

Greer Stone 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?

- 1) Narrow jobs/housing imbalance by limiting office growth and expanding housing opportunities,
- 2) Reduce traffic,
- 3) Expand city's ability to support social services by investing more in our city's nonprofit organizations.

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 was appointed to the Palo Alto Human Relations Commission when I was 23-years old. I currently chair the commission and I have been very active in my community effectuating change wherever I can. I have been involved in various liaison roles through my position on the commission, including: Project Safety Net, Homeless Services Taskforce, Palo Alto Chief of Police, Palo Alto Mediation Program, Senior Services Sub-Committee, HSRAP Sub-Committee, and the CDBG Sub-Committee. I have been most proud of my work in helping lead an effort to end veteran homelessness. For the past couple of years I have been co-leading an effort to end homelessness amongst veterans in Palo Alto and Santa Clara County. Last October, my commission hosted an event with two White House officials and other representatives from local veteran agencies to address these various issues.

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?

Undoubtedly, the most divisive issue this campaign season will be housing. Palo Alto has gained national attention lately over this very issue. But affordability in Palo Alto is not a new issue; it is the unfortunate consequence of living in one of the most desirable cities in the world.

Some in this race advocate that the affordability issue is supply and demand economics and we can make Palo Alto affordable by increasing the supply of housing. However, no one has opined on how many housing units we would have to build in order to make housing affordable. If we ever build enough new housing units to make Palo Alto affordable, we will by then altered the very fabric of our city to the point where it is no longer recognizable. I think we can, and should, build more housing, but let's be smart, not reckless about our growth. The simple fact is we do not have the infrastructure to support such a dramatic expansion of housing as some are

proposing. Our roads, public transportation, schools, parklands, open space, utilities, and other necessary services cannot support unbridled expansion.

I offer a different vision for housing. For the past 4 years since I have served on the Human Relations Commission. I have to say yes or no to nonprofit organizations asking for additional funding. I've heard their stories, seen the heartbreaking realities of the people they serve. It is the people these organizations serve who most need our help when it comes to housing.

I would prioritize our housing policies to protect our most vulnerable residents. I would increase the number of below market rate units required in new housing developments from 15 percent to 25 percent. Other towns have done this – we can too. I will also support requiring developers to build these units rather than paying in lieu fees that rarely cover the costs of actually creating new units. Buena Vista is a best example for the necessity of having an affordable housing in our community. We all benefit from having a diverse population. We need each other. I am a proponent of new housing that offers more affordable options than the traditional single-family home or luxury apartment.

If on Council, I will support the creation of blue ribbon committee composed of senior councilmembers and local experts that in 6 months will return with at least 3 viable and creative solutions for housing projects. Cities around the country are already having great successes with creative, non-traditional, alternatives to housing, including co-housing with private bedrooms living space but with shared kitchens and common living spaces.

One particular housing solution I would like to see is a mixed-use of housing for artists with studios open to the public so all can see and appreciate their work. The arts are essential to human existence. As the prices in Palo Alto have risen, our local artists have fled, and we have lost too many cultural amenities. Other cities in the county have done similar things. The city of Alexandria, Virginia, has created a project with studios and galleries on the ground floor open to the public, and housing for the artists above the studios. Austin, Texas, provides for a portion of their below market rate housing units be designated for artists. It is time we bring more artist opportunities back to our community. When we zone for new housing, we must ensure it is built near transportation hubs, near Downtown or California Avenue, closer to shops, restaurants, and jobs. New housing should also be mixed-use developments, with retail on the ground floor and housing above. This model is seen across Europe, and cities across this country, for years, it can work here too. When approving new development, whether it be residential or commercial, we must always be conscious of the impact it will have on the compatibility of our neighborhoods, existing residents, traffic, parking, schools, parklands, and the environment.

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

As I addressed above, I am a proponent of smart growth, not reckless growth. Palo Alto should invest in more affordable alternatives to the traditional single-family home or 2-bedroom apartment. We take pride in Palo Alto being a city known for its high quality of life. We should not be warehousing people, but instead incentivize developers to build units that will naturally be less expensive. I believe Palo Alto must maintain a high quality of life for all living in this city, not just the wealthiest amongst us. We should not sacrifice quality for quantity, but instead ensure that even higher-density housing is high quality housing that we can all be proud of. This includes having adequate access to light, parkland, and aesthetically pleasing buildings.

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?

We currently have a jobs/housing imbalance of 3 jobs to every 1 employed resident. Palo Alto is one of only half a dozen cities in the nation whose daytime population doubles! Since 2010 we have added approximately 13.7 jobs for every new housing unit. This growth in commercial development is unsustainable, and only serves to exacerbate the need for housing.

If on Council I will propose extending and strengthening our current office cap. We currently cap office growth to 50,000 net new square feet per year. I will propose strengthening the cap. Stanford Research Park is exempt from that cap. I would allow it to remain exempt. However, this exemption would be conditioned on one simple measuring tool – that they reduce their traffic impact by 2018 to below 2016 levels. This means not just reducing the amount of traffic new development would bring, but reducing the total trips generated by the Research Park. Stanford has the means as common land owners, and we should ask them to be the stewards of the environment that we know they can and strive to be.

In addition to office caps, we must strongly consider the type of business and culture we want to foster in Palo Alto. Palo Alto is the birthplace of innovation. This is a city where ideas are born, nourished, and then finally tested on the open market in a small startup space within the city. We must remember our history. As other companies in the past, when these companies get too big, they move out to cities where they can expand and grow their headquarters. Our zoning and planning should reflect that history. We should update the zoning code to limit permitted uses of the Downtown district for research and development to employers of 50 employees or less. The intent of this would be to facilitate more startups and less large companies. Existing companies should be grandfathered in within the policy.

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?

I believe in smart growth, not reckless growth. Cities are living entities, Palo Alto will continue to grow, it is our responsibility to manage that growth in a way that maintains our quality of life and culture, and mitigating the deleterious impacts to our schools, traffic, parking, environment, parkland, etc. As a Councilmember, I will consider all these impacts, and seek the input of the people who will most be effected by new projects.

School enrollment and having small class sizes is very important to me. I am a product of our exemplary school system. I attended Duveneck, Jordan, and graduated from Paly. My mother is an elementary school teacher, first at Duveneck and now at Ohlone. I myself taught in the school district as a substitute teacher before attending law school. Currently, our elementary enrollment numbers are down, but our middle and high schools' are up. We have seen similar trends in Palo Alto before, such as in the mid-90s. We must plan accordingly for the future to ensure our pace of growth can keep pace with our schools.

Another critical impact new development has is traffic. I support aggressive, and enforceable, traffic mitigation strategies. My proposal would condition new development on the developer's ability to create a traffic plan that will reduce the impact of anticipated traffic by 30 percent. The developer would then have to come back to council within a year after the project is completed to prove their plan has worked. Any amount of traffic impact over 30 percent would be assessed a

penalty. The fees collected by the city for noncompliance could be invested in citywide traffic decongestion projects.

- 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?

Too often developers promise mitigated, or no impact, from their developments, and then we are left with more clogged streets and dearth of parking after it is built. I would require the developer to pay for, and conduct, a study on the various impacts their development will have. After the study is complete, they will have to sign an affidavit swearing to its accuracy.

We must also ensure we evaluate projects on quality, just as much as quantity. There must be clear standards so that neither the developer, nor city staff, has to waste years and countless dollars proposing a plan that was illegal from the beginning. The one thing I find most critical in any decision by council, or any evaluation of a project, is to receive the input from the community members who live near the proposed project. I would promote the creation of standing neighborhood committees whose job it would be to report to Council, or the Planning and Transportation Commission, regarding the neighborhood's concerns over the project. It is the people living in the neighborhoods who best understand what is best for their community. Council should represent the will of the people, and neighborhoods, who voted for them.

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

Laws like the Budget Trailer Bill 707 would strip local control and circumvent the will of the neighborhoods. Cities have, and should have, the right to control the future of their city. We, as Palo Altans, know what is best for Palo Alto, not Sacramento.

I am also opposed to Bill 707 because it would reduce the amount of below market rate housing already mandated by our inclusionary zoning law. The Bill would only require 5 to 10 percent of the units be made affordable if the housing is built near a transit center, such as a bus stop or train station. My proposal aims at increasing our inclusionary zoning from 15 to 25 percent. Bill 707 would lead to less below market rate housing, and undermine the very intent of the Bill.

- 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?

If on Council I will vote to extend the current ground-floor-retail protection ordinance. Between 2008 and 2014, we lost approximately 70,514 square feet of retail, but added an alarmingly 537,144 square feet of office and R&D space. As more stores continue to close their doors, residents will have to leave the city in order to do their shopping. This means more car trips, more traffic, and less revenue for the city with less sales tax being generated. With the right attention and entrepreneurial focus that is Palo Alto, I believe we can generate start-up retail programs and incentives. To do this we need to preserve retail locations that are currently in retail use but not in locations that command the highest rents.

As a councilmember, I will uphold these retail protection ordinances. I would not give in easily to landlords or developers who astronomically increase the rent on storeowners and then claim within a few months they cannot find a new retailer to move in and afford those exorbitant prices.

We must enforce these policies in order to preserve and expand retail across the city; failure to do so will turn our home into a place where clothiers and personal services are merely a memory.

- 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?

The primary problem with rezoning to support Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) is there is no guarantee that, if built, they will be inexpensive, and there is no guarantee they will be used for residential living. Building costs of these units will certainly be expensive. Once built, there is no legal mechanism in place to require these units be used as living units. The owner can simply turn the ADU into a home office, gym, or an Airbnb rental. Even if we could regulate the use of these ADUs, code enforcement would be nearly impossible. During a time when code enforcement has been nearly nonexistent, to believe we could enforce uses of these ADUs is laughable.

Adding ADUs also means less open space on parcels. This will have the effect of higher density R-1 neighborhoods, potential removal of trees or natural habitats, and increased parking woes on our clogged residential streets. Finally, there is no proof these units will adequately address our housing needs. Currently, one-fifth of our residential parcels are large enough to accommodate second-dwelling units. However, last year there was less than a dozen permit requests for new ADUs. The city should focus on housing solutions that will do the most good for our community, and involve less time spent by staff that only slows positive change and wastes thousands of taxpayer dollars.

- 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?

Palo Alto is already 88 acres below our per-capita goal of parkland. We must ensure there is adequate parkland being included along with new development to keep pace with our required ratio of 4 acres of parkland per-capita, and I will fight to keep that ratio in the new Comprehensive Plan. In addition to new parkland, we should ensure there is sufficient use of outdoor recreation facilities for all in Palo Alto. I would work hard to bring a public swimming pool to South Palo Alto, and bring a Magical Playground to North Palo Alto.

If Palo Alto becomes denser (high-density housing as opposed to single-family homes) there will be an even greater need for neighborhood parks. Single-family homes often come with yards and outdoor space for families to enjoy the outdoors. Families living in apartments, or higher-density housing units, will need outdoor space for their children to play.

As our population continues to grow, we must prioritize in-town parkland so that all Palo Altans can have equal access. Currently, our parkland to residents ratio is 2.8 acres for every 1000 residents. This puts us behind both New York City (3.3 acres/1000 residents), and San Francisco (4.0 acres/1000 residents). Despite this current deficit, I am confident we can correct the problem and add sufficient parklands to keep pace with our long held acreage standard of 4.0 acres per-capita. Without concerted expansion of parkland our deficit will continue to grow. Our updated Comprehensive Plan should delineate the clear expectation that future population growth will be accompanied by parkland expansion at a rate consistent with our standard of 4.0 acres/1000 residents.

- 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?

We should limit the amount of basement square footage because basements rely heavily on pumping ground water. This equates to thousands of gallons of ground water being pumped. In addition to the loss of ground water, basements in Palo Alto require a vast amount of concrete in order to prevent water incursion, because we are so close to sea level. Concrete is one of the worst pollutants for construction materials.

- 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?

It is very important to have Single Family Individual Review for proposed projects. Each neighborhood in Palo Alto is unique. What works in Crescent Park may not work in Midtown, and we must consider the visual unity of our streets and neighborhoods. The current process brings balance to a homeowner's right to expand their home, with the neighborhood's valid concern to ensure synergy and compatibility with the surrounding community.

I am also a proponent of Eichler preservation and creating policies to protect these unique regional architecture gems. I believe in seeking community input as often as possible – ensuring neighborhoods are heard when new projects are proposed. Having Single Family Individual Review allows neighbors to have a voice in the look and feel of their home block. This is critical, and must be maintained.

- 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?

There is almost nothing that inhibits our quality of life more than traffic on our clogged streets.

Not only is traffic congestion an inconvenience, it also creates a danger. When our major thoroughfares become gridlocked, more and more commuters will use residential streets as shortcuts around the traffic. These commuters fly through the streets, breeze through stop signs, and create a very dangerous environment for kids biking home, senior citizens walking the neighborhood, and families walking their dogs. High traffic also wrecks havoc on our environment; exhaust from vehicles make up 60 percent of all greenhouse gases emitted in Palo Alto. Reduced traffic equals safer streets, reduced travel time, and a more environmentally sustainable city.

In order to address these concerns, Palo Alto must adopt a holistic approach with all solutions on the table. First, no new developments in Palo Alto should be approved without an aggressive Traffic Demand Management plan in place. Currently, Palo Alto's TDM policies lack actual enforcement, and developers have been allowed to make empty promises without fear of reprisal.

My proposal would condition new development on the developer's ability to create a traffic plan that will reduce the impact of anticipated traffic by 30 percent. The developer would then have to come back to council within a year after the project is completed to prove their plan has worked. Any amount of traffic impact over 30 percent would be assessed a penalty. The fees collected by the city for noncompliance could be invested in citywide traffic decongestion projects.

In addition to these transportation demand management requirements, the city must invest in a wide variety of solutions to get people out of single occupancy vehicles. We must expand our city shuttle, and promote new technologies such as ride-sharing apps like Scoop or Chariot, and encourage employee carpools. This also includes a more walk-able and bike friendly city. We must invest in more bike racks on public property, additional express bike lanes, and an underpass at Loma Verde to connect both sides of Palo Alto.

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?

Yes, I support an expanded RPPP and believe the neighborhoods need to be protected from unreasonable encroachment by non-resident parking. If on council, I would promote reducing the number of non-resident permits from 2000 to 1600 in order to mitigate the intrusion in neighborhoods. We should reduce the number of non-resident permits by 200 each year, and prioritize the outer most zones of the current RPPP. Given the lack of need in zones 9 and 10, those zones should no longer issue non-resident permits. We should facilitate the equal distribution of non-resident permits in each zone to ensure no more than 1/3 of the total space capacity in any one zone is allocated to nonresident permits. I would also promote prioritizing non-resident permits to employers of retail, restaurants, and other service industries, as permitted by California State Vehicle Code § 22507(b). I will continue to support the commitment to phase out non-resident parking in the Downtown district over the next 10 years. I am confident that with increasing transportation technology, and a larger focus on a more biker/pedestrian friendly city, we will have less need for non-resident parking permits in the future.

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

Increasing public transportation is a key strategy in mitigating our traffic problems. Caltrain's electrification plans are not perfect, but they are a good step in the right direction. According to Palo Alto's recent TMA poll of downtown workers, 55 percent of employees drive to work in a single occupancy vehicle. Of that 55 percent, roughly half of drivers expressed interest in finding alternative means of travel. Amongst these concerns were reliability of train services.

Electrification will mean more service, more trains, less vehicles on the road, quieter, and environmentally sustainable trains. However, with the increase in service, there will be worst traffic congestion at grade crossings. I am interested in learning more about the viability of grade separations at major grade crossings in Palo Alto. I believe proper studies will be needed to determine the tradeoff on costs to the city and saved time at the crossings. Regarding, High Speed Rail, I believe it am opposed because I think it will bankrupt our State and would have negative impacts to our surrounding neighborhoods and environment if it were to cut through Palo Alto.

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.

Cutting bus services to Palo Alto hurts the most vulnerable in our community. Typically, it is not the wealthiest that rely on bus services; it is the workers in our restaurants, our dishwashers, bus boys, janitors who are harmed by this. It is our most needy who need affordable bus tickets to reach critical services in San Jose. It is our seniors and high students who need to get to the grocery store or to school. These are the people who are most impacted by VTA's cuts. Palo Alto's jobs/housing imbalance proves there is a need for public transportation into and out of this city. If the VTA bus routes are expanded, more workers will take the bus. Our Downtown businesses should form together under the TMA in order to receive a group rate from the VTA. The VTA has already expressed an interest in this, and the city should help facilitate this partnership in any way possible.

- 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?

The city's long-term pension and health benefits liability is a serious issue for the city's longterm viability. Most of our city budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits. The city must consider all best options in order to pay off our rising pension and health benefits liability. One good option is to diversify our investment portfolio by creating a separate pension trust. This would give us more budget certainty in the future in case CalPERS rate of return does not remain consistent. I would also continue to support the efforts the city has made over the past several years in making the city's budget more sustainable for years to come. The impact of our budget being tied up with pensions and health benefits means less critical services for the rest of our city, such as funding for reduced traffic, more parks, and less funding for social services.

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

The two most important aspects of Stanford's General Use Permit will be housing and traffic. Stanford has made great gains in their traffic mitigation strategies, and I would expect them to continue, and improve these efforts. Currently, Stanford Research Park is exempt from our city's office cap. I would allow it to remain exempt. However, this exemption would be conditioned on one simple measuring tool – that they can reduce their traffic impact by 2018 to below 2016 levels. This means not just reducing the amount of traffic new development would bring, but reducing the total trips generated by the Research Park. Stanford has the means as common land owners, and we should ask them to be the stewards of the environment that we know they can and strive to be I would also prioritize the need for Stanford to build more housing in order to house their students and employees. Currently, Stanford houses most of their students, and approximately one-third of their faculty. Stanford should continue to increase their supply of on-campus housing in order to reduce the number of commuters into Stanford every day. In addition to these housing projects, I would strongly encourage increased below market rate housing units being built to further diversify the socio-economic statuses of residents in this area.