

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:

[E] John Hackmann : www.JohnHackmann.com : Hackmann@stanfordalumni.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?

[E] John Hackmann

I have the time and interest to serve the City that has served me, and that I love.

Palo Alto right now needs experienced leaders with good judgment, ability to work to a consensus, and a proven track record of accomplishments in the public sphere. I offer this. If elected, I will serve diligently, commit the necessary hours of time required, and continue listening to each of you.

Housing density and overdevelopment, structural budget deficits, and the clear need for immediate pension reforms are some of the largest challenges that we face together.

For more than 20 years I have come before the City Council with others to help achieve positive solutions for Palo Alto such as working to protect the Baylands, preserving historic buildings, enhancing our libraries, and supporting the development of small and home businesses.

Having been a teacher of environmental and health policy and a general practice attorney solving the problems of individuals and neighbors, I am well aware of local problems and the ways to address them.

I love this city and now I have the time and interest to give back by serving on the Council if elected.

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.

[E] John Hackmann

Part of my public policy experience was serving on the Boards of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Palo Alto, The Consumers' Co-operative Society of Palo Alto, and the MayView Community Health Clinic of Palo Alto.

Specific to the Council, I have appeared and spoken on important issues before the City Council, as many know, on many issues over the last twenty years.

1) In July and August I spoke at four meetings of the Finance Committee and City Council, and was one of the leading quoted critics of the "gross receipts tax" approach to Measure A concerning small businesses, home businesses, professionals, tutors, doctors and other self-employed people.

2) In September I spoke up with others at City Council, successfully, to encourage a somewhat larger collection of books in the downtown branch of the Palo Alto library system, so it feels more like a "real library," as two council members stated.

3) I spoke up at Council for Baylands protection as habitat for both the harvest mouse and an egret species.

4) I fought for preservation of the historic first African-American Church on the Peninsula, on Ramona Street. I was a leading voice as an attorney in this fight which many preservationists thought could not be won but which we did win and the church building today still stands and forms a graceful transition between the residential neighborhood and a larger building.

5) An athletic field for soccer and softball was the focus of my efforts and the efforts of many others before the Council years ago. This athletic field is still used today by the students of Castilleja High School.

6) I formed Friends of Embarcadero with one other person to create new bicycle lanes and to improve traffic on Embarcadero Road. This project was approved as a pilot project by the City Council but then was not implemented due to budget constraints.

On all six of these issues, the first two not yet completely resolved, I was successful in working with others and organizing the message. On the City Council I believe I will be able to work collegially with others and continue my track record of success.

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.

[E] John Hackmann

In addition to my house, I own the small building where my office is, near Downtown North.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

Cost containment should first be addressed by fair negotiations between labor and management. Structurally, we clearly need to reform the taxpayer's annual contribution to the pension pot so it is a known and fixed contribution each year. Lifetime payouts of pensions can be up to \$2,000,000 to \$6,000,000 EACH for long serving employees. The city, and the taxpayers, can simply not be on the hook for forever increasing, unknowable obligations far into the future.

Palo Alto is said to be in much better shape on the pension funding than other cities. This is precisely the reason we should fully address and solve this problem now.

No essential service need be cut. With focused goals, specific objectives, closer management and accountability, and increased public partnerships with the non-profit organizations we have here in Palo Alto, we can continue to provide all essential services. We have many excellent employees here in Palo Alto.

Overall, we need to do a better job controlling spending. In my opinion, we, as other cities do, have a high cost per employee when salary, benefits and pension contribution are all included. And Palo Alto has a larger number of city employees per population than most of our neighbors.

One specific area of service where savings are possible is to have a closer partnership between staff and volunteers in library operations, where there are many skilled and willing people ready to help. A second valid alternative to contain costs is with new government sector productivity software, for example, in public record keeping and record retention. This would put Palo Alto on the cutting edge and demonstrate Palo Alto's leadership.

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

[E] John Hackmann

Measure A on the ballot proposes a combination business registry and employee tax.

A business REGISTRY requires no vote, only a limited fee, and can be enacted by the City Council directly, and even carried out by the Chamber of Commerce or a private business at no cost to the city.

The business TAX proposal (up to \$30,000 per business), with the City claiming the right to AUDIT even INSPECT every SMALL BUSINESS and HOME BUSINESS in Palo Alto just seems very inappropriate for our town. This in my opinion is not the Palo Alto way.

If we are one of the relatively few cities without business tax or registry requirement, this can be effectively marketed as "Business Destination: Palo Alto" to draw business to our town, and could be one reason we are so successful here in Palo Alto in attracting new businesses.

Business is hurting right now. This is just not the time for any new tax or heavy new regulation. I urge each voter in Palo Alto to OPPOSE MEASURE A.

Over spending is not cured by extra, new taxes. I have spoken out at four Finance Committee and City Council meetings AGAINST this tax on an estimated 9,000 businesses. Other cities primarily use a business registry with a minimum cost, not even requiring a vote.

Measure A is a HUGE NEW TAX partly described as a business registry. Home businesses and small businesses need to be more supported by Palo Alto. It is wrong to subject thousands of HOME BUSINESS to city audits and unnecessary burdens.

A deep recession is the wrong time for new taxes; let's fix our spending problem first.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

This is a long-term issue that needs to be re-addressed. Transfer payments should not be so large as to be a significant factor in increasing the already burdensome utility bills of our senior citizens and residents, some of whom are struggling just to stay in their homes.

These seniors and these residents are the engineers, teachers, nurses, workmen, and moms and dads that made us who we are in Palo Alto.

Every decision we make in Palo Alto should always bear these long term residents in mind, who have contributed so much over the last sixty years to what Palo Alto is, and who we are.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

There should be NO HUGE WALL for an elevated train in Palo Alto taking up vast amounts of our land and dividing our community.

High Speed Rail can be valuable to California. However, the most important route should first be built from Sacramento through San Jose to Los Angeles. Then we will learn how much it is used.

The proper role of the Peninsula route is to use the existing bullet CalTrain as the feeder to the High Speed Rail, so it can collect riders for the high-speed journey. Otherwise, the train has several stops on the Peninsula – in which case it would not be a high-speed train in that segment.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

Listening to businesses, and responding reasonably, is the best approach. Neighborhood retail has very site-specific issues, which need to be addressed individually and with clear written notice to and input from the neighbors. Two examples of such site specific local neighborhood

center issues are the loss of walkable retail along El Camino adjacent to the Barron Park neighborhood and preservation of neighbor friendly single story retail at the Edgewood Shopping Center.

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

[E] John Hackmann

ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) requirements for 10,000 or so new units of housing in Palo Alto are unrealistic and will never be met, as there is not land available and no political will to build such a huge amount of new housing. These goals need to be readdressed to more realistic levels. Palo Alto was an early leader in affordable housing, and has great income diversity already present in town. Palo Alto has welcomed a great variety of senior, family, low income, and other housing to our town.

High density housing should be closely scrutinized for its impact on neighbors, traffic congestion, and whether it even is the best location for the actual population it serves.

Impact on school attendance, school funding, and school boundaries must be closely accounted for.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

Potential impacts of development should be discussed and decided in clear, unambiguous terms that are objective, that is, state specifically what the developer has to do so that the city has a concrete, numeric measure of whether the objectives were met or not.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

A community forum should be held on the scope and cost of affordable housing and on the impact on schools and tax revenues and on the demonstrable and measurable impact on the lives of the residents of those affordable housing projects. Then the community would be better prepared to reach consensus.

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.

[E] John Hackmann

PC zoning can be appropriate, but many of us including me, feel that the variously defined 'public benefit' is sometimes either not directly related enough to the exception granted, or of minimal significance. However, PC zoning is still appropriate in certain situations.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

Stanford Hospital is of great benefit to Palo Alto and the entire region. Hospital earthquake seismic safety is required by state law in the near term, so of course a complete rebuild must be done. The hospital has presented a very good plan. Height is one concern to many. Most seriously, we need to look at traffic management and impact.

In the area of traffic impact, I can contribute. In 1974, I initiated the concept for a free transit service for a University community, implemented in 1989, and still continuing today for 33,000 students, and apparently copied around the country. I also created at Stanford in 1979 what may be one of the first car share programs in the United States for 53 students. We here in Palo Alto can continue to be creative and innovative in traffic impact and I can help.

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

[E] John Hackmann

Civic engagement, to me, includes ‘civil engagement,’ a respectful and polite discussion and analysis of policies and actions on their merits, in a way people want to be engaged, and enjoy and benefit from the process.

Many of our more effective Council Members are those that understand and enjoy the process, and are not only focused on a result or outcome.

Neighborhood groups do a remarkable job of ‘spreading the word.’ Citywide, we make information and processes accessible to our residents with televised meetings through the Media Center, taped replays of meetings, radio coverage on 90.1 FM, distributed documents, and the city website.

Yet, we can do better. We need forums and other technical outreach that attract newcomers to Palo Alto, that engages young people, and that makes participation interesting and satisfying.

Key agenda items need to be publicized more widely. Items should not be added at the last minute. Proposed laws should be written down and available for discussion a week in advance. Those appearing before the Council should have all their inputs submitted one week in advance in writing, and thus available on the city website and in City Council Chambers.

When documents are submitted close in time to the Council meeting, the City Council, the public, and even the City Attorney have no time for thoughtful reflection or considered judgment.

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

[E] John Hackmann

Neighborhood associations are one of the most valuable assets of Palo Alto. These groups provide a greatly intensified look at local and specific effects of actions of City Council and city staff, and help inform and even check and double check those

decisions. One possible change to make neighborhood associations even more effective might be some systematic communication with the neighbors that are not in the associations, which is consistent between the associations.

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?

[E] John Hackmann

Council meetings should start somewhat earlier and then go to no later than a fixed ending time, with automatic continuance to the next day if all business is not completed. It is not fair to shut out so many seniors who may go to bed early, and residents who need to go to work the next day, from public participation. Council members could comment more succinctly. Council size could be reduced, if the voters choose to, from 9 to 7 as many have suggested.

Definitely, meetings need to end earlier. In September I was at a City Council meeting and stayed until the decision on the issue was made at about 1:00 am. This was on a proposal on which I spoke to possibly consider more books at the Downtown Library, originally slated to have no increase in collection space in a \$4,000,000 remodel. (Later amended for some expansion.) The closed session then ended about 2:00 am.

Another City Council meeting in August ran near midnight at which I spoke opposing the “gross receipts tax” formulation for the Measure A to be placed on the ballot. Near midnight, with twenty-three people in the room, I noticed that I appeared to be the only non-city employee or non Council member present when the meeting finally ended. To have only one or two members of the public present at the end of a meeting is not acceptable for the city of Palo Alto with such a high level of civic engagement.

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.

[E] John Hackmann

As a teacher at Stanford, I taught Environmental Policy as a Consulting Assistant Professor for several years, in the Program in Human Biology which explicitly deals with the complex interaction of the biological sciences, human culture and behavior, and public policy formulation.

Governmental response to global warming is exactly the kind of issue that can be well addressed by this approach using inputs from the wide variety of expertise in the community. Our policy should be that regarding environmental issues, staff time and effort should be focused on the issues of high consensus, with science-based and evidence-proven approaches where local effort can make the greatest practical difference.

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

Option not exercised.