

## 4. High-density housing

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

### **Stewart Carl:**

The High-density housing units that have proposed so far seem to make the units more affordable by shifting the cost of the unit onto our already overburdened infrastructure of schools, roads, retail, parks, trees, water, our air, our unique quality of life, our seniors, and our residents of moderate means. Affordability of the high-density unit goes down (a little), but the overall affordability of living in Palo Alto goes up.

### **Leonard Ely III:**

This term is somewhat of a catch all. As stated above we need to identify the needs and then present the solutions.

### **Adrian Fine:**

High density is a loaded word. In San Francisco and Manhattan it may mean 30-50 story towers. In Palo Alto high density means 3 and 4 stories. I favor densities of this kind near services, transit, and shopping--areas that provide opportunities for walking, biking, and shopping locally. The prime areas to focus on are along El Camino, University Avenue, and California Avenue.

To manage growth effectively, we need to use Coordinated Area Plans so that community stakeholders can come together, plan for needed investments in amenities and infrastructure, and help design the future look and feel of these areas. The South of Forest Area plan (SOFA) is a successful model of Palo Altans working together to design new housing, designate amenities to be built, and create design guidelines - we should refine and re-use this model.

I also favor exploring opportunities for Stanford to provide more housing on their lands, such as Stanford Mall or the Research Park.

### **John Fredrich:**

Higher densities can be made to fit with good planning, especially in areas such as Buena Vista, Fry's, and at the margins of the industrial zone that are near transportation. We should work with Stanford to up the density of Escondido Village to an appropriate level.

### **Arthur Keller:**

We need more housing for seniors, so our seniors can stay in our community as we age. Additional housing must also focus on those most in need, including more affordable housing units.

We can explore housing for new teachers, as suggested by proposed legislation, and for first responders and utility workers. We must also do our part for emergency preparedness.

State law allows Palo Alto to consider school impacts of our changed policies, though not individual development projects. The City must start to consider school overcrowding. Our high school sites were originally designed for 1200 students each and are now planned to hold nearly double. Our Middle Schools are already at capacity. The School District can build two story school buildings, but we cannot have two story playing fields.

Most of the housing built in Palo Alto since 2000 has been large townhouses, resulting in the enrollment surge in our schools and school overcrowding. Let's take a look at what type of housing we most need. Only 20% of our housing stock is studio or 1-bedroom apartments. Yet 60% of Palo Alto's households have 1 or 2 people. So we clearly need smaller units for these smaller households. And those happen to have less impact on our schools. We can also encourage larger housing units to be built at a rate that does not cause overcrowding in our schools.

When I make decisions, my priority is to ensure that the quality of life in Palo Alto is preserved and enhanced for all Palo Altans.

Dense housing means even more need for parks that their residents can walk to.

### **Liz Kniss:**

This is completely dependent on the land available, zoning requirements, and proposals made by developers. In our housing element, we have identified available housing sites. However, the city does not build housing, rather, the city responds to requests for high-density and at that point an application would be made to the city to be voted on by the city council. I believe we need additional housing for low-wage earners, our teachers, police, firemen, and city workers, as well as the elderly who would like to downsize. There are long waiting lists for senior housing options in this city.

Last May, when there were opportunities for low income senior housing available in Palo Alto, there were 100s of seniors on the wait list for rental apartments.

I have been very supportive of the collaborative effort between the City of Palo Alto, Santa Clara County, and others in the ongoing effort to prevent the displacement of over 400 low-income residents at the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park. This is a good example of low income, high density housing. I proudly voted to commit approximately \$14 million to help keep these families in our community. Also, I have been supportive of efforts to improve housing options near transit, including smaller units and below market rate (BMR) homes.

### **Lydia Kou:**

The issues of high-density housing are in multiple layers. At the outermost layer is the impact on the city-wide infrastructure. For example, should we build high-density housing where the projected number of children – realistic, experience-based projections, not irrelevant national averages – would be the equivalent of one or two additional elementary schools of students? And there are similar issues with parks and other community services.

Another layer involves traffic. Many of the calls for high-density housing want it in areas where it is already significantly congested. One of these areas – University Avenue – is already projected to become much worse – including intersections graded "failing" – with the development already in the pipeline (Stanford Hospital expansion being the largest of these). Similarly, for proposal around the Page Mill-El Camino intersection. Or near San Antonio (increases from major development around San Antonio Center). We are at the level where congestion not only ripples out to other arterial streets, but is increasing cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets.

For me to support significant levels of high-density housing, I would need to see credible explanations of how it would result in significant negative impacts on our infrastructure.

As to who the housing is built for, the City has very little control over this – zoning influences average unit size, but the City has no control – nor should it - over details such as the mix of 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom units. Nor the categories of people willing to pay the rent or purchase price. Recognize that Palo Alto house prices are roughly 25% more than similar units in surrounding cities because parents want to have their children in Palo Alto schools. This heavily skews who will be in those units.

Many of the advocates for high-density housing have contradictory goals. They say housing should be built for people currently commuting to jobs in Palo Alto, but they argue that it should be located where it is convenient for people commuting to jobs outside Palo Alto (and don't have school-aged children).

When you hear leaders of advocacy groups such as Palo Alto Forward say that we should build enough housing for all the people who commute to Palo Alto, do some math. They point out that the daytime population currently doubles, but neglect that housing would not just be for those employees but also their families. How would Palo Alto double its schools (currently 17 total)? Or more than double its parks (we already have an unaddressed deficit)? Or... And many of those advocates oppose limits on additional office/R&D building growth.

Recognize that about one-third of employed Palo Altans work in other cities. Consequently we should expect to be creating two outbound commutes for every one inbound commute eliminated. Locating housing near transit centers is no answer if there isn't a viable transit **between** residents' homes and their jobs.

**Danielle Martell:**

DID NOT RESPOND

**Don McDougall:**

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

**Greer Stone:**

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.

**Greg Tanaka:**

Palo Alto should hold a housing summit to explore the success or failure from other communities with micro units and community housing complexes (like Palo Alto Commons, for all ages), including who they attract, impact to services, and contribution to civic engagement. Palo Alto has lost its historic place for teachers to live and work, they would be my first priority, then other service workers like first responders. I will oppose converting single family zones to high density zones.