before renewal and consolidating overlapping studies. I would prioritize filling vacancies where staff overtime costs the city more. While unfortunate, we can delay certain city beautification efforts and other nonessential or urgent capital upgrades. Continued integration of AI technologies can help achieve a 2026 council priority of increased government efficiency and reduce expenses.

By prioritizing effective use of Measure K funds, delaying nonessential capital expenditures, and working with PAUSD to cover the costs of rail-safety measures and crossing guards, we were able to close the FY2027 budget gap. Having been through four years of the budget balancing process on Council, I am well positioned to continue addressing and improving the City's fiscal outlook.

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?

We should monitor the impact of our new Retail Vitality Ordinance in all areas of the city to see if it is having the desired effect of enhancing retail districts in all of these areas. We have broadened allowable businesses to combat vacancies. We should then adapt and update it to enhance what is working.

We should also consider supporting community events in these different areas, entertainment, and public art activations, along with attractive public spaces where people will want to gather.

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?

I am very concerned about this issue. I have spoken with our Youth Advisory Board and they, too, identified this as a top concern.

I support PAUSD's decision to phase in a ban of e-bikes on school grounds. We should accompany this with e-bike safety education, either in partnership with the schools or as part of our Parks and Recreation program.

I believe that there should be a minimum age for e-bikes, especially class 3 e-bikes, and we should explore licensing them. For e-motos, we should consider similar rules as for regular motorcycles.

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 appreciate that the question mentions difficult choices and tradeoffs because there are no perfect solutions or easy answers to this question, which is why it has taken years. Balancing community interests is critical on what is one of the largest, if not the largest, infrastructure projects in the city's history, with a pricetag of over a billion dollars even if we don't pursue grade separation at every crossing.

The primary purposes of grade separation are safety and traffic reduction. So we need to keep that in mind as we balance tradeoffs. These considerations have evolved over the years. For example, we have seen the effectiveness of track monitors and improvements in anti-trespass technology like advanced LIDAR and anti-intrusion mats in increasing safety. Population estimates have decreased. Work-from-home has decreased the amount and frequency of commuter traffic. We have also seen an impact on the number of trains running, which did not increase as quickly as expected. So, while I still believe that grade separation is an important solution to both issues, the need has somewhat diminished, allowing us greater flexibility as we choose next steps.

It has been the plan since I have been on council to prioritize the south Palo Alto crossings before Churchill and I support that. The question now is whether we do both at the same time, do the two sequentially, or only separate the grades at the Charleston crossing.

Our options are limited by what we can fund. At present, the federal government is a less reliable source of support as we contemplate funding partners. As a result, it seems unrealistic to move forward with both south Palo Alto crossings simultaneously as that has an estimated price tag of \$1.1 billion and a 5-year construction process.

Other options are to sequence Charleston and then Meadow, or to just do Charleston. Given that the price tag for the sequential approach is greater than the simultaneous approach, I support at this time moving forward with Charleston first, learning from it, seeing how our population, commute patterns, and train schedules develop, and then decide if we still have sufficient need and can obtain sufficient funding to also pursue Meadow. Between Measure K and Measure B dollars we are close to being able to fund the council-selected underpass option at Charleston. When considering tradeoffs for this option, the big negative is that several homes need to be acquired; but the positive is that if we have an underpass similar to Oregon, Embarcadero, and University, it will have a significant positive impact on traffic and this is the intersection where traffic is heaviest.

Key for me is that we go ahead and create a bike/pedestrian tunnel both in South Palo Alto and near Churchill while we are finalizing the grade separation plan so that we have a safe crossing site available to students, bike commuters, and others in the near term and before construction commences.

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?

People living in vehicles on our streets is the city's most intractable issue. Residents and businesses are understandably frustrated. We have to do more – and faster; and we're making progress.

First, a couple weeks ago we made sure that all residential streets in the city will be treated the same, and closed loopholes where RVs had been allowed on some streets where people live. That won't be the case going forward.

Second, some RV dwellers would otherwise be unsheltered, while others use the RV as a second home when they drive in to work here. We don't have the same moral or legal obligation to take care of those having other shelter, so we have directed staff to get better data about who is who, so that we can disallow those who have other shelter. That will also become clear through the permit program. We are also contacting major employers to assist and I have personally had at least one encouraging conversation on that front.

Third, for those who would otherwise be homeless, we are starting a permit program where they can park in designated spaces while we work to get them into housing. We are also working to add more off-street safe parking lots, and I am pursuing a strong lead on one such lot at present.

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?

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.

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 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.

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?

The biggest challenge has been that the JPA requires cooperation and agreement among five agencies. Particularly Menlo Park has been an issue. We can't simply implement a solution on our side of the creek (the JPA cannot force Menlo Park to make corresponding improvements on its side) so we ultimately need agreement on a project all cities will support.

That need for unanimity has contributed to the delay. For example, one of the Reach 2 alternatives came before the board a year and a half ago and MP raised objections on the proposal of flood walls on MP's side, and threatened to vote against any alternative with MP flood walls. That forced us to evaluate other alternatives without flood walls and found all those alternatives to be nonviable.

The other hold up was the 2022 NYE flood which showed our creek modeling was off, so we had to go back to the drawing board to ensure our modeling was up to date.

There have also been issues with Valley Water's role. They are a critical funding and technical partner and have representation on the JPA Board, but their priorities extend throughout the entire county and don't always align with the urgency Palo Alto residents understandably feel about this specific project.

As a result of the above, we should focus on getting the JPA aligned around a technically feasible project, funding strategy, and firm timeline. Doing that will accelerate progress toward a solution at the Pope-Chaucer bridge.

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?

All uses of this type of technology require a legitimate law enforcement purpose. I draw the line at facial recognition which I do not think we should use, but if we can get comfortable with ALPRs, the safety benefits may outweigh the privacy concerns.

If the City is to maintain use of ALPRs,

- 1) use should be frequently (at least monthly), regularly, and thoroughly audited. We should review use both via random sampling and any instances flagged for suspicious behavior, such as repeated queries of the same plate by the same user;
- 2) the audit should verify that the vendor and anyone with access only uses it for a legitimate law enforcement purpose linked to a specific police report, case file, charge and user;
- 3) verify on-schedule data deletion;
- 4) only share with Bay Area jurisdictions with similar or more stringent audit and other access protocols; we need reciprocal agreements to the same terms with any other agency before sharing with them; and
- 5) maintain a small number of cameras located only on major high-traffic thoroughfares and not in neighborhoods.

We are awaiting the Independent Police Auditor's report on whether vendors can meet the above requirements, our high expectations of deterrence of abuse, and rapid identification of any abuse.

Also, based on what I've seen, I believe we should discontinue use of Flock.