

## Question 17

### Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2009 Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN)

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

**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.

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

The purpose of setting 3 or 4 general goals each year or for a longer period of time is to focus efforts on things that advance those specific goals beyond the normal operations of the City. Certainly we recognize that the wide variety of issues that come before the Council require widely varying amounts of staff and Council time to handle. Priorities should be determined based on a variety of criteria, such as public safety, critical-time items, cost-effectiveness and short- and long-term impact.

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[B] Victor Frost: No response from candidate.

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[C] Chris Gaither

The main goal of any municipality is to focus on those concerns, issues and services that affect the city, and its local citizens. Each council member has a single term of four years, of course with the option to extend that time another four years if successful in re-election. Given the finite period of time in office, there is a finite amount of time to do immediate, and visionary (planning) work with respect to city focused objectives while addressing resident customer service inquiries. Palo Alto is a pro-active city in many ways, and often leads the nation by implementing policies having both federal, and global concern, and impact. It is an honor to be a resident of a city that is not only viewed as a municipal leader, but is a municipal leader in the nation. This is all good, as it is a great goal to act locally, and think globally. However, the main focus of any council person, and the main objectives of the city should be to address the concerns of the city's citizens (our customers); business owners and leaders (also our clients); and to implement policies, procedures that are city related, and to do work that positively affects the city. If those programs and policies also have positive environmental results, this is good.

All told, the primary work should be that which helps the city with its local agenda. If we create, or institute a policy, product or service that has national, and global ramifications while achieving a local and needed objective, then in essence, we have obtained a sort of icing on the cake position – a kind of bonus. However, the main focus of the time should be spent on local issues!

Framing an answer to this question with respect to some larger environmental issues addressed by our council on a local level, I can provide two examples where the council's time was beneficial for the greater environmental good. Firstly, the plastic bag ban. I would argue that this policy does have both local and global positive ramifications. When I first heard of the plastic bag ban initiative, I was still a property manager. My first thought being what would my residents wrap their food garbage in before disposing into the building's public garbage dumpster? As time passed, I realized this is a great opportunity to promote composting if you have time so that

some food stuffs end up back in the ground to reinvigorate nature, and not in the garbage bins. Also, the reality is, plastic bags do get left on the street as they fly out of the garbage trucks, and they do end up back in the environment, creating numerous challenges. All told, while I find plastic bags personally useful, I believe the ban policy will be good in the long run. This is one of those policies that have both local, and global results. It is a good thing that the council addressed the issue, but it was not a priority issue. What about the fact that none of the current council members were aware of the holly oak tree blunder on California Avenue near my home? Why was time not allocated in a council session to address the fact that **all** the holly oak trees on California Avenue would be eradicated in one fell swoop? It is difficult to imagine that something like this happened in Palo Alto, an environmentally “super” conscious city. The council should have made time to discuss this issue, heard public concerns, and more importantly, the council should have known about this issue. Furthermore, if the council did not know about this massive tree whacking, were permits issued to fell the trees? There are many unanswered questions folks ☺!

Secondly, with respect to the global warming example, there are positive ramifications for both reducing personal vehicle usage on a local basis with the emphasis on increased public transportation usage (as promoted by the council), and producing alternate energy sources, also being considered by the council. It is a good focus for Palo Alto to be involved in both endeavors to help reduce carbon emissions, and thereby reduce the impact on global warming. Because Palo Alto does manage its own utility service, the city can allocate time to the issue of alternate energy sources simply because we have city staff that can research these issues, and offer solutions. This is a good thing! And, because Palo Alto does have great public transportation choices, and the fact that Palo Alto is easy for bicycling and walking, the council and the city can lead the way in promoting and “soft selling” suggested alternatives to vehicle transportation. However, the council should not make this effort a priority with respect to council issues. If we can promote projects to help in the endeavor of global warming, we should do so, but we should not make these issues feel mandatory to residents. People have so much to balance in their personal lives that they don’t want to feel as though the city in which they reside is trying to control their personal lives by enforcing environmental choices that some people are quite honestly not ready to envision, or practice.

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[D] Tim Gray : [www.vote4Gray.com/](http://www.vote4Gray.com/)

It is true that a “Green Future is a Golden Future” and Environmental Stewardship is close to the top of my list, however our immediate financial future needs our attention. If we don’t find the right balance, we will be denied the opportunity to invest in projects that make our City green. Collectively we need to set the priorities, and then doggedly refuse to get side-tracked on items that are not on the list. There is much comment, true or not, that we got side-tracked on “petty” items and nearly got “Railroaded.” (Literally.)

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[E] John Hackmann

As a teacher at Stanford, I taught Environmental Policy as a Consulting Assistant Professor for several years, in the Program in Human Biology which explicitly deals with the complex interaction of the biological sciences, human culture and behavior, and public policy formulation.

Governmental response to global warming is exactly the kind of issue that can be well addressed by this approach using inputs from the wide variety of expertise in the community. Our policy should be that regarding environmental issues, staff time and effort should be

focused on the issues of high consensus, with science-based and evidence-proven approaches where local effort can make the greatest practical difference.

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

If the question is intended to ascertain how projects and goals are often interconnected and cannot be viewed in isolation of each other, then it should be considered that environmental goals also effect or impact development, transportation, City budget, and staff work load, to name a few. Larger policy decisions need to be considered or made before initiating specific discussions that do not consider or that are inconsistent with existing policies.

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

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

I believe the council should focus more on the issues of oversight of city operations – improving government efficiency, budget, infrastructure backlog. Much work has already been done on Climate Change/Global Warming, and the council now needs to refocus on one of it's core mission – making sure the city has a firm financial basis and structure to continue it's operations.

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

While I fully support the Council's past work on environmental issues (I support the conclusions and recommendations set forth in the Climate Control Plan, the Zero Waste Plan, and the Green Building Ordinance), I do not believe it is the Council's role to be making or attempting to influence international policy. We have more than enough issues to deal with close to home and precious little time and resources to waste on issues over which Palo Alto has no influence or power to affect.

If, however, a national or international issue intimately affects our community, then I believe it is appropriate to act and/or to make our voice heard. Environmental protection and preservation is a good example of such an issue. Preserving and protecting the environment is a responsibility of all citizens and I am proud that Palo Alto has taken a leadership role in this regard. The policies Palo Alto has implemented, as cited above, are wholly appropriate.

The Council must be careful, however, that when it speaks in its official capacity as our elected representatives, that it reflects the will and mood of the people of Palo Alto. If this is in question, then council members must be clear to delineate their public and private roles and speak appropriately.

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[J] Gail Price

Elected officials, working with the staff and the community, have a responsibility to set the vision, mission and goals of local government. One of the many challenges is that we often have a variety of competing needs in our community. The Comprehensive Plan should better define the vision and provide policy guidance for the plan implementation. An ideal Comprehensive Plan is visionary, innovative, measurable, and economically feasible. The current Comprehensive Plan has too many themes and policies within each chapter. There is not sufficient effort made to prioritize the key issues. On a yearly basis, the City Council establishes priorities for each year to define the work plan of the staff. All communities also need to have some flexibility to address unanticipated challenges related to planning and the economic environment.

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

“Climate Change” is an important issue facing the world and we should continue to be a leader on environmental policies and climate protection. Palo Alto as a recognized leader on these issues, last year adopted one of the first mandatory green building ordinances in the country. However, this is not enough. The Palo Alto City Council should be focused on improving the quality of life of Palo Alto residents, supporting our schools, parks and libraries, improving our bike paths, fixing our streets and protecting our City’s financial future. The top three priorities of the City Council should be (1) protecting our community, neighborhoods and schools (e.g. from the impacts of High Speed Rail and high-density housing); (2) strong fiscal management and accountability (reigning in unsustainable pension and medical costs); and (3) promoting a vibrant business community.

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[L] Nancy Shepherd: [www.electNancyShepherd.com](http://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.

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[M] Brian Steen

Rely on and implement the City’s existing climate Protection Plan and updates.

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