

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.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

I am running in response to a guest opinion by Sid Espinosa in Palo Alto Weekly suggesting that citizens should run as a form of civic engagement, especially given the unusually high number of seats (five of nine seats open, one incumbent).

I own a concert and artist management company, Earthwise Productions of Palo Alto, and as such follow the arts locally. In recent years, I have followed arts commission very closely, as well as the two concert series, Twilight Series (Tuesdays in the parks) and Brown Bag (Thursday noons at Cogswell Park on Lytton). I was also recruited by Mayor Peter Drekmeier, who I knew from Bay Area Action, to work on —Fete De La Musique /Palo Alto World Music Day || – running for office feels like a natural extension of my advocating for the arts here. When we decided to cut the Brown Bag series, I felt it an example of where I could help us get more bang for our bucks municipally in the arts: I want to restore the series.

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.

[N] Mark Weiss

Gunn High, class of 1982

(editor in chief of student newspaper, varsity basketball (league champions, 1981), junior varsity tennis, Oaxaca student exchange)

Dartmouth College, a.b. 1986 in English (editorial board, The Dartmouth)

I was student body president fall semester at Terman Junior High in Palo Alto in 1977 which means either a) I am due to win some kind of election every 32 years or b) only a 14-year-old would find merit in my candidacy.

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.

[N] Mark Weiss

I was a consultant to City over the years with various Special Events and Arts and Culture events but don't think its an issue. I could waive any fees if I work for future City events – I often have done these on pro bono basis anyhow.

I am a renter and own no real estate in Palo Alto.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

I look forward to learning about, and understanding in detail, our budget. I feel I have the capacity to contribute in this area. Generally, I think we should demand excellence for our tax dollars and pay for that excellence.

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

[N] Mark Weiss

I describe myself as entrepreneur and activist (i.e. I own a small concert and artist management business here; office-in-home – although I often work out of Palo Alto libraries). I think it is perhaps unwise to target small business in this way. I am undecided on Measure A but think we might want to exempt smaller businesses. I would comply, of course, if asked to.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

One of the honors of running for office is being able to listen to citizens with their suggestions for what a prospective or future council member should do or work on; a Palo Alto voter and home owner suggested that I look into this very issue. He thought it unfair that savings from Palo Alto Green (he says) are being reapportioned to general fund. (Thanks, Al).

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

My statement in the voters pamphlet self-describes me as "for libraries, bikes, rail and community". (I take Caltrain when I can, for instance). Regarding High Speed Rail, I am not convinced we as a state community can do this right. Generally, however, I am for the progress of our society from fossil fuel cars towards something more public. (It seems to work in France, or at least it works for Tom Cruise in — "Mission Impossible").

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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.

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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?

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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.

[N] Mark Weiss

No response from candidate to this question.

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

Option not exercised.