

LOCAL BLOGS



By Diana Diamond

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About this blog: So much is right — and wrong — about what is happening in Palo Alto. In this blog I want to discuss all that with you. I know many residents care about this town, and I want to explore our collective interests to help ... (More)

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My recommendations for Palo Alto City Council

Uploaded: Oct 5, 2022

I had hoped that this upcoming city council election in Palo Alto would bring out an array of candidates who were, dedicated, knowledgeable individuals with local government experience, people who would serve well for the next four years on the council. Being a council member is the highest elected position a resident can hold in this city.

I was looking for individuals who can understand two important budgets – the capital fund and the general fund, -- the latter is close to spending almost \$1 billion year now –and I wanted individuals who could analyze and control our expenditures wisely.

I fear I was being unrealistic, because I also wanted us to elect individuals who are able

to think outside the box and question old habits, question whether the way the city continues to do things year after year is appropriate, and come up with new ideas.

And the seven candidates running don't have all, or for a few running, many of these qualifications.

I wanted candidates who will not automatically do what staff recommends or the city manager suggests, but be more visionary in their approach. I also wanted candidates who can be leaders. A few of our current council members are short on leadership abilities.

Yet in listening to the seven candidates at several council candidate forums, I started wondering how much they know about how this city works, and whether they consider how much the projects they endorse actually cost. For example, when asked what each thought about fiber-to-the-home (FTTH), most candidates quickly said they support it, and that it would be nice to have in this city, and that since the Utilities Department is doing so well, some were sure the city could easily handle providing fiber to the home. Interesting on two counts: The Utilities Department has its own problems, including the need to ramp up their transformers and transmission lines, and better handle things like four blackouts in a two-week period this summer, one caused by a squirrel.

Much more important though is that those candidates who jumped on the FTTH bandwagon did not mention that it would cost at least \$100 million (or more) to get it operational, and that AT&T and Comcast already are able to supply high-speed transmissions to the home. So why spend \$\$\$\$ for a service we already have access to?

In fact, candidates didn't talk much about the various demands on the budget (upgrading our electric grid, providing for more affordable housings, which all candidates wanted, or the huge expense in improving our rail grade crossings). Maybe because that cost question was not posed to the seven candidates, i.e., no one was asked. Nor were they asked where do we get the money for all this stuff that they want, and can we Palo Altans afford all the projects that they favor?

In fact, the questions asked at a couple of the forums were almost identical at most forums, and the candidates each had well-rehearsed responses to them. Not much probing, except at the Weekly's two-hour forum.

Given those caveats, here are my endorsements for three seats on the council. I first

want to say that they all seven are competent and well-meaning, and have assets and skills that could contribute to council deliberations. They are all nice people, and I thank them for running. I want to add that in these forums, the candidates did not distinguish themselves from others running, so that's why any of us are scratching our heads as to who to vote for.

Ed Lauing – in my estimation, the best candidate for the council. He is bright, a man who doesn't quickly jump to conclusions, and seems to weigh both the pros and cons of any issue. He often says "We can't do this until we improve . . ."

For example, he warned that we can't go ahead and get everyone to quickly convert to all-electric homes because our grid equipment first needs to be upgraded. He is aware of how much new projects will cost, and indicated some proposals should have lower priorities. He is knowledgeable about how this city functions, in part from serving several years on the Planning Commission, currently as chair.

Doria Summa – Summa also has served several years on the Planning Commission, currently as vice chair, a post where one quickly learns the intricacies and rules and regulations of city governing, particularly in applying housing and office requirements. She is an independent thinker, and is not afraid to differ with her colleagues. Her philosophy has often made her the sole dissenter on development proposals, which is refreshing.

Vicki Veenker is my third choice, with a little hesitation because of her strong advocacy for more housing. I am careful not to choose one-issue candidates, because a council member has to face a panoply of other issues on all subjects. A patent attorney and professional mediator, Veenker has decades of experience in delving into complex and contentious issues.

All three seem to have received most of their campaign contributions from Palo Alto residents, which is not true of all candidates. It shows the three do have local appeal and support

Despite my caveats, we need to select three competent people. I have tried to do that. Those who serve on the council can influence many aspects of our lives here (e.g., converting to all-electric homes), so who were elect is very important;

Comments

Posted by **TMH**, a resident of Mayfield,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 3:33 pm
TMH is a registered user.

Ed Lauing and Doria Summa are the most experienced, knowledgeable and extremely prepared individuals running for Council this year. Both have worked hard for our City and know the fine details when it comes to affordable housing, traffic issues, and understanding our complex city budget. Working on the Planning and Transportation Commission for over 5 years, they both have had that critical level of experience in understanding key problems and pushing solutions forward that help people on a daily basis. Ed and Doria are the best!

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Posted by **Joe in Green Acres**, a resident of Green Acres,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 3:39 pm
Joe in Green Acres is a registered user.

I second what TMH wrote above in all respects!! A concise summary of these two candidates and their qualifications. They deserve to be elected to City Council, for the knowledge and experience they would bring.

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Posted by **Online Name**, a resident of Embarcadero Oaks/Leland,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 4:58 pm
Online Name is a registered user.

I agree with the two previous posters about supporting Ed Lauing and Doria Summa. They're experienced and independent with all but a few hundred dollars of their donations coming from Palo Alto residents -- unlike the "Three Great Candidates" -- Julie, Lisa and Vicki -- whose declared donors approach half coming from non-Palo Altans.

I say "declared" donors because I wonder who's paying for the large daily ads for the "Three Great Candidates" "paid for by The Committee to Support" Julie, Lisa and Vicki with the disclaimer that the "Committee to Support" them has "no relationship to the candidates or their campaigns."

Obviously this raises questions about who can afford those big daily ads and Ms Veenker's independence. We know the first "Three Great Candidates" ad was paid for by several named people including Gail Price, John Kelly and Steve Levy "and no one else" with the latter employed by Joint Venture Silicon Valley as a housing advocate whose blog appears here on Palo Alto Online.

Why drop the sponsors' names and change to the unaffiliated Committee to Support...?"

How much do all those big daily ads cost? They sure don't come cheap. Will they be declared by the candidates as in-kind contributions and/or will they continue to pretend there's no connections?

We need independent City Council members representing us, not outsiders and shadowy sponsors.

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Posted by **Annette**, a resident of College Terrace,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 5:27 pm
Annette is a registered user.

I agree with your endorsement of Lauing and Summa; their knowledge and experience is invaluable. I also have hesitation about Vicki Veenker even though I supported her in her run for the Assembly. My hesitation is related to that. I think she will be a "one and done" Council member in order to move on to higher office and that her positions on local issues will be informed by her ambition for higher office. I'd rather see people elected who are highly likely to try for two terms b/c there's a lot to learn and all the major issues are ones that will take years to resolve. The more institutional memory we can have on CC, the better, especially when it comes to housing.

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Posted by **Fred Balin**, a resident of College Terrace,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 5:44 pm
Fred Balin is a registered user.

Good choices among good people, and spot on regarding omissions of questioners and candidates on source of \$\$s for favored projects.

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Posted by **Bystander**, a resident of Another Palo Alto neighborhood,
on Oct 6, 2022 at 5:57 pm
Bystander is a registered user.

I agree with the first two choices, Lauing and Summa.

I don't have a serious third contender except that I might go with Brian Hamachek as he appeals to me. I know he has no experience, but his heart is in the right place and speaks like someone who is passionate about Palo Alto like many other residents who are unable to do anything other than use a vote to show their passion. He appears to be using his own money which is a good thing as he will owe no political favors. Most of his effort appears to be on social media, as my social media is getting a lot of ads from him.

Speaking to others it may be that he will get some protest votes in lieu of a satisfactory third choice. Even if he doesn't get elected, it might be the case that he gets enough votes to make the established status quo take note.

The established status quo needs a good shake up. I'm tired of the same old same old in Palo Alto and we need a breath of fresh air with residents concerns taking the top priority for a change.

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Posted by **Terry Howells**, a resident of Palo Alto Hills,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 7:42 am
Terry Howells is a registered user.

Regardless of who is elected to the PACC, nothing ever changes for the ultimate good or the ultimate worse.

The PACC members are merely pawns of various special interests groups and/or City Hall directives.

Few have backbones.

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Posted by **resident**, a resident of Midtown,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 8:08 am
resident is a registered user.

@ online name. The committee paying for the three great candidates may not be blood relatives of the candidates but they have definitely been hosting events and campaigning for them. It's disingenuous to say "no relation"

The committee includes a current school board member who is pushing a candidate for that office who moved to Palo Alto in May, but who holds their beliefs and would presumably echo their platform. I don't like that much influence from a small group.

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Posted by **Anon123456**, a resident of Adobe-Meadow,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 9:02 am
Anon123456 is a registered user.

I support Forssell and Veenker, because I believe they know how to build coalitions and get things done. Lauing and Summa are supported by NIMBY groups like "Palo Altans for Sensible Zoning", enough said. Note that you do not have to vote three candidates even though you are allowed to, not voting for your 3rd choice means better chances for your 1st and 2nd choices to win.

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Posted by **Online Name**, a resident of Embarcadero Oaks/Leland,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 9:35 am
Online Name is a registered user.

@Anon123456m, do you mean deep-pocketed NIMBT's like Mark Andreesen and his wife who were funding the YIMBY's et al but who were recently caught objecting to Atherton City Council about multi-family housing in their fair city near their \$16.600,000 Atherton manse?

The hypocrisy of their YES In YOUR BACK YARD but Not Near Mine has been in the national business press for weeks, showing just how meaningless labels like YIMBY and NIMBY are.

Here's one of the many articles [Web Link](#) entitled "Billionaire Marc 'It's Time to Build' Andreesen Is a NIMBY"

Now can we get back discussing real issues and drop the mindless labels even though tossing them around is so much easier?

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Posted by **Citizen**, a resident of College Terrace,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 9:39 am
Citizen is a registered user.

No to Veenker who has stated her policy position is to push dense housing, fast growth and rent control.

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Posted by **Mark Weiss**, a resident of Downtown North,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 12:47 pm
Mark Weiss is a registered user.

Doria Summa is unique among the seven candidates for having a track record of civic involvement but not signaling submission to powerful special interests (Castilleja, Sobrato, Stanford, et al ad nauseum).

She worked closely with the similarly reasoned and independent councilmember Greg Schmid.

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Posted by **Demetrius Karoualis**, a resident of Midtown,
on Oct 7, 2022 at 2:59 pm
Demetrius Karoualis is a registered user.

"Regardless of who is elected to the PACC, nothing ever changes for the ultimate good or the ultimate worse."

So true...the PACC is just treading water between elections.