

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:

[G] Larry Klein: www.ReelectLarryKlein.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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I am running to continue the work I started in my present term on the City Council and in particular to focus on three main areas:

- a. The City's finances. We face a \$10 million structural deficit and I will work to eliminate that through a combination, in roughly equal amounts, of a reduction in the number of city employees, a reduction in the compensation paid city employees and an increase in City revenues
- b. The quality of life in our community. I see two major threats here: an above grade: High Speed Rail along the Caltrain corridor and the ABAG requirement that we zone for an additional 2700 housing units over the next seven years.
- c. Global warming. Palo Alto has been a leader in this area through such measures as our mandatory Green Building Ordinance but we can and must do more through measures such as improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings.

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.

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I initiated the reduction in the amount of housing that could be built on the Summerwind and Palo Alto Bowl sites in South Palo Alto.

-- Along with Peter Dreke meier I led the Council to pass one of the first mandatory Green Building Ordinances in the country. It has become a model for other cities in California.

-- Four years ago when I ran I was critical of the performance of the then City Manager (the most critical candidate according to the Palo Alto Weekly) and I thus welcomed the opportunity in 2008 when I was Mayor to lead the selection process for our new City Manager.

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.

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

My wife is a Professor at Stanford and I thus cannot participate in Stanford related matters unless they involve a relatively minor financial impact.

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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

As part of the City's negotiations this year with the SEIU, our largest union, I have advocated a five percent (5 %) reduction in the total compensation paid these employees. Part of this reduction should come from their paying a portion of their medical insurance premiums and pension payments to CalPers. I voted with all of my colleagues to reduce the City's headcount by twenty positions in the 2009-10 fiscal year which represents about 3% of our general fund work force.

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

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I favor the Business License tax for the following reasons:

--We need the revenue – about \$ 3 million dollars per year—to close a portion of our \$10 million budget gap

--It's a fair tax. It will reach service providers such as lawyers, CPAs, consultants and venture capitalists who do not pay sales tax. They will pay nearly half of the tax.

-- It's a modest tax.. \$35 per employee per year for retail businesses up to \$95 per employee per year for service providers. Neighboring cities charge similar amounts. San Francisco charges much more.

--It will be easy to administer. All an employer will have to do is add up the number of its full time equivalent employees and fill out a simple form.

--All but two or three of California's cities have a Business License Tax. We have borrowed the language for our proposed BLT from them. None report any difficulties in the administration of the tax.

- 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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

For nearly 100 years—yes, 100 years,--- the City has been paying a portion of the profits from its utilities, primarily the Electric fund, to the General Fund which under law is its owner. Going back thirty years the amounts of these payments represented a higher percentage of utility revenues. When I was on the Council in the 1980s we adopted a more rational and consistent method for determining the amount to be transferred each year. This resulted in a smaller but more defensible transfer each year. I believe this process, which today results in transfers equal to nearly 15% of our General Fund revenues, is appropriate. Note: our electric rates continue to be about 30% less than PG & E's—a factor that businesses recognize with approval when considering whether to move to Palo Alto.

- 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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I oppose the construction in Palo Alto of HSR above grade which would mean a “wall” somewhere between twenty and forty feet high running the length of our town from the Mountain View border to Menlo Park. A HSR in a tunnel through Palo Alto might be a great benefit to us but there is much research and study to be done before we fully understand the ramifications of this idea. A station in Palo Alto would have to be so large that its impacts would be unacceptable. I oppose this idea. Much is at stake for Palo Alto in the HSR decision making process and we will have to be vigilant in monitoring and lobbying not only the HSR Authority but also actions by the Legislature and even the Congress.

- 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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I'm not sure that it's correct to say that other cities do more than Palo Alto. Some, indeed most, of our retail areas are doing as well as their peers in other communities in this economic downturn, Town and Country with a 98% occupancy rate is doing better; Downtown is doing worse. I think the Council should examine the causes of the sharp downturn on University before we undertake any significant expenditure of funds. A revitalized and better focused Chamber of Commerce would be helpful in this regard.

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

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

The State of California, acting through ABAG, has directed that Palo Alto zone for an additional 2700 housing units over the next seven years. The units may or may not be built depending on the market and the desires of the owners but the City has to assume they will be constructed. While we should build some additional higher density housing, particularly along our transit corridor, 2700 units, a ten percent (10%) increase in our housing stock and population, is unrealistic and unacceptable. The State's premise, that if only more housing is built near jobs,

people will choose housing near their jobs, is in my view flawed and outmoded. We need to find ways to work around or change the present "ABAG" system so that our City and School District are not overwhelmed.

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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

Four years ago when I ran for Council I was critical of the Arbor Real (Hyatt Rickey) project. Indeed, one of the reasons I chose to run was to help us avoid a repeat of that project. As bad as I thought of it then it has in my view turned out even worse. One of the additional problems is that many of the residents there have chosen to use their garages for storage and park their cars on the streets. We now face some challenging planning opportunities in the East Meadow/Loral neighborhood. We need to have zoning and planning there which will preserve the opportunity for small and startup businesses to locate in Palo Alto and any housing must reflect the lessons we have learned from Arbor Real and similar projects.

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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

If we are to have additional affordable housing in Palo Alto somebody has to subsidize it. That's just reality. There are some federal subsidies and that's fine. There aren't going to be any City subsidies from the General Fund. We don't have the money; we haven't had it in the past and are very unlikely to in the future. That leaves the present system which has produced a fair amount of affordable units (compared to neighboring jurisdictions). I would keep the present system.

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.

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

I was in Cambridge, Mass. a few years ago and took a walk to visit a neighborhood in which I had once lived. I was surprised and bemused to find a number of political signs in the old neighborhood criticizing a proposed PC and calling for Cambridge's City Council to do away with all PCs. So, I recognize that this sentiment exists coast to coast but I think we would be giving up a valuable planning tool. If we didn't have the PC we wouldn't have been able to save JJ &F. and that would have been a sad blow to that neighborhood. The solution to bad PCs is not to ban PCs but to have better decision making. We (and Cambridge) are built up communities and almost inevitably there are going to be situations where the zoning and land use patterns call for flexibility and creativity. Enter the PC..... done right.

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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

As I answered to question # 3, my wife is a Professor at Stanford and I cannot vote on significant Stanford matters. Similarly, I am not allowed to publicly comment on such Stanford issues.

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

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

Civic engagement to me means the encouragement of maximum participation of our citizens in the life of the community. At the most basic level for the City this translates, for me, to reaching out to our citizens, providing them with relevant, timely information and encouraging them to participate in our decision making process.. But I think it means more than that. It means getting people to volunteer in the life of the community, to participate in a variety of ways from working in the community gardens to coaching Little League to serving on a city commission. The more who participate the better off we'll all be. I am concerned that portions of our community do not presently participate at sufficient levels. Our boards and commissions, for example, are not as ethnically diverse as the community at large. The Council needs to reach out more energetically to such under represented groups.

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

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

Neighborhood associations are an important part of our political dialog. They provide essential input on issues of concern to their particular part of the City. In recent years neighborhood associations have become an indispensable part of our Emergency Preparedness planning. While City staff has become somewhat more welcoming to neighborhood input, more work needs to be done here. Council could also help by requiring that more information be made available to neighborhood groups earlier in the decision making process.

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?

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

Actually I think Council meetings are generally effective (particularly when I'm the Mayor !). Democracy is messy. Palo Alto is an engaged community and we have many voices contending to be heard on a wide variety of issues. Sometimes, a referral back to staff or a commission might indicate a Council unwilling to make a tough decision (bad); other times it might indicate a wise recognition that more information and thought is needed (good) My watchword as Mayor in 2008 was “ taking care of business”. that meant moving things along and reaching resolution, even on tough issues. It didn't mean concluding business by 9p.m.

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.

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

The City Council in recent years has had a meeting in early January to determine which three, or four or five issues will be considered priorities for that calendar year. I have been somewhat disappointed in the process in two respects. One, staff sometimes more or less ignores the priority (e.g., the Global Warming priority a few years ago). Two, portions of the public assume, despite statements to the contrary by various Councilmembers, that if their issue isn't listed as a priority it won't be considered at all. In general, however, the process works in that if an item is a priority more staff resources will be assigned to it. Regular dialog between the Manager and Council on how the inevitable balancing act is progressing is the best, perhaps only, way to make sure the Council's priorities are being carried out.

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

[G] Option not exercised.