

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:

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I'm running for City Council because I believe we must do a better job of taking care of the essentials of running the city. This means focusing on the budget and the long-term implications of a new economic picture. That includes funding infrastructure repairs and maintenance that have been neglected to the point where the cost is staggering - \$450 million. I also think we have not given the business community the attention it needs to ensure we have a healthy economy in Palo Alto. And finally, I think the City Council needs to stop micro-managing projects and deal with the policy issues that reflect the desires of our citizens.

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.

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I have been attending City Council meetings since before I ran for the Council in 2007. I would appear to make statements on topics of which I was involved or concerned with, such as the Palo Alto Black and White Ball, Alma Plaza, PTA, Stanford Hospital, and the Chamber of Commerce.

I also served on the Blue Ribbon Task Force for the Public Safety Building in 2008 and found it to be a rewarding experience that allowed me to see how the City pursues its primary task of providing for the safety of our citizens.

Through these activities, I have come to know many of the department heads at the city and feel these relationships will help me be an effective collaborator on the Council.

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

[A] Dan Dykwel : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I have no conflicts of interest in ongoing issues and anticipate no conflicts going forward.

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?

[A] Dan Dykwel : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I appreciate that this question refers to structural deficits. These are deficits that have been building for many years and there are no quick fixes. The rising costs for employee benefits are unsustainable. We all are awaiting the results of the city's efforts to gain concessions from the unions. Obviously, we cannot renege on contracts or agreements that are already in place for retired workers. Going forward, we must consider numerous options for reducing the city's liabilities, such as providing less than 100% health coverage for retirees. Reductions in the city work force should be analyzed in a manner that truly compares our work force with those cities similar in size and characteristics and the services provided. The fact that we have a sizable portion of city workers assigned to the utilities division skews our numbers compared to neighboring cities. Determining which services might be candidates for reduced employee headcount would entail, in my mind, a robust public discussion about which services we are willing to forego.

The recent audit of the city's telephone system indicates that there may be other areas in need of auditing that could produce savings. We could also consider expediting automation in areas that could be eligible for stimulus funds.

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

[A] Dan Dykwel : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I realize this is a difficult time to levy new taxes on our businesses. As a small businessman in Palo Alto I, too, will be subject to this tax. But, I support the business license tax. I worked on the Chamber of Commerce business license tax task force which was formed to respond to and oppose the tax being proposed by the City. After several months of studying other cities' taxes and presenting arguments to the City, I changed my position to one of favoring this tax. For the vast majority of businesses in town, the fee will be nominal. The tax will align Palo Alto with nearly every other city in the state and provided badly needed revenue.

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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

The funds that flow from the utilities to the general fund are designated as an equity transfer that was established when the utility enterprise fund was established. The dynamics of this transfer could impact utility rates, so it should be managed to minimize rate increases while serving as a stable source of revenue for the general fund.

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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I do not support an elevated high speed rail system going through the middle of Palo Alto. An underground route would be most favorable in terms of safety, noise and preservation of properties along the route. There is an assumption that a station in Palo Alto would be a boon to business and make the city a transportation hub. I have not seen an economic analysis, if there is one, that makes a case for this assumption. It was just such assumptions about the value of high speed rail that has placed us in this difficult situation of trying to stop an elevated project. I think the City has the responsibility to get all the information available that would support or reject the value of an HSR station in Palo Alto and present it to the residents.

The official website of the California High Speed Rail Authority can be found at <http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov>.

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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

Directly and indirectly, business accounts for roughly one-third of our annual revenue. In addition to revenue generation, it allows us and visitors to Palo Alto able to buy what we need and want. Merchants add vitality to commercial streets, and business people contribute significantly to civic priorities as well. It is in our long-term interest to promote the health of Palo Alto businesses. We can do that by creating policies to attract and retain the rich mix of retail that will generate the tax revenues and enable maintenance of high quality city services.

We really need to develop a business support strategy. We can no longer afford to leave this important segment of our community to the vagaries of institutional inertia. We might create an ombudsman (reassigned from existing staff), who can help new businesses navigate the complexities of obtaining permits, or get back to the basics of keeping our retail areas clean and our parking garages clean and safe. Signage and alleyways that serve as corridors between shops could be enhanced. Getting to a comprehensive assessment of our strategic options will require collaborations among the Council, staff, business community, and citizens. Each is a partner and a stakeholder in our retail vitality.

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

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I'm not sure to whom you refer. The Sierra Club advocates for density housing to minimize sprawl and the deterioration of the environment. A Livable Palo Alto (ALPA) is currently advocating density housing as a way to attempt to meet ABAG numbers. (Whether or not you agree with the ABAG assessment, people are at least looking at the issue, but that's a whole separate question). The lack of vacant land in Palo Alto has resulted in the redevelopment of some commercial parcels into density housing. This is a perennial question in Palo Alto for good reason. We all want to maintain our quality of life, and it is in our best interests to stay open to diverse residential ideas that are our best assurances of a dynamic population.

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?

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I don't of any specific projects where this has been proven. If this behavior is occurring, it needs to be brought to the attention of the city manager so he can manage his staff appropriately. I would expect any such understating to be noticed first by the planning and transportation commission.

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?

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Certainly affordable units are desired in our community to encourage diversity and provide housing for those who provide many of our vital services. The cost of land makes it nearly prohibitive if built as stand-alone projects by the City or housing authority. Attaching this requirement to new developments is a more cost-effective way (for the city) to provide this badly needed housing. Adjusting the ratio is a challenge as it must balance the needs of the City with the financial viability of any project.

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.

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This type of zoning is provided for in the Comprehensive Plan to provide the flexibility to develop sites that could not be developed under their normal designations. As designated,

18.38.010 Specific Purposes

The PC planned community district is intended to accommodate developments for residential, commercial, professional, research, administrative, industrial, or other activities, including combinations of uses appropriately requiring flexibility under controlled conditions not otherwise attainable under other districts. The planned community district is particularly intended for unified, comprehensively planned developments which are of substantial public benefit, and

which conform with and enhance the policies and programs of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.

There is a documented procedure to apply for a planned community district and it is reviewed by the Planning and Transportation Commission and approved by City Council, with public input occurring at both ends. I'm not convinced the procedure has been abused. The recent examples that include Alma Plaza and the proposed project on El Camino Real that is the current site of the JJ&F Market are both sites that are no longer economically feasible. Attempting to replace them with the same use will only result in failure.

18.38.060 Required Determinations

Development of the site under the provisions of the PC planned community district will result in public benefits not otherwise attainable by application of the regulations of general districts or combining districts.

The pieces are in place to ensure the PCs do result in public benefits. This process is intended to ensure that we have a mechanism to replace and reenergize areas that would otherwise not be viable under current designations.

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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

I support the Stanford Hospital project but recognize that the impacts need to be carefully understood and mitigations negotiated in good faith. I have looked at the extensive list of possible mitigations that has been presented to Stanford and feel some are excessive. The development plan should not be used to extract things for which Stanford has no mission or responsibility. I struggle with the issue of housing and its relationship to this particular institution adding jobs. We don't ask the same of companies in the research park who add employees.

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

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To me, civic engagement is an attempt to connect the city and its workers with the residents of our community. It's creating synergy among our citizens to manage our many challenges.

There is a large reservoir of very talented and generous people in our community and I am so privileged to work with many of them. They are committed to the greater good and are a resource that if encouraged and shown how to become more engaged at their interest points would provide our city with an expanding social capital that could only be positive.

As a Council Member I would seek to engage more of our citizens in addressing specific social and economic challenges through teams of experienced, interested and available people. They would study and provide recommendations for some of our more difficult challenges and work on both short and long-term issues.

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

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

Neighborhood associations can help mobilize residents and bring focus to issues that are important to specific areas of our community. They can also act on behalf of the overall community, as PAN has done with emergency preparation, and help create the dynamic balance between the city and the neighborhoods that is vital to a healthy community. When relationships of trust and reciprocity are working well, our city benefits. Neighborhood associations can be a prime mover in building and maintaining such relationships.

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?

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

Ah, this is a good one! One approach may be to limit the speaking time of the council members, as we do with the public. It's not always necessary to hear the same reasoning from 7 or 8 council members. Also, the Council needs to focus on policy and avoid the trap of micro-managing. We have a city manager and staff to do the work.

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.

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The purpose of setting 3 or 4 general goals each year or for a longer period of time is to focus efforts on things that advance those specific goals beyond the normal operations of the City. Certainly we recognize that the wide variety of issues that come before the Council require widely varying amounts of staff and Council time to handle. Priorities should be determined based on a variety of criteria, such as public safety, critical-time items, cost-effectiveness and short- and long-term impact.

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

[A] Option not exercised.