

Question 15

Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2009

Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN)

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

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.

[M] Brian Steen

Most recently the work of the Charleston Neighborhood Assoc. was beneficial in identifying traffic problems and solutions along Charleston. Their involvement resulted in a good project that has increased safety without significant restriction of traffic flow. And it was accomplished in over a reasonable time period. A good example of neighborhood and City partnership.

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

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

Neighborhood associations can help mobilize residents and bring focus to issues that are important to specific areas of our community. They can also act on behalf of the overall community, as PAN has done with emergency preparation, and help create the dynamic balance between the city and the neighborhoods that is vital to a healthy community. When relationships of trust and reciprocity are working well, our city benefits. Neighborhood associations can be a prime mover in building and maintaining such relationships.

[B] Victor Frost: No response from candidate.

[C] Chris Gaither

I feel neighborhood associations are good for the community at large. One case in point is this questionnaire to city council candidates and arranging the upcoming forum for all residents to meet and question the candidates. In addition, associations often times bring forth issues to the city, like the College Terrace parking situation that ultimately help both the city, and that particular neighborhood. For example, the recent parking permit implementation is helping to ensure that residents of that area have ample parking and this helps the city both enforcement and revenue wise.

However, not all residents are aware of what association is in their neighborhood; what the association represents; and how the association can be helpful in advocating for a particular

area of the city, which can ultimately provide benefit for the entire city; become a model policy for other areas of the city, and sometimes other cities across the nation.

I feel the associations can do more outreach to the city at large by regularly communicating through our local papers and flyers contact and meeting information, and what section of the city is represented by which association. There are renters new and old in the city who do not even know associations exist and how they can get involved and stay informed. Lots of people ask me, who are these people, and whom do they represent? The associations could be even more effective through more inclusive outreach, advertising, and increased public relations.

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

They could become the main structure for the Civic Engagement of question 14. We must cast our nets further, be sure to include all stakeholders, not just the vocal ones. Finally, when we get feedback, we must act with respect and not just proceed with what we wanted to do all along. (Yes, this is an observation of some historical behaviour).

[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.

[F] Karen Holman : karenholman.org

Neighborhood Association activism provides numerous benefits to the City including program implementation, leadership, and community education. PANDA programs, emergency preparedness, green program education, and National Night Out activities are a few examples where Associations help foster and forward community agendas. Associations also can provide critical information to the public and the City regarding projects and policy considerations as no one knows the community better than those who live in it.

Some cities provide a level of financial support to neighborhood associations to help them be better organized, better distribute information to their neighborhoods and present to Council and the public. Palo Alto should consider the model provided by other communities such as San Jose and evaluate. There is a lot to be learned and gained from the volunteer efforts of Palo Alto's highly informed, active, and educated community.

An improved City website can be a better vehicle for providing information about and links to neighborhood associations such as contact information, history, and updates.

[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.

[H] Leon Leong : www.leonleong.com

Neighborhood associations have been an important part of getting parts of the community involved. The neighborhood associations have also provided the city an opportunity to get residents aware of issues such as “disaster planning” that they might not ordinarily pay attention to.

[I] Corey Levens : www.electcoreylevens.com

Neighborhood Associations can serve a vital and effective role in the operation and functioning of City government by acting as a mechanism for providing essential information to the City concerning the mood, needs, and concerns of the many Palo Alto neighborhoods. While each Neighborhood Association will adopt the method of operation that best suits its community, all Neighborhood Associations have as a primary concern preserving the qualities and values that make their community special.

I have served on the Board of Directors of my Neighborhood Association, the Green Acres Improvement Association (off Arastradero next to Terman Park and the Cabana Hotel) for the last several years. While our Association tends to take a low key approach, primarily due to our small size, we always pay close attention to the concerns and activities of other Neighborhood Associations. And while the GAIA has tended not to be a very activist Association, when critical issues arose that had the potential of drastically changing the neighborhood, it was the GAIA that was able to mobilize the community and to ultimately successfully protect and preserve the well-being of the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Associations are at their best when they are keeping the City informed of the concerns and needs of their respective communities. In so doing, they can insure that City government is responsive to those concerns and needs. In taking counsel from a Neighborhood Association, however, the City Council must be certain that a Neighborhood Association is representative of its community. If, for example, a Neighborhood Association is run by the same, small group of people year after year, it runs the risk of becoming insular and not reflective of the community it serves. In such an instance, the value of seeking counsel from a Neighborhood Association is drastically reduced and may even be a detriment.

[J] Gail Price

Effective neighborhood associations are key venues for a form of “representative” community experience and perspectives. Each neighborhood has similar elements but each also has unique features and concerns. While they may not necessarily represent all the views of the neighbors of all ages and circumstances, strong and truly representative neighborhood associations with thoughtful leaders are important to creating a more informed discussion and insight for all stakeholders, including other neighborhoods, City staff, business community, and elected officials. Neighborhood associations are critical elements of the community.

[K] Greg Scharff : ElectGregScharff.com

Our neighborhood associations play a vital and important role in our City in providing a sense of community and giving input on major issues and taking an active role in having our residents get to know the candidates and advocating for our communities. I have no plans to change the relationship.
