

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?

Stewart Carl:

I miss our unique retail stores like University Art and Accent Arts (which is leaving). Preserving retail is a really difficult problem with soaring real-estate prices and rents. We can, and probably should try banning chain stores, but that will not insure a small unique retail store can survive. We can encourage new developments to have first floor retail, but again that does not insure a small unique retailer can survive while paying exorbitant rents. Maybe we need to require new developments to have BMR retail, but we need to avoid trading that against other aspects of our quality of life.

Leonard Ely III:

Anytime you draw arbitrary lines you will have problems. I do not believe that the current “emergency ordinance” in regards to this issue is correct and should be let to expire and replaced with a more flexible ordinance.

Adrian Fine:

My first job was at Accent Arts on Cal Ave, which is now closing, and I have a deep appreciation for our local retailers. The retail environment is changing all over America, and over time more shopping will be done on the internet and via home delivery of items including food. I believe we should be asking experts in the retail area to advise us on what is realistic to expect and how

On the planning commission, I helped create ordinances which prohibited conversion of ground-floor retail into office, and I also helped improve restrictions on chain stores. These two ordinances, later passed by council, are important steps to protect Palo Alto’s retail.

I support mixed use developments combining retail and housing. But location is critical because no matter what we wish for, retail is a very competitive market and retailers want access to the largest number of customers.

Finally, we should make business easier for our local and small retailers. We should streamline the permitting process for local retail businesses, and I’d like the city to provide more flexible retail requirements such as smaller shops, “maker” spaces, shared storefronts, and simpler signage requirements.

John Fredrich:

I expect the City Manager and City Attorney to enforce existing laws with the able assistance of the County District Attorney and state and federal authorities if needed. I would like to know how much retail space is being leased by Palantir.

Arthur Keller:

I am in favor of vigorously defending the requirement to retain retail uses where they are now.

I propose shortening the length of time when a non-conforming use in a ground floor retail location is allowed to remain vacant without requiring enforcement of the ground floor retail uses.

I propose that the City create a list of protected ground floor retail locations, so that the City can effectively enforce the rules against conversion to non-retail uses.

I want the City not to issue Certificates of Occupancy for a non-retail use that replaces a retail use. The City should scrutinize these requests to ensure that they are retail, but without delaying the process for true retailers.

Liz Kniss:

I support retail, which provides important revenue for our city budget, contributes to a sense of community and local pride, provides needed products and services to Palo Alto residents, and helps reduce car traffic by allowing people to make a short trip instead of driving to another city for their shopping. I voted recently to protect the retail operations that exist. In certain areas, we don't allow any current retail spaces to convert to office and I support that.

It should remain a priority for the city to ensure community and neighborhood-serving retail is retained and supported. Retail works in some areas better than others, but we should be very careful and skeptical when hearing requests for exceptions

Lydia Kou:

It is important to remember that retail is not just University Ave and California Ave, but El Camino and neighborhood centers (most notably Midtown, Charleston, Edgewood) and Stanford Shopping Center and Town & Country

It is crucial to not only preserve space for retail, but to have that space in clusters that allow stores to mutually reinforce each other

It is also important to recognize that when a building is replaced or substantially remodeled, there is a significant likelihood that any local business there will be replaced by a chain store (or franchisee). I have been told that this is a result of the globalization of such loans – it is easier for non-local investors to assess the reliability of the rental income from a chain

Another important matter is to enforce the ground floor retail preservation ordinance.

I believe that City Hall has been overly focused on University Avenue. The recent improvements to California Avenue are appreciated but seem to have taken forever. But other districts have been neglected. For example, South El Camino Real has been long neglected. It was a major focus of the Comprehensive Plan process in the mid-1990 and then of a Caltrans-funded study in the early 2000s. A range of issues of importance to the merchants were identified—such as visibility of signage on stores, signage for parking—that have yet to be addressed.

Danielle Martell:

DID NOT RESPOND

Don McDougall:

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.

Greer Stone:

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.

Greg Tanaka:

I support independent retail in Palo Alto, and hope that we can re-instate the concept plan that this current council rejected for the Fry's area, and expand it to California Avenue so that we can create formula retail. This would limit retail giants and chains, and secure the historic retail combination of mom & pops, high quality grocery, and other services like dry cleaning and personal services.