

Question 14

Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2009

Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN)

Terminology: "the City" refers to the government of the City of Palo Alto.

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

[K] [Greg Scharff](http://ElectGregScharff.com) : ElectGregScharff.com

We need to encourage "Public/ Private Partnerships" such as the Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo, Palo Alto Art Center, Heritage Park, and Lytton Plaza. Palo Alto is very lucky to have a cadre of active citizens willing to give their time and money to improve our City. We need to encourage this generosity and improve our City through "Public/Private Partnerships". We also need open communication which will lead to greater civic engagement. The agenda and agenda reports must be available to the council, newspapers and public at least ten days before council meetings. I also support the City of Palo Alto work on enhancing "Civic Engagement for the Common Good" (see http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/depts/cou/see_it.asp).

[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.

[M] Brian Steen

Civic engagement means encouraging open public participation on public issues. Palo Alto does a good job of this. I don't favor special interest closed door meetings or exparte communications with council members.

[N] Mark Weiss: No response from candidate to this question.

[A] [Dan Dykwel](http://www.dandykwel.com) : <http://www.dandykwel.com>

To me, civic engagement is an attempt to connect the city and its workers with the residents of our community. It's creating synergy among our citizens to manage our many challenges.

There is a large reservoir of very talented and generous people in our community and I am so privileged to work with many of them. They are committed to the greater good and are a resource that if encouraged and shown how to become more engaged at their interest points would provide our city with an expanding social capital that could only be positive.

As a Council Member I would seek to engage more of our citizens in addressing specific social and economic challenges through teams of experienced, interested and available people. They would study and provide recommendations for some of our more difficult challenges and work on both short and long-term issues.

[B] Victor Frost: No response from candidate.

[C] Chris Gaither

I define civic engagement as being involved in world affairs as a producer, and not just merely a consumer. This can be done locally, state-wide or nationally. One can create or support non-profits that service special local community, state or national needs. One can be engaged by holding public elected or non-elected office via boards and commissions. One can be engaged by volunteering to personally provide goods and services to those in need. One can be engaged via paying jobs that provide goods and services to those in need. One can attend council and commission meetings and orally participate. The opportunities to get out and contribute to society are limitless. Research shows that those who stay engaged in community relations, and those that help others in turn lead healthier lives both mentally and physically. We need to all be examples to others as to the win-win benefits of civic engagement.

I plan to have regular visits with residents throughout the city to hear their opinions, and invite them to become more involved by joining existing city groups, and creating organizations like committees or non-profits that can provide or supply gaps in needed services. In addition, I will encourage the city to advertise more frequently in our local newspapers, on-line, and with cable service providers existing opportunities for civic engagement.

[D] Tim Gray : www.vote4Gray.com/

Cast a broader net. We have a history of gathering friends together in committees and then calling it community involvement. Citizen participation requires a constant outreach, and then a real honoring of the information gathered.

[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.

[F] [Karen Holman](http://karenholman.org) : karenholman.org

Civic engagement to me is far more than having dialog. It is having opportunity for varied opinions to be heard and considered. It is providing a level playing field so all constituents have equal opportunity to participate. It is about transparency so everyone has the same information on which to base their expectations and participation. It is about respect for diverse opinion. About utilization of Palo Alto's intellectual capital.

It is about Honoring the Public Trust. It is an understanding that government works for the public and in its best interests, those of its residents and businesses. And that those who work in the public's interests also deserve respect. It is about volunteerism and being a good neighbor. This is civic engagement I would like to see us achieve.

[G] [Larry Klein](http://www.ReelectLarryKlein.com) 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.

[H] [Leon Leong](http://www.leonleong.com) : www.leonleong.com

I believe "civic engagement" should be a two-way street – the council needs to engage the residents on issues that they feel are important, as well as issues the council thinks are important. I believe it should be a priority to get "new faces" and "new voices" involved.

[I] [Corey Levens](http://www.electcoreylevens.com) : www.electcoreylevens.com

Civic engagement is the act by which members of the community volunteer their knowledge, expertise, and energy to the community at large whether to assist in the proper functioning of city government or to otherwise contribute to the common good.

The people of Palo Alto possess an extraordinary reserve of talent that can benefit the City in virtually every facet of City government. The breadth and scope of the expertise of our population is unmatched by any other community. The question, then, is what is the best means by which Palo Alto can harness this incredible potential? I believe that the City can employ many tools and techniques, whether by simply maintaining lists of volunteers and their various specialties, perhaps using social media tools, or other mechanisms for tapping into vast human resources of our community.

In encouraging civic engagement, however, we must be careful that the essential purpose of the particular engagement is not lost and that the services of the community are employed in an efficient and targeted manner and are properly managed. The recent experience with the re-design of the City's website is a good example of the positive, but also the potentially negative,

aspects of civic engagement. While there were many talented and motivated people participating in this project, several members of the group working on this project apparently became frustrated with the lack of direction and leadership, and the loss of focus during the life of the project. If we are to take full advantage of the willingness of members of our talented community to volunteer their services for the benefit of the City, we must make sure that the experience is a positive one. We need for those who volunteer to come away from such experiences willing to volunteer their services again when needed, and acting as recruiters of others in the community to do the same.

[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.
