

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:

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I am running for City Council because our future matters. I want to work with fellow citizens to keep that community feeling we know as Palo Alto while we modernize our city. I am committed to working effectively to navigate finances during this crippling financial crisis; re-energize our neighborhood shopping centers; protect city services, parklands and open spaces; and modernize our infrastructure while mitigating the massive impact of California's high speed rail projected to run through Palo Alto, if that comes to pass. How we respond to these challenges will determine the quality of our future.

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.

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

While PTA Council President I reported on to the City Council on school issues. This helped connect city government to the school community in many ways. Additionally, while working as a co-chair/producer on the 2001 Little Big Game revival at Stanford Stadium for the Paly/Gunn rival football game, I secured City Council endorsement for the game along with enthusiastic smiles and attendance. I organized city participation in the opening ceremonies with Council Members, fire trucks, and motorcycle police leading the parade of school children marching into Stanford stadium.

As a member of Palo Altans for Government Effectiveness (PAGE) I chaired a series of programs on leadership building called "How Do You Make a Good Community Better." Speakers included Bill Johnson, Publisher of the Palo Alto Weekly; Ed Everett, Former City Manager of Redwood City; and Steve Toben, Former Mayor of Portola Valley. Also California State Senator Joe Simitian presented his talk called "13 Tips for Effective Advocacy" which I was able to video tape for future leadership programs. The purpose of this series was to help Palo Altans with civic engagement best practices and formed the basis for PAGE's promotion of "Civic Engagement for the Common Good" which the City Council adopted as one of its goals.

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.

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I have no conflict of interests and no Stanford relations. I own public securities that might conflict with utility investments.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I support the current strategy of Council to solve the deficit burden by 1) reducing city inefficiencies and potentially reduce or eliminate some services, 2) work with city staff and labor to find cost savings and potentially restructure labor contracts and benefits package so that the city can meet its future responsibilities, and 3) collect a business license tax. It's also important that we have an in-house city auditor to help Palo Alto remain vigilant throughout the budget cycle eliminating redundancies and inefficiencies.

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

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I agree that a business license tax (BLT) is necessary. We need these funds to maintain our city services, and a business tax is one of the few ways that the State allows a city to collect revenues. All cities in our region have a BLT. During the working day the city increases its population substantially, this tax will help support the expanded services required as a result of these commute-citizens in Palo Alto.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

The portion that is transferred into the General Fund is allocated to administrative costs associated with managing the Utility Fund assets. This appears to be a reasonable and appropriate use of Utility Fund revenue and should continue. Access to natural resources and

the upgrade to the Hetch-Hetchy system has a potential of increasing water rates as much as 300 percent and electricity between 40–50 percent. It is prudent to manage reserves carefully. Reference: <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civica/filebank/blobdload.asp?BlobID=14655>

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

The possibility of having modern transit is exciting and I support the California HSR plan. I do not support any transit design that would put HSR or CalTrain above ground on walls with towers—this would permanently change the character of Palo Alto. I am eager to hear and consider alternative ideas, any decision I make will be through the lens of what is best for Palo Alto as a city of neighborhoods.

Regarding the Palo Alto station request, I believe that this will be such a large project that it will generate too much traffic for our city streets. Since it would be connecting people from all across California, the station would need to be designed to handle large populations similar to an airport or mass transit hub—something that Palo Alto is not capable of accommodating. I believe that Redwood City would make a more convenient location for a HSR station.

The City's role in this state-wide initiative is to participate in the process, keep our residents informed, advocate for Palo Alto's interests and vigorously fight for the will of our citizens. This will mean that an engineer should be employed on the city's behalf to make an independent evaluation of EIR findings and interpret this for our residents. This will help separate the political rhetoric from good policy for Palo Alto.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

The revitalization of Town & Country Village from a tired old shopping center to a vibrant busy retail center without the public drama of a developer asking for exceptions to the comprehensive plan demonstrates that city involvement can be minimal and developers can bring inspiration to tired community centers. We need to amplify these successes so that our other stalled or idle business centers like Edgewood Plaza, Alma Plaza and University Avenue can become revitalized also.

I would like to see the Chamber of Commerce develop an effective business focus on how to bring back vibrant shopping centers and business districts. The City's Economic development office needs to be strengthened so that it can work closely with Chamber, local businesses and large corporations.

There is also an opportunity to re-energize our commercial districts with green technology businesses. Having Tesla move its corporate headquarters to the research park is a great incentive to reach out and attract other green business and Palo Alto shouldn't miss this opportunity. This can create that network of innovation around new technology while generating a buzz for green development.

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

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

The Association of Bay Area Government allocated 2,700 housing units for Palo Alto which will need zoning within the next seven years. This is too much growth too fast. I will support current efforts to push back on ABAG and I would like to look at the possibility of reframing state methodology to examine the issues regionally so that East Palo Alto, even though it is not part of Santa Clara County, can be considered in these calculations. Even if the number is reduced there will still be some housing that will need to get built, and Palo Alto should look at this intelligently.

Senate Bill 375 (SB375) was signed into law in 2008 providing California with an aggressive plan that redesigns communities to reduce green house gases. Along with many policy changes there is a “better land-use planning” component that intensifies high-density housing so that workers can live closer to jobs—these are important efforts that will reduce individual carbon footprints within the next seven years. This is why I will join the advocacy for Palo Alto to be considered as a region, not an isolated city when allocations are calculated.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

Without knowing the specific project that this question points to, I understand that the Hyatt Ricky’s development was built inside the parameters of the comprehensive plan without accommodation or zoning change. Yet, the impact of parking has spilled over into the original neighborhood along Wilkie Way resulting in a permanent and undesirable outcome which may have been understated by the developer and city planners unintentionally. I would like to see all projects of this size available on the City website for public preview and comment so that members of the community can question the assumptions. Design review should be carefully managed by planning commission and/or council so that Palo Alto maintains its local vision and character. We need to think thoughtful and carefully about growth and stick to Comprehensive Plan ideals.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I support the city’s current approach to provide affordable housing by having units integrated into market-rate housing projects. I am proud that Palo Alto Housing Corp manages the 19 properties and over 500 units that have been tucked into the nooks and crannies of Palo Alto. I would not consider changing this structure.

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.

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

The PC zones are mechanism for developers to “think outside the box” and provide a public benefit for some type exchange—a height extension or more square footage on a building, etc. It is incumbent upon the developer to make a compelling reason to have the zone changed. There are some instances where the benefit is not very clear. For example 800 High Street had promises of plazas and gathering spots, but when built these areas look more like private than public spaces. The “feet building” on Lytton Street is interesting, but not exactly a “public benefit.” The city needs to be more specific about what a public benefit really means so that the solutions have a meaningful impact on our community.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

A modernized Stanford Hospital is a common good for this community and if this project is not approved and on schedule for seismic retrofit by 2013 the hospital could be closed. The city should require Stanford to help with mitigating increased traffic impacts and housing issues. Palo Alto and Stanford should also jointly look at structural changes to public transportation in our area that could bring better efficiencies between transit corridors.

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

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

“Civic Engagement” means citizens participating in problem solving efforts that affect our community. Palo Alto has strong commissions like Park & Recreation, Library Advisory, Art, Planning & Transportation, Human Relations, etc. Members are appointed by City Council through an application process. However these meetings follow Brown Act procedure. This has generated a “formalness” to the monthly meetings where the public can communicate with members only through the public meeting process and its strict guidelines of engagement.

I would like to rethink the relationship between City Hall and our citizens. Mini Town Hall meetings on important issues facing the community will help Council members and commissioners engage directly with citizens and bring the community into the civic process.

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

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

Neighborhood Associations contribute to the good quality of life that makes us Palo Alto. They are beneficial because they build community outreach efforts in a neighborhood setting by organizing block parties and becoming information hubs that create networking systems among residents. They are critical partners to how our community functions by disseminating information about emergency preparedness, city events, activities and volunteer opportunities. They can serve as the City's eyes and ears by identifying street and sidewalk repairs and hazards, bringing first hand reports on community improvements. They also provide good training grounds for developing future civic leaders.

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?

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

Palo Alto is a community that likes to make decisions carefully. As a former leader in the school community and as a graduate of Leadership Mid Peninsula I have been trained in meeting management. I have presided over a 70 member board, managed overflow community meetings and trained other nonprofit leaders. Meeting management works best with a clear agenda, a time frame for each item and efforts from all members to keep comments crisp and efficient. I am known for doing my homework ahead of time and getting answers to questions prior to discussion. This should help to improve Council meetings.

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.

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

I agree with the Council's standard practices of setting annual goals (the environment is one of three current Council goals), and it is important that staff allocate time to these goals. Council should direct staff to present a timeline with metrics on what they intend to do and how much time will be spent working on these goals and to monitor that the goals are receiving adequate focus throughout the year.

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

[L] Nancy Shepherd: www.electNancyShepherd.com

Question: Do you think that the partnership between the council and school board is working right now.

Currently there is an atmosphere of open dialogue, which is good. I would like to see Council and the School Board establish a clearer understanding regarding the use of shared fields,

recreation programs and mental health issues. When I was PTA Council President I attended Council meetings, kept interested Council members informed of school issues and advocated for Council to support youth activities and maintain a close and integrated relationship. My efforts included hosting sessions with City Council members, the newly hired city manager and fire and police chiefs so that the school leaders and PTA Presidents could have better direct communication in an unstructured setting. I am strongly motivated to maintain a direct communication between the City and School leadership so that youth issues are included as a serious consideration in the scope civic duty.