

Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2009

Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN)

To the readers: The intended audience for this questionnaire is normal residents who are interested in the issues (versus activists who are deeply enmeshed) and the candidates were instructed to respond appropriately (detail and length). The candidates have diverse backgrounds and the questions are intended to be open enough to allow them to demonstrate their knowledge, experience, priorities and perspectives while being constrained enough to allow you to make comparisons between the candidates. The questions are not intended to allow safe, generic responses that reveal little. The candidates' responses will stay in the same order relative to each other, but we rotated whose response is first. Candidates have the option of including clickable links (hyperlinks) in their responses and of making the name at the beginning of each response clickable.

For more information on the candidates and their positions, you are encouraged to visit their individual websites, which can be found at:

[C] Chris Gaither : www.electgaither.org or email chrisgaither@rocketmail.com

Terminology: "the City" refers to the government of the City of Palo Alto.

1. Reason for running: What are your primary reasons for running for City Council?

[C] Chris Gaither

I believe that to whom much has been given, much is expected in return. Palo Alto has been a wonderful home to me for 25 years, and I have been granted lots of gifts and opportunities in my life time. Even as I once worked in Sacramento, I commuted to and from Palo Alto on a weekly basis because I did not want to leave Palo Alto, even for a better job opportunity. In the end, I returned to Palo Alto as something inside of me always concluded, one just cannot get any better living wise than Palo Alto. Palo Alto has felt like home to me from the first day I stepped foot into the city, and I have been blessed to meet, get to know and work with so many exceptional Palo Alto citizens.

Given my positive and strong feelings for Palo Alto, and my gratitude for all the opportunities I have been afforded as a resident, I feel it is my turn as a community citizen to step up to the plate, and contribute my aptitude, commitment, experience, and skills to the governance and vision of Palo Alto; and to share my heart and perspectives with the goals of further uniting our residents and employees in order to solve the critical challenges facing our community: budget deficits; community and police relations; high rail speed issues; land use; assisting our children with staying mentally clear and healthy; loss of retail business and growing commercial space vacancy rates; and putting the fun back into community!!!

A few months ago, Garry Fazzino suggested that he would run for city council if not enough people with experience came forward. Initially, I was excited about another Fazzino run for council. As time passed, I realized as a city, we cannot continue to rely on the same core group of residents to work on our behalf. Those of us who have the desire, experience and time must take turns in assisting the city with its objectives, day to day planning, and crisis management. Thus, I decided to run for council because of my desire to give back for all that I have been afforded. My package of experience and skills; combined with my never ending thirst for knowledge through studies and ability to comprehend and apply what I learn, all make me an

exceptional fit to serve the city as a council member for the next four years. I hope that by November 3, 2009 you will agree that Chris Gaither should be one of the five council elects to progress Palo Alto forward, and to help Palo Alto preserve those fundamental characteristics which make it a unique city, and our humble abode!!! As Cesar Chavez once said, "The end of all education should surely be service to others."

2. Experience:

Non-incumbents: Describe your personal experience with Palo Alto City government and recent issues that have come before the Council (Public Hearings). What was your role? (For example, did you send an email, speak to the Council, lead a group of citizens, etc.?) How extensively were you involved?

Incumbent (Klein): What have been your major initiatives on the Council? Describe your role and the results.

[C] Chris Gaither

Most of my personal experience with Palo Alto City government has involved day to day life issues that affect either me or others as residents. I will phone a particular department when an issue surfaces in our neighborhood of California Avenue area or other parts of the city. For example, the street sweepers were cleaning the streets around 3:30 to 4:00 in the morning in our neighborhood. Our area is a mixture of commercial and residential. It really is like a downtown section. This start time for sweeping in the residential section is way too early, and the noise is noticeable. I phoned the Public Works manager, explained the situation, and offered a solution. The request – please start the street cleaning in the commercial area first at 3:30 or 4:00 a.m., and then progress towards the residential sections around 8:00 a.m. when people are in general awake and about to start their days. The Public Works manager accepted this solution. As a result, we don't have sweepers on our residential streets at 3:30 or 4:00 a.m. any longer. I also suggested that we install permanent signs like those in San Francisco announcing a regular schedule for cleaning each street throughout the city. This will keep our streets clean with a regular maintenance schedule. The Public Works manager is taking this into consideration. Another example – when Sergeant Hernandez was on the PAPD (he is now at Stanford), I received a parking ticket on Grant Avenue because my car was not the required length (I believe 15 feet) away from the fire hydrant. On this particular part of Grant Avenue, a large section of the curb just before the hydrant was painted red which in my mind indicates you cannot park in that red zone, and a smaller section before the hydrant was cement. After I received my ticket, I noticed that Sergeant Hernandez was ticketing people in that same spot on a daily basis, at the same time. I phoned him and spoke to him about the red zone, and the fire hydrant. He told me that the red zone appeared to be painted there by the owner of the apartment complex or done by a private person. In other words, the city did not paint the curb red. Because of my inquiry, Sergeant Hernandez got the powers that be to remove the red paint. Now, people can park along the curb without being too close to the fire hydrant and risk getting a parking ticket. In addition, when I see a problem anywhere in the city, I will call the city dispatch and phone in such issues like hanging tree branches/limbs; drainage and flooding; road obstructions; lost children or people in need of medical assistance. There are things every one can do to assist our city's government and operations.

In terms of public hearings, a few local developers have approached me to attend either the planning commission's or city council's hearing on their specific projects. I attend in person to hear the arguments for and against, and to show my support for that specific project. In addition, our La Comida board members have appeared before both the council and the finance committee when those two entities review and approve the budget and the city's allocation for

La Comida. I have appeared a few times with the group years ago namely to show La Comida's interest and appreciation to the city for its respective funding.

- 3. Potential conflicts of interest:** The City Council can be hampered in its deliberations when members have to recluse themselves because of conflicts of interest. Please identify potential conflicts that you may have (excluding your personal residence) in ongoing or forthcoming issues.

[C] Chris Gaither

I have been a volunteer board member for La Comida, the senior lunch service since the year 2000. As a city council member, I will retire from the board as the organization meets on Monday evenings, and La Comida receives annual funding from the city of Palo Alto, as approved by the city council. To learn more about La Comida, you can view our website at www.lacomida.org

- 4. Deficit:** The City has a large structural deficit. A large part of its costs are for employees, both current and retired. How do you propose to contain those costs? If you advocate reductions in the workforce, which services would be affected? Do you advocate an alternative way(s) to contain costs?

[C] Chris Gaither

Palo Alto finds itself in a situation shared by other municipalities, counties and states across the nation. In good financial times, and to attract employees to public sector work, government based entities offered enticing benefit, bonus and retirement packages, and promised/negotiated cost of living (or higher) annual merit increases. Hence, Palo Alto is not alone. Just as Palo Alto finds that it needs to reconfigure these fixed expense categories of benefits, retirement and salaries due to the economic downturn, other cities, counties and states are grappling with the same "how to contain costs and thrive" issues.

One must get creative so that employees do not feel devalued and become unmotivated, and that the city is able to remain financially sound. The answer lies not only in curtailing costs, but also creative revenue ventures that do not further tax or burden city residents, and small businesses.

The approaches that the city is currently taking with respect to salary cost controls are ones with which I agree, and I applaud their assertiveness, and their calculated steps. Firstly, the city directly asked the Fire and Police unions to assist with expense containment by holding off on pay increases for this upcoming fiscal year. Both unions agreed. However, the Fire union stipulated that the city not discuss medical and benefit changes with the SEIU right now, so that all three unions could work with the city on this issue in the future, and the next round of negotiations. The unions and some employees do acknowledge that the city is incurring a large burden of expense with respect to health insurance/medical and benefits. This part of the Fire union's request was ultimately tied to whether or not that union would hold off on its annual salary increases. Since the city decided to move forward with negotiating medical/benefit participation from the SEIU, the Fire Union received their normal merit increases effective retroactively to July 1, 2009 thereby reversing the Fire Union's ultimate contribution to immediate salary cost containment. The only change I would have made on the city's part was to request that the Fire union's request not be tied to any part of the SEIU negotiations.

The city is currently bargaining with the SEIU for employee contributions to medical benefits (just as in the private sector), pay reductions, and salary increase management. This has not been concluded as we speak (or write), but I am hopeful that the final agreement will be a win-win compromise for both sides, just as Stanford was able to accomplish with its SEIU employees. Secondly, the city's upper administrative and management staff will all receive salary adjustments, and there will be an alteration in the infamous bonus policy this fiscal year. The City Manager led the way by offering a decrease in his salary. Furthermore, with the official hiring of the new chief of police, the city manager has reduced the salary of the position from both that of the previous chief's salary, and what the current interim manager made this past fiscal year. The city manager basically asserts that as a result of his (city manager's) research on salaries of police chiefs, what is being offered to the new chief is the regional norm. The person to whom the position was offered, Interim Chief Burns accepted the salary which is below what he was paid this past fiscal year. Thirdly, the city is re-configuring (increasing) the age of retirement in which employees are entitled to pension benefits. This is a good thing, and will help reduce the overall pension benefits and income paid to retired employees over the future years.

The city also requires that new employees hired in 2005 and beyond have to provide 20 years of service at a minimum prior to receiving life long health/medical benefits. This is an acceptable and adequate amount of time to invest in any organization, and expect some reward (like life long medical benefits) in return for service. If an employee is older and begins to work for the city, in most cases, the employee would have previously worked in the private sector thereby being in the position to receive both Medicare and Social Security benefits by the age of 65 to supplement any retirement pension and medical benefits, and they would not need to have the life long medical/health benefits if they are unable to achieve the above 20 years of service requirement. In addition, the city now requires that employees contribute at least 2 percent of their salary to the CALPERS pension plan, while the city contributes 2 percent at 55. As the years go on, the city should require a higher salary contribution towards pensions from each employee. People have to learn to pay "yourself" first via savings and investments. With more aggressive employee contributions, the city could pare down its portion of contribution and save in the long run. For more information see City of Palo Alto website – benefits and pension.

What I would add to the mix, when some positions become vacant through attrition, I would fill them with qualified volunteers who have time, and want to contribute and help the city. Palo Alto is fortunate to have amongst its residents, people who have tremendous experience and skills – acquired from years of working and owning businesses. We have many unused people resources. The city could save money as positions open up by creating a volunteer opportunity and invite residents whose skills match with the position to assist on a part-time basis to help the city provide any services lost to attrition.

I do not advocate reductions in the work force as the city needs to maintain services to its residents via its employees. However, I would research other cities that are similar in population size to Palo Alto to determine their number of respective city employees, and the types of services those cities provide to determine if Palo Alto in comparison has too many, or too few employees to maintain community and customer services. In other words, we need to do some investigations as to whether the city is efficient with respect to its work force. If the research reveals that we have too many employees in certain positions compared to other cities of the same size and similar characteristics than we could reduce staff in those over employed services as attrition occurs, or do transfers to different departments. I am not a fan of eliminating jobs, as people and humans are affected. Decisions that affect peoples' lives and well being always have to be made while taking into consideration both the impact on the person (the human) and the business entity. A win-win compromise is always the best and desired result.

In terms of creating more revenue to help budget deficits, the city could do as private non-profits and universities do, look to its citizenry for those who would like to leave parts of their estates or assets to the city in the form of a will or trust. People who attend universities, or participate in organizations and have good memories associated with those entities do this all the time. If we leave people with a great feeling about Palo Alto, some people will naturally want to give back in return in this format if they possibly can. They simply need to be encouraged in the form of positive outreach. Secondly, Palo Alto needs to do a better job of helping retail businesses create a solid and supportive presence in the city so that the business can thrive, and the city receives resulting tax revenue.

5. Business license tax: What is your position on a business license tax, such as the one on the November ballot?

[C] Chris Gaither

I do not support the business license tax in its proposed form, and the one on which we will vote in November. I believe the employee based tax is too high, adds further burdens to doing business in this current financial climate, and penalizes small businesses which are the number one sources of employment opportunities in our NATION. I do support some type of nominal licensing fee like \$ 100 per business entity of which the sole purpose is to advertise and document the services and products offered in the city by ALL of its business establishments – home based, e-commerce, and brick and mortar (offices and store front retail).

When I was visiting Castro Street in Mountain View the first night of its Art and Wine festival, I met a Mountain View businessman who was walking his newborn child. I asked him if business owners paid a business tax in Mountain View. He responded yes, but it was not a burdensome fee, and that it ranges between \$30 to \$100 per business. In addition, he added that operating a business in Mountain View is a wonderful experience! He felt treated well by both the city and the Chamber of Commerce. Sounds like, lots of bang, for a minimal buck!!!

This is the vision that the City of Palo Alto needs to adopt. Let's make it attractive financially and service wise for businesses to flourish in the city, and let's communicate with, and fully support our businesses. Remember, small businesses supply the largest number of employment and career opportunities in this nation. We are an entrepreneurial based society. In return, as a city, we are equally if not more rewarded by the revenue, tourism (even more revenue) and goodwill and services of our local businesses – both small and large.

Our goal should be to encourage, and seek as many people as possible to start and sustain small businesses not only in Palo Alto, but throughout our country. And this is a great time to just do it! Go start a business tomorrow (of course after you have written your business plan), and knock on those doors to get funding. If you wholeheartedly create it, they will come!!! And in this spirit, let's not hamper our businesses by imposing additional taxes that do not provide services with payment of those taxes, and that further financially burden our businesses.

6. Utilities Funds: Currently a portion of the City's Utility Fund is paid into the General Fund. What do you think are appropriate levels for such payments?

[C] Chris Gaither

Ah, the infamous utility fund question ☺. I remember the days when we residents received credits on our utility bills when the city had a surplus. Bring back those days!!! Why not have some of those funds allocated to reimbursing residents who promptly and without fail pay their

utility bills, and to those households and businesses that implement an energy efficiency plan. These good customers, and some have been customers for many decades, should be rewarded for contributing, and sustaining the city's utility department, and for conserving energy and resources. Palo Alto is unique in that it created and operated a more than viable city owned utility service. Just like when the Cable Coop was in existence to provide local cable options to the city and rewarded us with profit sharing checks when it was initially sold to A T & T, the utilities department should give back in some proportion to the residents. I am certain, most residents would be happy with just the gesture. The utility department does not need to break the bank with this policy.

As to the amount that should be paid into the General Fund, first reimburse the residents for supporting the utilities department all of these years. In some years, we pay more than PG&E customers, and in other years we pay less. Think of the hand that feeds you, and makes you prosperous and viable first! A good percentage to be paid to the General Fund however would be 25 to 30 percent. This would help the city with its funding, and leave enough for the utility department to be functional, operable and to perform planned capital and infrastructure improvements.

7. High Speed Rail (HSR): What is your position on HSR, including undergrounding? If HSR is built, should the City request a station? What should be the City's role?

[C] Chris Gaither

For anyone who has travelled to or lived in Asia and Europe, the benefits of High Speed Rail are self evident. And for those who have travelled to or lived in the eastern states of the United States know the benefits of a public transportation system where the many different parts are connected to serve the greater good i.e. – subway systems that easily coordinate and connect to bus lines, or rail or ferry systems to get passengers and patrons from one city to the next, and often times to another nearby state.

Unfortunately, the HSR proposal before us was not presented in a truthful manner from the start. In many respects, we were bamboozled creating the current brouhaha! The potential situation that some home or property owners face with eminent domain if their land is needed for the tracks is not a matter to be taken lightly. People work hard and save a long time in order to purchase a house. For many people, the home they live in today is the home they plan to live in for the rest of their lives. A HSR system that threatens to impact even one home either through loss or devaluation due to proximity to the track is an emotionally devastating thought, and this could become reality if the HSR project is approved in its **current** format. Of course there are those who own homes who might want to relinquish ownership and be paid through an eminent domain process, but this is most likely a small number of folks.

I support efficient public transportation that not only gets us where we want to go quickly, but an overall public transportation system that is connected and coordinated with all the various modes of transportation. In the case of HSR, we have no evidence that a market study has been done to support that "if you build it, they will come" theory. We don't have market study evidence reflecting that enough passengers will use the service to financially sustain this business model. Going back and forth from San Francisco to Los Angeles on HSR is not as attractive as being able to go from Los Angeles or San Francisco to a bordering state by HSR. Although, Disneyland is one of my favorite touristic sites, and I love to see the Giants beat the Dodgers in any stadium, I don't see evidence where the market will support the HSR system.

I don't support the current HSR plan, or an undergrounding plan as I don't think a HSR system focusing in on these two end points as the main destinations will be financially successful. As a

region, we cannot even make Caltrain financially successful. As a nation, we have failed Amtrak. To lose even one person's house to such a plan is inhumane, and does not factor in the human emotional suffrage. It is easy for people who don't own homes to say that those who do own these potentially affected homes are being too sensitive, and not thinking of the greater good.

If the HSR is approved, there should be a station in Palo Alto, as Palo Alto is an attractive touristic destination given Stanford University, the Stanford Shopping Center, and our very own new and improved Town and Country center. Furthermore, the city should remain involved, and very vocal if even one house is affected by the HSR as the city should be a center point to help the home or land owner negotiate the best deal. After all, the city council heavily promoted this HSR before the election last year, so they should be the first to advocate for any impacted landowning resident. And most importantly, why isn't the train red and white? Blue and gold, who thought of that ☺ !!

8. Retail: Palo Alto has multiple business districts and neighborhood centers. The health of a retail area is dependent on far more than just individual stores. Although cities cannot provide the level of management found in malls, other cities do more than Palo Alto. What should the City do to support the retail sector?

[C] Chris Gaither

The city could improve its relations with businesses owners, and show real support in three ways. First of all, the city has to really listen to, and openly communicate with its business shop owners. When many businesses express concern about additional taxation, the city has to do a better job of understanding the financial concerns of those businesses. Just as the city is facing revenue short falls due to the current economic situation, businesses are facing the same challenges. Businesses are not opposed simply because they don't want to pay. They might not be able to pay anything more or they will break. The solution cannot be to simply request higher direct fees from businesses to support the city's budget deficit. Particularly when those additional required fees do not provide any extra services to the businesses, there will be understandable reluctance from the business owner. The main thing the city needs to do here, is keep open ties with the business owners, and when asking for such fees to clearly demonstrate and highlight what the business will gain in return. People respond better if there is a WIFM (what is in it for me). Secondly, for businesses that rent space, the city should create a mediation ordinance or system, just like they did for residential renters so that business owners can seek city support in negotiating lower or stable rents for leasing commercial space. Currently, you can really feel the effects of the escalating commercial vacancy rates especially in the downtown area. Such a mediation approach between commercial landlords and renters could help to mitigate the loss of retail businesses due to rent concerns. Sometimes, with all that a small business has to do, it is not always easy to be your own advocate for rental negotiations. The city gains in revenue terms if it can help more businesses stay afloat due to commercial rental issues, and the business gains by staying in business. Reasons for drastic rent increases should be supported by economic and expense factors, not just a desire to have more money for the space. Lastly, the city council should have a committee or representative assigned to meet with local business owners on a monthly basis to do strategic planning with respect to city wide business concerns. For example, why do we have a Sit and Lie ordinance in the downtown area of Palo Alto, and in front of Whole Foods, and it does not extend to other business areas of Palo Alto? Why would you have a selective ordinance and not one that is enforced throughout the city? This opens the door to selective and discriminatory enforcement, as we are currently witnessing some businesses in one location being asked to pay fees for outside tables and chairs that others are not being required to pay. An ordinance like this should either apply to all business areas, or no zones at all.

9. High-density housing: What is your perspective on the major forces pushing for high-density housing?

[C] Chris Gaither

Basically, Palo Alto has limited land. The opportunities to even buy land in Palo Alto are short in supply. We are not like San Jose or Sacramento where land is more readily available for purchase and re-development. Hence the fact that those areas also have less expensive housing – for both purchase and rental, and less expensive office rental rates.

As a result, when a housing development opportunity does occur, developers and the city planners often feel they need to get the best bang for their buck by creating structures that “cram” in lots of different living units, and in an attempt to satisfy the housing element goals. Architecturally speaking, some are aesthetic, and have helped the city’s landscape. Others don’t fit into the overall current city landscape, and they don’t support the needs of the community well. Unfortunately, it appears that the city lacks an overall plan, and vision with respect to high density structures. The city should get a game plan and require that only certain areas of the city are qualified for high density structures – areas where the impact of blocked views and overcrowding are not as evident, and where the feeling of the structure being too big for the space is not the prevailing effect. In essence, the city should maintain to keep a low profile, and aesthetic community feel – i.e. similar types of current and prevalent housing structures throughout most of the city, except for a few areas specifically designated for high density housing.

10. Development impacts: The City has been criticized for allowing developers to understate the impacts of their projects, and thus avoid paying for measures to reduce the problems created. How much of a problem is this? What changes are needed?

[C] Chris Gaither

Even with the overly analytical development process the city uses in order to decide which projects are ultimately approved, neither the city or developers can anticipate all future impacts of the approved projects. This is impossible. There is no such thing as perfection and avoidance of all risks. I don’t see the above as a problem simply because the city really does take its time in “general” before deciding to approve a development project, and the city attempts to look at as many potential facets as possible. Hence the unusual length of time most development projects hurdle when facing the city for development approval. Unfortunately, in the past three years we have seen some projects get built that in the eyes of most residents are not the greatest of ventures. Most people wonder how and why they were approved. In addition, at times the city is presented with great opportunities for retail and housing development with resulting revenue potential, and by either not approving these projects; taking too long to approve them; or demanding more than the developer can and should provide, we then lose out in time and money and on much needed services provided by the development.

The change that is needed is in the overall development approval process between the commissions and the city council with respect to time and demands on the developer. A developer can only anticipate so much with respect to the future impact of their project. And, if impact understatement is perceived as a problem, the city should have staff to research and project all impacts the developer must address, and not put the concern and onus on the developer to project every future risk.

11. Affordable Housing: The City's current approach to providing affordable housing relies heavily on requiring new housing developments to include affordable units. What is your assessment of this approach? What changes would you make?

[C] Chris Gaither

To require new housing developments to include affordable housing is a policy I accept and approve not only because I have both managed and lived in affordable housing, but because this is a fair and prudent policy to ensure that a community is inviting and truly open to people from all economic classes. A city that grows to satisfy its housing objectives by creating housing (both owned and rented) that all income levels can afford is a city that will be diverse, and capable of surviving any economic cycles- good or bad.

My philosophy is two fold. One, affordability is relative. For the person or family who earns a six figure annual salary, purchasing a 1 to 2 million dollar home is affordable if they qualify for the mortgage on all criteria (if one is needed) and as long as the mortgage, and other expenses are not more than 30 to 40 percent of their income. To the household or person who makes the average median salary for Santa Clara County, affordable might mean purchase or rental of a below market rate unit as long as the associated mortgage or rent is not more than 30 to 35 percent of their income. In addition, they could have hope of purchasing or renting market rate housing as their economic situation progresses. This is an admirable plan and one that should be encouraged. To the household or individual who makes less than the county's median annual salary, affordable might mean living in a project based section 8 housing, or using an individually assigned section 8 voucher, or residing in tax credit funded properties. The first two options ensure that the rent will not be higher than 30 percent of a household's income. Secondly, as mentioned above, my philosophy is that any housing whereby one spends close to or their entire monthly income to live is not affordable even to one who makes a six figure salary. Housing payments either in the form of a mortgage or rental should never exceed 30 to 35 percent of one's annual income.

In terms of changes to the policy, Palo Alto in my opinion does well with respect to encouraging and developing affordable housing as they work with the public benefit entity, The Palo Alto Housing Corporation to help fulfill the goal of affordable living for people with low to average income. Of course, some people would always like to see more affordable housing, but as I said above, affordable is relative to one's income outlook and position. Palo Alto is truly a national model as it has both below market rental housing, and below market purchase inventory. Some cities are still trying to get where we have been for the past three decades. Palo Alto is an exemplary municipal model with respect to affordable housing.

The only aspect I would change is to do forecasting about demographics with the realization that in about 10 to 20 years, Palo Alto will need more housing to accommodate baby boomers who will become seniors. There will need to be housing that can cater to independent seniors who are at all ranges of the income pool. We will need more low-income senior housing (currently there are only three properties in the city **totally** dedicated to low-income senior housing), and more market rate senior housing communities so that those people who want to sell their homes and change to senior community living will have more options. In addition, demographically speaking, we have to do a better job of learning to connect the dots with respect to housing. If we continue to build housing that focuses primarily on families, how will we keep up with respect to school space, and ensuring good teacher and counselor ratios per student? After all, one benefit that encourages home purchase and living in Palo Alto is the great educational system. While the argument can be made that more family ownership and rentals allow more students to participate in the PAUSD, we have to ask ourselves, can we financially and structurally handle this type of growth? Land is a rare commodity as we speak, do we expect land to free up for school growth? And if so from where?

12. Planned Community (PC) Zoning: Planned Community zoning is controversial because it is perceived as being routinely abused. What is your perspective on the use of this zoning? Use specific examples to illustrate your points.

[C] Chris Gaither

Due to the fact that Planned Community zoning has a public benefit commitment and requirement of the developer as specifically defined by the city, it can have the perception of being abused by the city in order to get certain quid pro quo results. Personally, as far as dwelling units are concerned, I am not a fan of Planned Community zoning. With respect to living and shelter, the Planned Community Zoning goal seems to be to “hoard” as many people as possible in that community. This has the effect of creating more housing to help achieve the housing element goals in one fell swoop. I personally don’t like living in such an environment with so many units close to each other proximity wise. It has an ornate tenement housing feel, as many people have commented with respect to the Arbor Real development (the former Rickey Hyatt’s Hotel parcel). I personally like some space when it comes to living. I prefer single family dwellings in the form of tri and quad plex style housing with the right to purchase ownership, if one is to build housing on a parcel to accommodate more than one household. This is more aesthetic, and offers the feel of more space. But, that is my personal preference on how to live. I believe others share the opinion of having **some** space between living dwellings.

However, I do support planned community zoning projects for administrative, commercial, office and research development. I believe this is a great way to use land to promote business and retail space and for the city to reach its public benefits goals. This is a win-win result.

13. Stanford Hospital Project: The expansion of the Stanford Hospital will have substantial impacts on Palo Alto, most significantly increased traffic and requirements for additional housing. What do you think is appropriate for the City to require of Stanford as part of this project?

[C] Chris Gaither

Stanford has offered a great win-win situation to the City of Palo Alto for the Stanford Hospital project. The offer to contribute 23 million to the affordable housing fund is unprecedented. If managed and invested well, this fund could provide enormous future affordable housing opportunities for Palo Alto. Considering this was not even necessary for Stanford to do, it is a great compromise. There is no data to support that everyone or the majority of people want to live where they work. Personally, I am not a commuter by nature, so I enjoy rolling out of the bed and walking a very short distance to wherever I work. Commuting is not my cup of tea. However, some people choose to live outside of where they work for various reasons – family; personal affordability; childhood ties; they desire home and work separation; or they simply like the idea of working in a particular city over another, but as the saying goes, they would not want to live there- i.e. nice place to work, but not to live. Every time a company is started or expands does not mean that they have to answer the call to consider if their employees will be able to live in that city. In fact, the majority of employees might still want to live elsewhere. I have spoken to some city employees, and they enjoy working in Palo Alto and living in their chosen city outside of Palo Alto. And, I met a gentleman who works at Chris’s Fish and Chips in Los Altos the other day. He lives in Hayward, and runs the store for the owner. The worker enjoys living in Hayward, and enjoys coming to Los Altos to work. The best of both worlds in his words.

With respect to increased traffic from the Stanford Hospital expansion, well if you build it, hopefully they will come. People already choose to live in Palo Alto or close to it for the great medical services provided by Stanford. This fact is never going to change. Certainly the combined potential increase of both employees and patients (including family and friends) will have an impact, but we seem to over estimate traffic impacts. I am still waiting for the heavy traffic impact from the much talked about Sand Hill road project, and I take 280 to go to and from San Francisco on a normal basis – which is often. I feel that what Stanford has offered to address traffic concerns is ample. And, we can always take the approach that if traffic does increase exponentially, then a plan to deal with it can be created and attempted as we go along. Anticipation of every problem cannot be achieved. However, if we take the approach that everything is a Work In Progress, problems can be addressed, mitigated and solved as they occur.

14. Civic Engagement: What is your interpretation of the term “civic engagement”? What are your priorities for improvements in this area?

[C] Chris Gaither

I define civic engagement as being involved in world affairs as a producer, and not just merely a consumer. This can be done locally, state-wide or nationally. One can create or support non-profits that service special local community, state or national needs. One can be engaged by holding public elected or non-elected office via boards and commissions. One can be engaged by volunteering to personally provide goods and services to those in need. One can be engaged via paying jobs that provide goods and services to those in need. One can attend council and commission meetings and orally participate. The opportunities to get out and contribute to society are limitless. Research shows that those who stay engaged in community relations, and those that help others in turn lead healthier lives both mentally and physically. We need to all be examples to others as to the win-win benefits of civic engagement.

I plan to have regular visits with residents throughout the city to hear their opinions, and invite them to become more involved by joining existing city groups, and creating organizations like committees or non-profits that can provide or supply gaps in needed services. In addition, I will encourage the city to advertise more frequently in our local newspapers, on-line, and with cable service providers existing opportunities for civic engagement.

15. Neighborhood Associations: In what ways have neighborhood associations been beneficial to the City? What, if anything, would you change about that relationship?

[C] Chris Gaither

I feel neighborhood associations are good for the community at large. One case in point is this questionnaire to city council candidates and arranging the upcoming forum for all residents to meet and question the candidates. In addition, associations often times bring forth issues to the city, like the College Terrace parking situation that ultimately help both the city, and that particular neighborhood. For example, the recent parking permit implementation is helping to ensure that residents of that area have ample parking and this helps the city both enforcement and revenue wise.

However, not all residents are aware of what association is in their neighborhood; what the association represents; and how the association can be helpful in advocating for a particular area of the city, which can ultimately provide benefit for the entire city; become a model policy for other areas of the city, and sometimes other cities across the nation.

I feel the associations can do more outreach to the city at large by regularly communicating through our local papers and flyers contact and meeting information, and what section of the city is represented by which association. There are renters new and old in the city who do not even know associations exist and how they can get involved and stay informed. Lots of people ask me, who are these people, and whom do they represent? The associations could be even more effective through more inclusive outreach, advertising, and increased public relations.

16. Meeting Effectiveness: Council meetings often run to well after midnight, and decisions are deferred (continued) or referred (sent back for further consideration). What would you do to improve the effectiveness of Council meetings?

[C] Chris Gaither

Yes, Palo Alto is infamous on the Peninsula for its long city council meetings. In fact my friends in San Francisco are aware of Palo Alto's time intensive council meetings. We are fortunate in Palo Alto to have both citizens and city employees who are actively engaged in city issues and matters; and both sides feel the freedom and responsibility to express and support their perspectives during council meetings.

I see the challenge as five-fold. First of all, the council considers too many agenda items in one session. The council meets on the first three non holiday Mondays throughout the month. The plan should be to have the agenda for each meeting to first focus on crises/critical issues and those that need immediate attention and a decision that night. The next priority on the agenda should be all those where public comment and review are expected, and needed to make the best informed decision for the entire city, but a decision that night is not mandatory or feasible. One can use the example of how federal and state courts/judges make their decisions in cases. Some decisions take time, and need to include various factors. A decision cannot always be made at that particular point in time. Certain items on the agenda should fall in the category of hearing opinions and fact finding only for that session with the final decision being announced and made at the following council meeting with no further discussion or fact finding acceptable. If too many of these fact finding and opinion hearing items are scheduled for one night when first planning the agenda, then shorten the list to no more than 3 such items for that night as part of the final agenda. There is always next week as these are not the crises issues. Thirdly, if there are resident or employee proclamations and recognitions for that night, do those first when the meeting is called to order or after the minute approvals so that those individuals can be awarded early and leave the meeting if they desire. Fourthly, residents should be encouraged to speak only about that night's agenda and scheduled items to curtail this portion of council meetings. If a resident has a non-agenda, and non-emergency item to express, they should be encouraged to express their comments by either emailing or phoning a city council person to establish personal communication. If this is deemed an item that should be brought to the entire council's or public's attention for discussion that issue can be placed on the agenda in the proper order at a future meeting. Lastly, if there are items on the agenda where a council person or persons have to excuse themselves due to that issue being a conflict of interest, those items should be last in the appropriate section of the agenda so that the council person can be active in that council session for as long as possible, thereby reducing disruption, and ensuring a full active council for most of the meeting.

A final thought is that the council could designate one meeting of the month where crises/critical issues (needing answer that night), and the rest of the meeting is allocated to hearing resident concerns on any issues. This special monthly meeting would be announced and advertised in advance each month so that residents are aware that the primary focus of that meeting is to hear residents concerns.

17. Balancing Issues: A major focus of the current Council has been environmental issues, especially those related to Global Warming. Using this as a specific example, explain how you think Council and staff should allocate time and effort to the many issues that come before them.

[C] Chris Gaither

The main goal of any municipality is to focus on those concerns, issues and services that affect the city, and its local citizens. Each council member has a single term of four years, of course with the option to extend that time another four years if successful in re-election. Given the finite period of time in office, there is a finite amount of time to do immediate, and visionary (planning) work with respect to city focused objectives while addressing resident customer service inquiries. Palo Alto is a pro-active city in many ways, and often leads the nation by implementing policies having both federal, and global concern, and impact. It is an honor to be a resident of a city that is not only viewed as a municipal leader, but is a municipal leader in the nation. This is all good, as it is a great goal to act locally, and think globally. However, the main focus of any council person, and the main objectives of the city should be to address the concerns of the city's citizens (our customers); business owners and leaders (also our clients); and to implement policies, procedures that are city related, and to do work that positively affects the city. If those programs and policies also have positive environmental results, this is good.

All told, the primary work should be that which helps the city with its local agenda. If we create, or institute a policy, product or service that has national, and global ramifications while achieving a local and needed objective, then in essence, we have obtained a sort of icing on the cake position – a kind of bonus. However, the main focus of the time should be spent on local issues!

Framing an answer to this question with respect to some larger environmental issues addressed by our council on a local level, I can provide two examples where the council's time was beneficial for the greater environmental good. Firstly, the plastic bag ban. I would argue that this policy does have both local and global positive ramifications. When I first heard of the plastic bag ban initiative, I was still a property manager. My first thought being what would my residents wrap their food garbage in before disposing into the building's public garbage dumpster? As time passed, I realized this is a great opportunity to promote composting if you have time so that some food stuffs end up back in the ground to reinvigorate nature, and not in the garbage bins. Also, the reality is, plastic bags do get left on the street as they fly out of the garbage trucks, and they do end up back in the environment, creating numerous challenges. All told, while I find plastic bags personally useful, I believe the ban policy will be good in the long run. This is one of those policies that have both local, and global results. It is a good thing that the council addressed the issue, but it was not a priority issue. What about the fact that none of the current council members were aware of the holly oak tree blunder on California Avenue near my home? Why was time not allocated in a council session to address the fact that **all** the holly oak trees on California Avenue would be eradicated in one fell swoop? It is difficult to imagine that something like this happened in Palo Alto, an environmentally "super" conscious city. The council should have made time to discuss this issue, heard public concerns, and more importantly, the council should have known about this issue. Furthermore, if the council did not know about this massive tree whacking, were permits issued to fell the trees? There are many unanswered questions folks ☺!

Secondly, with respect to the global warming example, there are positive ramifications for both reducing personal vehicle usage on a local basis with the emphasis on increased public transportation usage (as promoted by the council), and producing alternate energy sources, also being considered by the council. It is a good focus for Palo Alto to be involved in both

endeavors to help reduce carbon emissions, and thereby reduce the impact on global warming. Because Palo Alto does manage its own utility service, the city can allocate time to the issue of alternate energy sources simply because we have city staff that can research these issues, and offer solutions. This is a good thing! And, because Palo Alto does have great public transportation choices, and the fact that Palo Alto is easy for bicycling and walking, the council and the city can lead the way in promoting and “soft selling” suggested alternatives to vehicle transportation. However, the council should not make this effort a priority with respect to council issues. If we can promote projects to help in the endeavor of global warming, we should do so, but we should not make these issues feel mandatory to residents. People have so much to balance in their personal lives that they don’t want to feel as though the city in which they reside is trying to control their personal lives by enforcing environmental choices that some people are quite honestly not ready to envision, or practice.

18. (Optional) Unasked Question: If there is a question you think we should have asked, ask and answer it.

[C] Chris Gaither

Do you feel that the Palo Alto Police Department engages in racial profiling, and other profiling which potentially violate other or all protected and non-protected classes? Provide three ways the Palo Alto Police department can improve its community relations, and how “some” of the community perceives its performance. Elaborate where necessary with examples.