

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?

Stewart Carl:

Limit growth and require any new development to provide more than 4 acres of park space per 1000 residents to make up for Palo Alto's declining park space to resident ratio.

Leonard Ely III:

DID NOT ANSWER

Adrian Fine:

Many years ago, Palo Alto made the wise decision to preserve the Foothills and Baylands, and use the space in-between for our city. Today, we have no extra land for parks, and so we must use innovative approaches to create new types of park/open spaces.

For new developments, we should implement an "urban green spaces plan", which could require things like publically accessible rooftop gardens or pocket parks on the street. Particularly in South Palo Alto and along El Camino, every development should be examined for potential green spaces, even if it's just a small grassy area with benches.

Existing and future parks should be used more efficiently. Some parks need shade structures, while others could have fields or tennis courts striped for a wider range of uses, such as pickleball or cricket.

Finally, we have to improve connections to our parks. The simplest and most economical approach is to develop comprehensive bike and ped access to these existing parks and areas.

John Fredrich:

For park space make sure the frontage of Stanford on El Camino is not built up. Save the trees and connect those woods with trails that go to Foothill Park and on to the Pacific Ocean. Reconfigure Cubberley.

Arthur Keller:

Palo Alto must maintain the current ratio of in-town park space to 1,000 residents as more housing is built. The need for in-town park space increases for dense housing. There continues to be a shortage of playing field space for soccer games and the like. See, for example, <http://archive.peninsulapress.com/2013/02/26/sports-field-shortage-prompts-palo-alto-to-change-reservation-rules/>

Parkland growth should keep up with housing growth. I support setting maximum dedication of parkland under the Quimby Act, and parkland impact fees at market rates used to acquire new parkland with new housing growth.

We have not been acquiring new parkland, with the sole exception of the Stanford Mayfield Playing Fields. My priority is to create new parks as we grow.

Liz Kniss:

Palo Alto has more than 36 parks including an exceptional park with 1400 acres, Foothill Park. While we are not always at the suggested average, which would consist of a park within a half mile of every resident, we do come very close.

Our new Parks and Open Space Master Plan, which we are currently working on, will improve our access to safe and enjoyable parks and open space on an even more effective basis. It is a very extensive plan and incorporates discussions about tree protection as well as better maintenance of our park structure.

We recently championed the Magic Bridge addition at Mitchell Park. This park is especially created for those with physical limitations and children who learn differently. We have had many inquiries about it and I am sure it will be duplicated throughout the country.

Additionally, our parks are used by people from the surrounding communities on a regular basis so I believe we do a good job sharing parks, open spaces, access to nature and urban recreation in a regional way. Also, I don't feel that Palo Alto is going to grow in any substantial way over the next few years. We are reasonably stable at about 65,000 residents.

Lydia Kou:

The City has three categories of parks:

1. Neighborhood parks: These are smaller parks that are supposed to be within easy walking distance of residents.
2. District parks: These are larger parks, such as Rinconada Park and Mitchell Park.
3. Open Space parks: Foothill Park, Enid Pearson-Arastradero Preserve, the Baylands.

The first two are what are counted for "in-town park space" and each has its own ration. We currently have a deficit of 88 acres. The 4-acre target is the recommendation of professional planners and not unique to Palo Alto.

When you have a large development, the City can require that space be provided for a neighborhood park. For example, when Palo Alto Medical Clinic moved, Heritage Park was created. However, much of the advocacy for substantially more housing either involves in-fill – which provides no additional park space – or higher-densities where it may infeasible to provide the expected amount of neighborhood park space. As for district parks, I have seen no credible proposal for providing more space as the population increases.

Given the difficulty of providing the additional park space, some are advocating abandoning the 4-acre target and instead intensifying the use of the existing parks. I oppose this. Many residents value the tranquility that parks offer: Densification makes such spaces more important than ever. Similarly, densification results in inadequate play space around homes and parks become a necessity for families seeking space for unstructured play and unorganized athletics.

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

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.

Greer Stone:

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.

Greg Tanaka:

Complete the parks master plan which is key to identifying park use, facility updates and needs. I would like to see a park impact fee on new development so that Palo Alto can build funds to expand parks, especial the undersized parks with new land acquisition capacity.