

# 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:

[J] Gail Price                      [www.gailprice.org](http://www.gailprice.org)

*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?

[J] Gail Price

I am running because I have a strong record of civic involvement, strategic planning and leadership as an elected official and community activist over several decades. I have a record of being thoughtful, caring and compassionate in my decision-making, I know how to balance competing demands with limited resources.

I have been serving people as a public sector employee in city planning and transportation for over 22 years. I have a keen appreciation and understanding of how government should work. Experience is needed and critical at this time; My main goal it to create a vibrant, strong future for all the members of our community by engaging in responsible fiscal, land use, transportation, and housing decisions to protect our environment. Sustainable community planning is critical to reduce green house gas emissions and to address climate change. We need to create careful economic development strategies that combine "smart growth" principles with energy efficient and attractive design while monitoring and addressing impacts on city services, infrastructure and school capacity.

Decisions should be made within the context of the Comprehensive Plan All decisions made now create our future. Palo Alto needs to better recognize and serve the underserved community members and neighborhoods. We need to be more efficient and effective to create a more inclusive and caring community.

### 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.

[J] Gail Price

I have had direct engagement with the City Council members on numerous occasions over the last 18 years. I was a member of the City-School Liaison Committee several times during my two terms on the School Board and we worked collaboratively on various items, including library services and coordination, data base purchases, support of the library bond, exploring mental health and recreational services to support students, child care centers on school property, advocating for additional athletic facilities, opening of Terman Middle School, supporting the modification of shuttle bus routes to better serve students at schools throughout Palo Alto.

I supported the library bond and have consistently sought opportunities for improved partnerships between the City and the PAUSD. During the early to mid 1990's, I was an alternate to the Comprehensive Plan Committee and a member of the Child Care Task Force (appointed by City Council). As President of Palo Alto Community Child Care Board, I also spoke to the council about the need for accessible, affordable quality childcare and the importance of City support of the child care subsidy program. As a Principal Planner in the City of Sunnyvale, I also spoke to the Palo Alto City Council on regional planning issues during the mid 1990's.

**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.

[J] Gail Price

I am the Executive Director of The American Institute of Architects Santa Clara Valley. AIA SCV is one of 22 chapters in California and part of a state and national organization. I would recuse myself from deliberations and votes on projects with a team leader/project manager who is a member of the Santa Clara chapter. If there were questions, I would always seek advice and guidance from the City of Palo Alto's legal staff to ensure there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

A balanced budget will require compromises. The deficit we are facing is not dissimilar to what other communities are facing throughout the region and California. I believe that we need to pay our city employees good wages and reasonable benefits that are aligned with what other communities have negotiated. Our pay scales should be comparable to "benchmark cities." I have several ideas to explore.

I believe that additional savings can be identified with more focused discussions and establishing an on-going joint benefits committee that explores more creative and solutions from both sides. Both have a vested interest in making this successful. Solid solutions are not necessarily developed in the midst of urgent and intense debate.

I think that the City and the unions need to engage in better communication and explore alternative methods and "best practices" for funding benefits and managing costs. I am a proponent of more aggressively reviewing what has been done successfully in other communities, including a phased approach to address significant budget problems. Other

communities have used methods of cost containment while remaining competitive; other cities have concluded negotiations successfully.

In many cases, employees closest to the work being done can best and most easily identify creative ideas, including feasibility and impact of costs savings or revenue generation. I am not sure this has been fully explored.

The City should explore additional ways of providing services at market rates to other public agencies as long as it does not reduce services to Palo Alto. We currently have revenue for services provided to other public and private entities (County of Santa Clara and Stanford University).

Given the current recession and skepticism about government, I do not think this is the time to consider either a bond measure or a parcel tax although it may be one of the few choices we have in the future to support services or to at least partially fund a new police station.

Investment in and support of the business community is critical. We need to ensure that we are sufficiently business friendly to support our businesses and create an environment that promotes revitalization and expansion of business opportunities and jobs. Successful business supports employment and creates sales tax revenue. I think we should explore additional opportunities for hotels to provide additional options to business, tourists, and academic visitors to Stanford. An additional source of transit occupancy tax revenue would enhance our General Fund.

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

[J] Gail Price

I support the business license tax. Palo Alto is one of two cities in California that do not have a business license tax. If approved in November, it will provide about \$3 million dollars in revenue to the City. Without this source of new revenue, we will not be able to support the current level of services. The tax will be one of several ways to address the \$10 million dollar deficit. I do think we need to examine how the discussion of the proposed tax evolved and how the process could have been improved.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

My understanding is that the level of payment from the City Utility Fund into the General Fund is based on several factors, including maintaining a reasonable level of return on investment and providing sufficient resources to support programs and infrastructure. I believe that the Utilities Advisory Commission in conjunction with staff recommends the appropriate level of payment to the City Council. I do not have sufficient knowledge to address if our current utility rates are too high or not since I do not know how the costs and operation of our City-owned utilities compare to other communities.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

I am a proponent of High Speed Rail because I believe it will provide opportunities to coordinate and improve transit services by linking to other local and regional destinations. If eventually operating within a similar corridor, it will enable long needed electrification of Caltrain while reducing hazards by creating more grade separations along the alignment. These would be critical improvements for our community. .

A major issue for the community is the ultimate alignment design, system operations, and configuration of HSR through our community. I support the underground option (either tunnel or cut and cover or a combination) to reduce the impacts on the community (although there is some discussion that the undergrounding option may also have staging and eminent domain issues). My biggest concern is the costs and identifying the funding for it (all options) Comprehensive costs for HSR have not been fully developed.

From an economic development perspective, I think the city should request a strong multi-modal station in Palo Alto. Property designed it could be part of a new municipal center complex and would have a strong economic and business impacts for Palo Alto.

A successful high-speed rail would likely promote additional housing and commercial opportunities near transit centers, which would help, address our jobs: housing imbalance. The construction and implementation of the high-speed rail could also provide jobs to Palo Alto and its environs that would be a positive benefit. . If the major design and operations issues are done thoughtfully, it could be a tremendous opportunity for the City

We need to continue to be leaders and active partners in the Peninsula Cities Consortium (PCC) in order effectively protect and advocate for the outcomes that best suit our local needs but contribute to transit improvements for the region. We will have direct and constant contact with the High Speed Rail Authority, and our County and State elected officials. It is critical that we continue to be heavily involved throughout the CEQA process to have some influence on the process.

As an elected official, I will examine and study all related environmental reviews and operational and conceptual designs related to the project. The HSR needs to be consistent with the transportation and land use goals of our Comprehensive Plan, the VTA Regional Transportation Plan and the goals of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. This will be an opportunity to intensity creative and compact land uses and projects directly adjacent to the transit stops along the route. The City of Palo Alto should examine alternative design options and land uses that will maximize the advantages of accessibility to transit, improved pedestrian options, and promote increased ridership of the HSR.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

Supporting and enhancing retail opportunities within Palo Alto is very important. Diversifying retail builds a strong base capable of withstanding economic cycles. It should include a range of types and sizes of retail services in many settings, including along major arterials, neighborhood retail centers, adjacent to transit center and activity centers, and in mixed-use projects that include housing opportunities. I do not favor big box retail but would like to see a creative plan, incorporating Fry's, into a mixed use or related project to combine both Fry's positive economic impact (i.e. sales tax) and housing, demonstrating smart growth principles,

near a transit center. I think the city should actively consider appropriate hotel development to provide needed services and to generate transit occupancy tax revenue.

To have a strong and adaptable business environment, I would promote a broader examination of successful business retention and marketing approaches done by other communities of comparable size and circumstances. An excellent example of successful and thriving neighborhood retail services has been demonstrated in the City of Berkeley. Its diversity and strong retail activity has helped it retain one the strongest sales tax base in the Bay Area during the recession. I am concerned that we have vacant and underutilized retail and office properties in our community and two of our four neighborhood commercial centers are in disarray. To ensure better understanding and collaboration between the City and the Chamber of Commerce, it would be appropriate to ascertain if the standing committees and initiatives are really addressing the core issues.

The vision and activities of the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce directly complement the content and policies of the Business and Economics chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. One of my concerns is that this chapter has 33 policies and an implementation plan of 18 items. While I recognize it covers a period of several years, I think additional prioritization would be helpful to achieve the outcomes desired. Are we focusing on the most critical areas? Are we being efficient with the resources and staff that we have to complete this important work?

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

[J] Gail Price

I believe that the City of Palo Alto should engage in “managed growth” that balances the vision and guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan and the specific goals and policies of the required Housing Element. Due to the quality of services, schools, and businesses, there will continue to be a demand for housing. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is through the zoning ordinance. I do think the increasing housing densities should be considered along major transportation corridors and adjacent to transit centers. Increasing housing in these locations will have a positive impact on business and sales tax if retail opportunities are within easy pedestrian and bicycling access. Many communities have done this very successfully. For environmental and social purposes, we should engage in responsible planning to support local and regional housing needs. With the passage of SB 375, cities are required to have Sustainable Community Planning strategies which balance land use, housing, and transportation decisions to reduce green house gas emissions and address climate change.

The amount of growth in housing is defined by many parameters: economic, social, community priorities, environmental, and political. These considerations also impact the vision and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the Housing Element shape the future of the community.

A key opportunity will be the update of the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan for Palo Alto. Preliminary discussions of the update have begun and this will be an important discussion. As in many communities, there are a range of ideas about what the goals and outcomes of the Housing Element should be regardless of what the ABAG numbers suggest.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

Each development project and proposal has unique strengths and weaknesses as it goes through the review and planning process. Professional staff review and analyze the types and degree of development impacts as part of standard review prior to presenting these projects to the Boards, Commissions, and City Council (depending upon the project). While not a full proof process, the CEQA process does provide a systematic structure for analysis of impacts and requires that appropriate mitigations be identified (and a mitigation monitoring plan prepared in some instances) depending upon the size and types of project. A full and complete project review incorporates staff, community, and elected officials concerns as part of the process. In a significant number of projects, architecture and design, building size, configuration, generation, parking and access and egress are major concerns.

With the number and variety of projects within Palo Alto, I believe we have a fairly good system of anticipating what likely development impacts might be and how they can best be addressed. To improve our understanding of this, it might be appropriate to 1. Complete a study comparing estimated impacts with the actual project impacts for a selected number of projects and 2. Examine “best practices” in other communities regarding impact identification and methods used to successfully address impacts of various types of development. These findings could inform our current review process and result in improved analysis of future projects.

An ongoing and serious concern is the potential impact of residential development on our schools. In other communities, there is a more formal process of seeking input from the school district regarding how schools will address the generation of new students into the district schools. I would recommend that clearly examine what charter cities. School impact fees for residential and commercial properties are established by the state and do not cover the average costs of providing educational services per student.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

I believe we need a variety of housing types and densities within the City of Palo Alto to meet the needs of current and future residents and businesses. Within the recent audit and community survey, affordable housing was identified as a significant need.

Affordable housing goals are defined through the Housing Element and are implemented via the zoning code, which requires a percentage of units designated as affordable units. I believe this has been a fairly effective method to achieve more affordable housing. Affordable housing goals can be partially met through BMR requirements but we need to look at other cities to discover if other “best practices” have worked well to achieve affordable housing. We could incorporate these into our current policies and practices.

City government should make consistent and dedicated effort to ensure that we have both for sale and rental housing of various designs and costs in Palo Alto. Within the last decade there



have been successful Single Room Occupancy units completed and available which has begun to address a segment of need.

**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.

[J] Gail Price

In general, I support the prudent and very careful use of PC zoning because it provides some flexibility beyond what the basic development standards of a zone allow. PC zoning can provide creative and flexible planning and design opportunities while meeting the general goals of the Comprehensive Plan. I do not think that prescribed zoning and inflexible development standards suit all circumstances. More flexible approaches (including site specific plans, etc.) are common planning techniques used successfully in other communities and it has great potential for creating positive and innovative results if high standards are maintained.

I recognize, however, that the nature of the PC zoning raises many concerns. about its utility, the definition and measurability of “public benefits” and the current review process used in its implementation. One concern that I have is if the current review process needs to be examined to determine if it yields “improved and defensible” results. There have been cases where the original proposals may have been preferable to the final project approved. We should compare our review process to what has been done in other communities to see if other practices are stronger and the results better.

The Planning and Transportation Commission has formed a subcommittee to study the PC zone but a formal presentation of their discussions and recommendations has not been done yet. Since the PC zone technique is comparable to what is used in other communities, I think an examination of “best practices” related to the use of this type of zoning would be productive and would assist the city in its review. A major issue with such zoning is how to reasonable and fairly assess or quantify benefits. The financial quantification of performance is only one measure and clearly does not address the more meaningful and subjective aspects of community benefit.

My impression is that the PC zoning related to the PAMF properties have been quite successful and represents a good outcome after extensive deliberation and review.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

An important factor for consideration is to what degree the details of a Community Benefit document include sufficient and appropriate types of benefits beyond what will be considered as mitigation measures for impacts identified through the CEQA process. A project of this significance and size should incorporate major community benefits to offset the anticipated immediate and long-term project impacts, including traffic, parking, housing, impacts to City services, jobs, design, and operations. The intensity and complexity of the project is daunting and will require multiple levels of review and critique through the planning process.

The Stanford Hospital Project will improve access to high quality, state of the art healthcare medicine and technology, including emergency services that will greatly benefit both current and future residents and businesses in Palo Alto.

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

[J] Gail Price

Ideal civic engagement suggests that all stakeholders are informed, engaged, and participating in a meaningful way to ensure thoughtful, creative solutions to challenges. In reality, a relatively modest number of individuals relative to the community participate via one of several means open to them. One role of government is to continually examine its methods (including languages used) of reaching the community and to find more effective ways of contacting and hearing from stakeholders. Although improvements have been made, we should never assume we are doing this effectively enough.

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

[J] Gail Price

Effective neighborhood associations are key venues for a form of “representative” community experience and perspectives. Each neighborhood has similar elements but each also has unique features and concerns. While they may not necessarily represent all the views of the neighbors of all ages and circumstances, strong and truly representative neighborhood associations with thoughtful leaders are important to creating a more informed discussion and insight for all stakeholders, including other neighborhoods, City staff, business community, and elected officials. Neighborhood associations are critical elements of the community.

**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?

[J] Gail Price

Conducting council meeting business after 11:00pm is not in the best interest of the community members, staff, and the community. I would like to see the following: 1. Limit the number of items for each agenda for each meeting 2. Establish a practice formally or informally that each council member limits the number and duration of their comments (encourage a practice of only speaking if a new point or significant modification of a point needs to be made). 3. Consider time limits for council members (allowing each one an extended period once per evening). 4. Conduct City business with a premise of trust and not distrust regarding staff presentations and recommendations and 5. Promote and praise behaviors that focus on brief, relevant, insightful comments designed to promote thoughtful results. I do not believe that interminable discussions lead to better outcomes.

**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.

[J] Gail Price

Elected officials, working with the staff and the community, have a responsibility to set the vision, mission and goals of local government. One of the many challenges is that we often have a variety of competing needs in our community. The Comprehensive Plan should better define the vision and provide policy guidance for the plan implementation. An ideal



Comprehensive Plan is visionary, innovative, measurable, and economically feasible. The current Comprehensive Plan has too many themes and policies within each chapter. There is not sufficient effort made to prioritize the key issues. On a yearly basis, the City Council establishes priorities for each year to define the work plan of the staff. All communities also need to have some flexibility to address unanticipated challenges related to planning and the economic environment.

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

[J] Gail Price

18. Unasked questions

During your campaign, you have referenced a caring community? What do you mean by that?

The City of Palo Alto is more than its buildings, neighborhoods, and roads; it is about people and providing services to the residents and businesses in our community. I believe that creating a caring community requires that the City take a more visible role to promote effective partnerships to improve and coordinate mental health services and well being for our youth and families. Recently the pronounced increases in youth suicides demand that we approach this issue differently. The schools, the City, non-profits and faith-based services and families cannot do this alone. We need to include the youth in these discussions (and not rely solely on adult experts), use the Youth Master Plan findings and recommendations to increase education and awareness of the range of mental health issues.

A reduction in Community Police Officers at our schools is not a solution. I would like to explore the possibility of using a portion of the transit occupancy tax devoted to increasing partnerships as the economy improves. There are several model programs, which have been used successfully in other communities, which have been used successfully in other communities. This is a community issue.

A caring community should also improve civil discourse that is more respectful and productive. While we have many opinions and firmly held beliefs, a lot of emotional and psychic energy is consumed and distracts us from more meaningful discussion of the complex challenges to create positive results. I am concerned about the “terms of the debates” and the interminable Palo Alto process. I do not necessarily believe that extended debate necessarily results in the most creative solution civil discourse should be more dignified, respectful and productive.