

Question 9

Questionnaire for City Council Candidates 2009

Palo Alto Neighborhoods (PAN)

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

Mark Weiss: No response from candidate to this question. [F] [Karen Holman](#) : karenholman.org
Palo Alto has a high jobs to housing imbalance. Some approaches to correcting the imbalance (one determinant is ABAG) are to mandate Palo Alto to zone for housing to address this imbalance (which can translate to building the housing given the right market conditions). Requiring housing city by city is supposed to reduce car trips and vehicle mileage thus improving environmental conditions.

There are some faulty aspects to this approach. A regional approach would better address the fact that some communities, such as Palo Alto, provide the jobs for other surrounding towns. A singular focus on housing does not consider impacts on schools, parks or ability to provide community services. ABAG does not recognize rezoning that would retain existing housing units such as the fact that a single house is now allowed to replace a cottage cluster of small homes. Palo Alto workers are not necessarily going to buy a smaller home in Palo Alto for more money and less or no yard when they can get more home and more land in more distant locations.

Palo Alto can absorb some housing but our more pressing need that has minimal impacts is housing of maximum unit size, thus creating minimal impacts on the schools, increasing work force housing, and adding to Palo Alto's diversity.

[G] Larry Klein www.ReelectLarryKlein.com

The State of California, acting through ABAG, has directed that Palo Alto zone for an additional 2700 housing units over the next seven years. The units may or may not be built depending on the market and the desires of the owners but the City has to assume they will be constructed. While we should build some additional higher density housing, particularly along our transit corridor, 2700 units, a ten percent (10%) increase in our housing stock and population, is unrealistic and unacceptable. The State's premise, that if only more housing is built near jobs, people will choose housing near their jobs, is in my view flawed and outmoded. We need to find ways to work around or change the present "ABAG" system so that our City and School District are not overwhelmed.

[H] Leon Leong : www.leonleong.com

Real Estate Developers, Affordable Housing Advocacy groups & Environmental Advocacy groups are all forces that have pushed for higher density housing. Over the past twelve years Palo Alto over 2,500 new housing units have been built – without a proportionate increase in community facilities, retail, or transportation. Palo Alto residents have seen an increase in traffic congestion, more portables on their neighborhood schools, and increasing competition for city services. More must be done to mitigate the effects on our schools, traffic & city services before further zoning changes for higher density housing are allowed.

[I] Corey Levens : www.electcoreylevens.com

Living in south Palo Alto (in the Green Acres neighborhood), where we have recently experienced the completion of several new projects with high-density housing, I appreciate the concern behind this question. Due to the scarcity of undeveloped land in Palo Alto, most

developers, in order to maximize the financial return on their investment, will seek to include as much housing as possible in their projects. Inevitably, such an approach places increased stress on Palo Alto's already stretched City services and decaying infrastructure. Clearly, we have also been victimized by a City Council that has too often been influenced by the parties seeking to build such projects.

I believe each project must be judged and reviewed on a case-by-case basis and that the review process must be streamlined. I do not believe that there should be one, City-wide regulation that governs the density of every project built in Palo Alto. Given the number of projects proposed each year in Palo Alto, it is possible, and appropriate, for each project to be judged on its own merits. Each project must also be reviewed based on where it is proposed to be built, recent development in the proposed area, etc. With a case-by-case review, and a more rational and streamlined review process, I believe we can bring sanity and reason back to the Palo Alto planning process.

[J] Gail Price

I believe that the City of Palo Alto should engage in "managed growth" that balances the vision and guidelines in the Comprehensive Plan and the specific goals and policies of the required Housing Element. Due to the quality of services, schools, and businesses, there will continue to be a demand for housing. The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan is through the zoning ordinance. I do think the increasing housing densities should be considered along major transportation corridors and adjacent to transit centers. Increasing housing in these locations will have a positive impact on business and sales tax if retail opportunities are within easy pedestrian and bicycling access. Many communities have done this very successfully. For environmental and social purposes, we should engage in responsible planning to support local and regional housing needs. With the passage of SB 375, cities are required to have Sustainable Community Planning strategies which balance land use, housing, and transportation decisions to reduce green house gas emissions and address climate change.

The amount of growth in housing is defined by many parameters: economic, social, community priorities, environmental, and political. These considerations also impact the vision and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the Housing Element shape the future of the community.

A key opportunity will be the update of the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan for Palo Alto. Preliminary discussions of the update have begun and this will be an important discussion. As in many communities, there are a range of ideas about what the goals and outcomes of the Housing Element should be regardless of what the ABAG numbers suggest.

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

I strongly oppose high density housing and its negative impacts on our schools, parks and services in Palo Alto as well as the increased traffic and additional costs associated with high density housing. Palo Alto can only accommodate very limited future growth, our schools and services are nearing capacity. We must resist the Association of Bay Area Governments' (ABAG) attempts to force a change in the character of our city. As an attorney with a strong back ground in land use, I am well suited to protect Palo Alto's interests in this area.

[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.

[M] Brian Steen

I’m opposed to ABAG’s requirement for up to 3,000 new housing units. As a strong regional employment center, Palo Alto should get proper credit for job creation with a renegotiated ABAG housing requirement.

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

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

I’m not sure to whom you refer. The Sierra Club advocates for density housing to minimize sprawl and the deterioration of the environment. A Livable Palo Alto (ALPA) is currently advocating density housing as a way to attempt to meet ABAG numbers. (Whether or not you agree with the ABAG assessment, people are at least looking at the issue, but that’s a whole separate question). The lack of vacant land in Palo Alto has resulted in the redevelopment of some commercial parcels into density housing. This is a perennial question in Palo Alto for good reason. We all want to maintain our quality of life, and it is in our best interests to stay open to diverse residential ideas that are our best assurances of a dynamic population.

[B] Victor Frost: No response from candidate.

[C] Chris Gaither

Basically, Palo Alto has limited land. The opportunities to even buy land in Palo Alto are short in supply. We are not like San Jose or Sacramento where land is more readily available for purchase and re-development. Hence the fact that those areas also have less expensive housing – for both purchase and rental, and less expensive office rental rates.

As a result, when a housing development opportunity does occur, developers and the city planners often feel they need to get the best bang for their buck by creating structures that “cram” in lots of different living units, and in an attempt to satisfy the housing element goals. Architecturally speaking, some are aesthetic, and have helped the city’s landscape. Others don’t fit into the overall current city landscape, and they don’t support the needs of the community well. Unfortunately, it appears that the city lacks an overall plan, and vision with respect to high density structures. The city should get a game plan and require that only certain areas of the city are qualified for high density structures – areas where the impact of blocked views and overcrowding are not as evident, and where the feeling of the structure being too big for the space is not the prevailing effect. In essence, the city should maintain to keep a low profile, and aesthetic community feel – i.e. similar types of current and prevalent housing

structures throughout most of the city, except for a few areas specifically designated for high density housing.

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

Stick with the Comprehensive Plan. We must not dilute our schools and infrastructure. We are a collection of neighborhoods – not just the canvas for some urban planner.

[E] John Hackmann

ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) requirements for 10,000 or so new units of housing in Palo Alto are unrealistic and will never be met, as there is not land available and no political will to build such a huge amount of new housing. These goals need to be readdressed to more realistic levels. Palo Alto was an early leader in affordable housing, and has great income diversity already present in town. Palo Alto has welcomed a great variety of senior, family, low income, and other housing to our town.

High density housing should be closely scrutinized for its impact on neighbors, traffic congestion, and whether it even is the best location for the actual population it serves.

Impact on school attendance, school funding, and school boundaries must be closely accounted for.
