

Don McDougall Replies to 2016 City Council Candidate Questions

1. **Reason for running:** What are the top three goals you want to achieve in the next four years on the city council?

I am running for Palo Alto City Council because:

I want to maintain the style and quality of life in Palo Alto that is defined by a SUSTAINABLE PALO ALTO defined by our open spaces parks and green canopy, our local economy, our attitude of innovation and the inclusiveness of our people.

I want to improve our diversity and inclusiveness.

I want to provide the leadership for a collaborative approach to housing, traffic and climate issues with neighboring communities and between our Palo Alto neighborhoods.

2. **Experience:**

Non-incumbents: Describe your personal experience with Palo Alto City government and recent issues that have come before public hearings at the city council or other board and commissions. 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 (Kniss): What have been your major initiatives on the Council? Describe your role and the results.

I am currently vice-chair of the Library Advisory Commission and an active member of the Citizens Advisory Committee for the Comprehensive Plan where I am on several subcommittees including Community Services, Sustainability and Transportation.

My interest in the environment experienced as an active volunteer with Environmental Volunteers. I teach natural science in class rooms in the Bay area and participate in their Development Committee. I am also an active docent at Point Lobos State Natural Reserve. Teaching students and adults about nature is a passion and a reward.

3. **Affordable Housing:** Regarding building affordable housing, we are faced with several problems: lack of land, lack of interest on developers' part and the cost (one unit costs \$400-600,000). Please address:

- How do we get such housing built?
- Can we even build enough housing to satisfy demand?
- Should the City increase development fees to fund more affordable housing?

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- How do we get such housing built?
 - a) We have to be willing to consider all types of alternative affordable housing including ADU's, cluster housing, and transit-oriented single bedroom and studio apartments. For example Boston is currently investigating something called a UHU that is only 385 square feet. We also need to explore ways to encourage developers' interest in affordable housing.

- Can we even build enough housing to satisfy demand?
 - a) No. We can't build enough to meet the demand, but we have to build as much housing of all types, affordable, BMR, Market Rate as the city will accommodate and allow. We must also recognize the regional nature of the challenge and work in the direction of creating affordable housing with all neighboring communities in a more collaborative way.
- Should the City increase development fees to fund more affordable housing?
 - a) Yes. We should increase development fees, but the question is how much? The city has relevant data from a study, which we should be able to use to answer that question. However there may if are open questions beyond that study further input should be considered.

4. High-density housing: What are your thoughts on “high-density housing” in Palo Alto? How much should be built and for whom?

I imagine “high-density housing” in Palo Alto as 3 and 4 story buildings in specific locations near services and shopping, designed for specific populations and increased affordability and accessibility. I would be interested in projects to test the market for studios and smaller units for a younger generation and seniors who want to live in a sharing, walkable, accessible location without owning their own cars

5. Jobs/Housing Imbalance: Office creation is outpacing housing development. Please address:

- How much, where *and what kind of* office space can Palo Alto sustain?
- Do you support extending the annual office space development cap?
- Should the City consider placing a moratorium on new office development?

ANSWER

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- How much, where *and what kind of* office space can Palo Alto sustain?
 - a) While first preserving the character of Palo Alto by protecting the canopy, walkability, retail and more, we need to pursue a "managed growth" plan to mitigate the impact of population growth in the region and Palo Alto. Methods such as the TDM and TMA traffic management approaches need to be used to manage the negative impacts of growth. I am a proponent of "smart growth" and “smart city” and sustainability principles to encourage controlled growth and density near transit corridors. We need additional mixed-use developments and a variety of housing designs and options. I do not believe the correct answer is no-growth.
- Do you support extending the annual office space development cap?
 - a) Yes. We need to manage the pace of office space development and we need to actively control development impacts such as traffic and parking on the city by clearly defining and following development requirements. Over time we need to continue to measure community livability and quality with available metrics such as air quality, congestion, canopy coverage.
- Should the City consider placing a moratorium on new office development?
 - a) I do not favor a moratorium. The up and down oscillations of growth and no growth create uncertainty for businesses and, more importantly, for city growth management and revenue planning. Currently the office cap has controlled office space development.

6. **Growth:** There has been a lot of discussion about the demand for housing as well as potential impacts, and how fast it should increase in Palo Alto. How does this compromise the quality of life of local residents, including school enrollment, and what mitigations do you support?

Population growth and what comes with it is affecting all communities in the region. I support strong managed growth programs to focus on mitigating the congestion impacts of growth. I do not support “no growth” as a practical solution for Palo Alto. I support infrastructure and mitigation programs like the S/CAP, TMA and Caltrain expansion. School enrollment forecasts need to be carefully reviewed and agreed by all stakeholders, including home owners, renters and business.

7. **Cumulative Impacts:** Commercial projects are evaluated on an individual basis, without looking at the cumulative impact on intersections, traffic and spillover parking in neighborhoods. Many traffic studies seem to have a finding of “no impact,” yet traffic continues to get worse. What changes in the way we evaluate projects would you favor?

I favor following the law and analyzing cumulative impacts.

8. **Local Review:** What is your opinion of the Budget Trailer Bill 707’s (or similar bills) by-right exemption from environmental review?

The devil is in the details here. In general I do not favor lawsuits against projects that meet the goals of the Housing Element and provide options to meet the needs of people struggling with housing challenges. There is no legislation now pending and I cannot comment in the abstract without seeing a specific proposal.

9. **Retail:** How would you support local retail? Specifically, how would you protect, support and possibly even extend ground-floor retail in our commercial and neighborhood commercial areas? How would you enforce existing laws?

I strongly support local retail. Ground floor retail can be supported but improving parking and accessibility. By providing clarity and predictability in local regulations and creating a safe, attractive environment for customers. We do need to be sure we are supporting real retail not artificial retail and should consider regulations for such entities.

10. **Accessory Dwelling Units (aka “Granny Units”):** Do you support zoning changes to enable the creation of additional second units, such as reduced minimum lot size, removal of parking requirements? If so, which ones? How do ensure these units don’t simply become short-term (Airbnb-type) rentals?

Additional second units are generally a good idea but need to be considered neighborhood by neighborhood. Downtown North, for example, is already crowded but other neighborhoods might consider additional second units with neighborhood involvements. Important considerations in each case are transparency of the process and stakeholder involvement.

- 11. Parks:** The current Comprehensive Plan calls for the city to maintain 4 acres of in-town park space for every 1,000 residents. The actual ratio is now below this ratio as our population has grown. What should we do?

The first thing the city must do is ensure implementation of the Parks Master Plan for the maintenance and support of our current parks. The second is to be alert and opportunistic for the possibilities of adding park space. Park space needs to be defined by the types of “gatherings” a space can and will attract to ensure the parks have the maximum positive impact on life in the community. For example, off-leash “gathering places” for dog lovers or permanently lined courts for “pickle-ball” gatherings would address the social and physical health of those constituents.

- 12. Dewatering:** What policies should the City set regarding the discharge and loss of water (as well as land settlement problems in neighboring properties) when basements are being built?

The impact of the excavation and building of below grade basements continues to be a challenge. It is an important concern and we must review data on the adverse impact on tree health basement construction and examples of where adjacent properties suffer some structural impact. A complete study should consider environmental impacts of “de-watering” and how it impacts the stability of soils and ground water retention.

At a minimum basement construction practices could be improved by enforcement of two practices:

- i. Less water pumped out by careful measuring of water levels (not over drawing).
- ii. Better capture of the excess water to put to good use. There are private companies that can draw water away in their trucks and use them for irrigation but it is expensive and impossible to capture 100% of the water.

- 13. Single Family Individual Review (includes SSO, Eichler preservation):** Please address:

- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?
- Is the current process working?
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?

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- What type of design guidelines should be developed to preserve neighborhood character?
 - a) Design guidelines should be on a neighborhood level and used consistently within the neighborhood. Eichler preservation should be well defined and followed, potentially with a task force from Eichler neighborhoods. Eichler design guidelines should be comparable with the unique characteristics of the homes and responsive to privacy concerns of residents.
- Is the current process working?
 - a) The current process is not working well and needs more specific attention by potentially a separate ARB.
- If so, give examples. If not, what should be changed?
 - a) The goal would be to have no neighbors fighting neighbors. That will require strong guidelines bring all members together and Council to initiate a stake holder process.

- 14. Traffic/Commuters:** With so much traffic spreading into many neighborhoods, and with a lack of regional transportation plans, what do you propose Palo Alto should do to address employee traffic into town? How do you propose to ease the congestion on our arterial streets — especially during the rush hours — so fewer commuters will try to take unsafe short cuts through our residential neighborhood streets?

My goal is provide real alternatives to driving downtown. This must be done through the TMA, new public transit options, increased bike and pedestrian infrastructure and the increased use of services like Lyft and Uber. I support providing positive options to reducing parking congestion. BIKES AND WALKWAYS!

- 15. Parking (RPP):** Do you support an expanded Residential Parking Permit Program? Please address:

- How should it be structured to protect neighborhoods?
- Should neighborhoods get determine which type of program is appropriate for them?
- What alternatives or additional mitigations do you support?
- Will you keep in place the commitment to phase out non-resident parking in the Downtown RPP district in 10 years?

I support the RPP and expansions that are neighborhood initiated. My goal is through the TMA, new public transit options, increased bike infrastructure and the increased use of services like Lyft and Uber to provide real alternatives to driving downtown. I support providing positive options to reducing parking congestion.

- 16. Caltrain/HSR:** What is your view on Caltrain's electrification plans, High Speed Rail and grade separations?

- a) I support electrification of Caltrain and funding for grade separations and trenching where feasible. I favor electrification as part of the efforts to reduce SOV commuting and as the only practical way to get better service at the Cal Ave station area.
- b) High Speed Rail should be contingent on certain conditions including system engineering, design, technology and impact analysis which need to be fully addressed with sufficient community input.
- c) Grade separation should be considered as a part of an agreed commitment to HSR. Otherwise grade separation alternatives need to be reviewed in light of full cost/benefit analysis with full community participation.

- 17. VTA:** What will be your strategy in dealing with the VTA to stop their proposed severe reduction of VTA bus service within Palo Alto, and to persuade them instead to improve their service in Palo Alto so more commuters working in Palo Alto will take VTA buses to their jobs in Palo Alto.

I support discussions with VTA about maintaining Palo Alto service. In addition I support exploring options that the City can control such as designing shuttle routes to replace lost service if that occurs and negotiation with providers like Lyft and Uber perhaps with cost sharing by the City.

- 18. Budget:** How do you plan to fund the city's long-term pension and health benefits liability, which currently stands at \$500 million? How serious is the impact of this liability to the City's ability to provide services and amenities to residents?

Retirement benefit liabilities are a widespread challenge among all public jurisdictions. We are dealing with a significant change in the returns from pension investments that are occurring in a low interest rate world but an established sinking fund allows whittling away at the deficit. Future solutions will rely on a combination of changes, including changes to the benefits and years of service required of new employees, cost sharing on future health benefits and increased funding from the City budget, as is occurring in jurisdictions at every level.

- 19. Stanford:** What is the most important aspect of the City's upcoming negotiation with Stanford regarding its General Use Permit?

I believe negotiations with Stanford provide a great opportunity to explore the subject of mutual benefit such as expanded housing on Stanford land and cooperation on reducing SOV auto use and no increase in traffic.