



CITY OF  
**PALO  
ALTO**

# State of the City

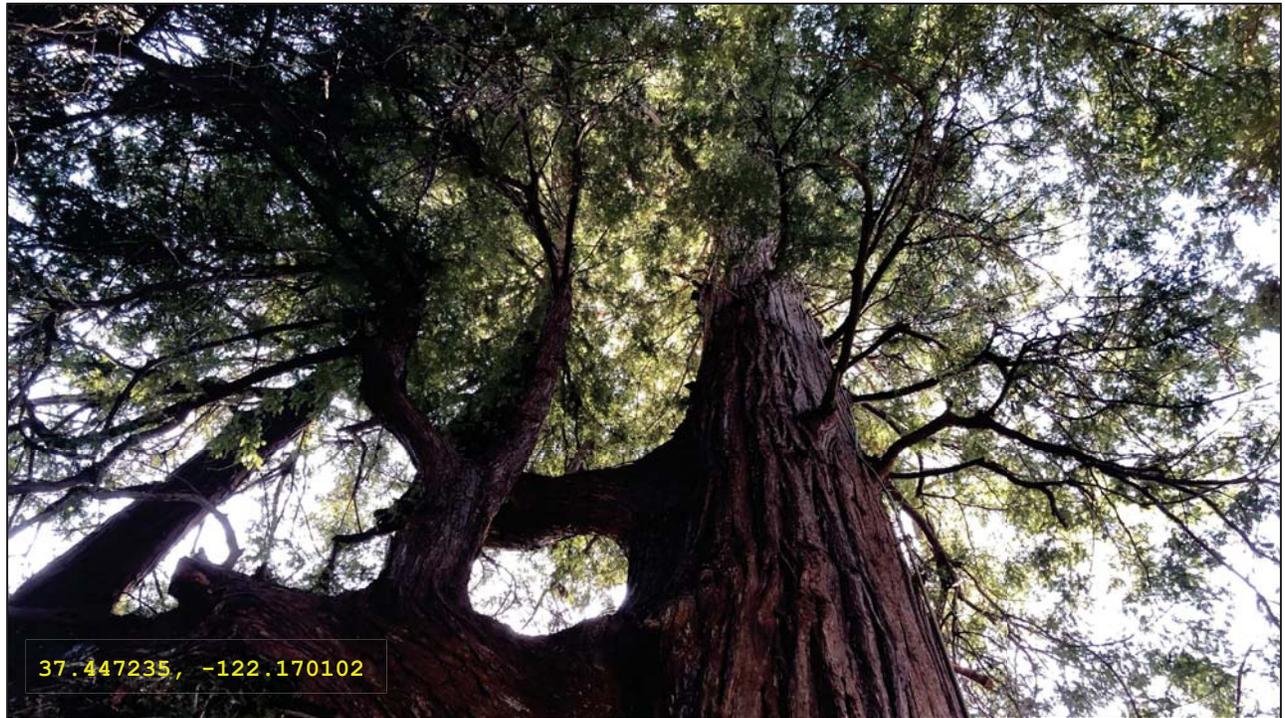
Palo Alto Mayor Adrian Fine  
Wednesday, March 4, 2020

- Good evening. Thank you all for coming.
- Thank you very much to our city staff for setting this up.
- Thank you Tom and Alison for the intros, and thanks to my colleagues and other representatives for joining us.
- Thank you to my family, and a special call out to my nephews Giles and Ferdinand.
- So these state of the city addresses you're supposed to say "the state of our city is strong". But would anyone ever say the state of our city is weak? The state of our city is perfect?
- I don't think so. The reality is there are good things, things we should be grateful for. And there are challenges; problems we need to solve.
- Palo Alto has always been that way for me. Pretty good, and hopefully getting better.
- I think sometimes we in the community, and on the council - get lost in the weeds, or suffer from a lack of perspective. To me, our civic process can feel disconnected. No problem exists in isolation, and no one person has all of the solutions.
- And so tonight, I'm going to walk through Palo Alto, and try to connect some of the dots.

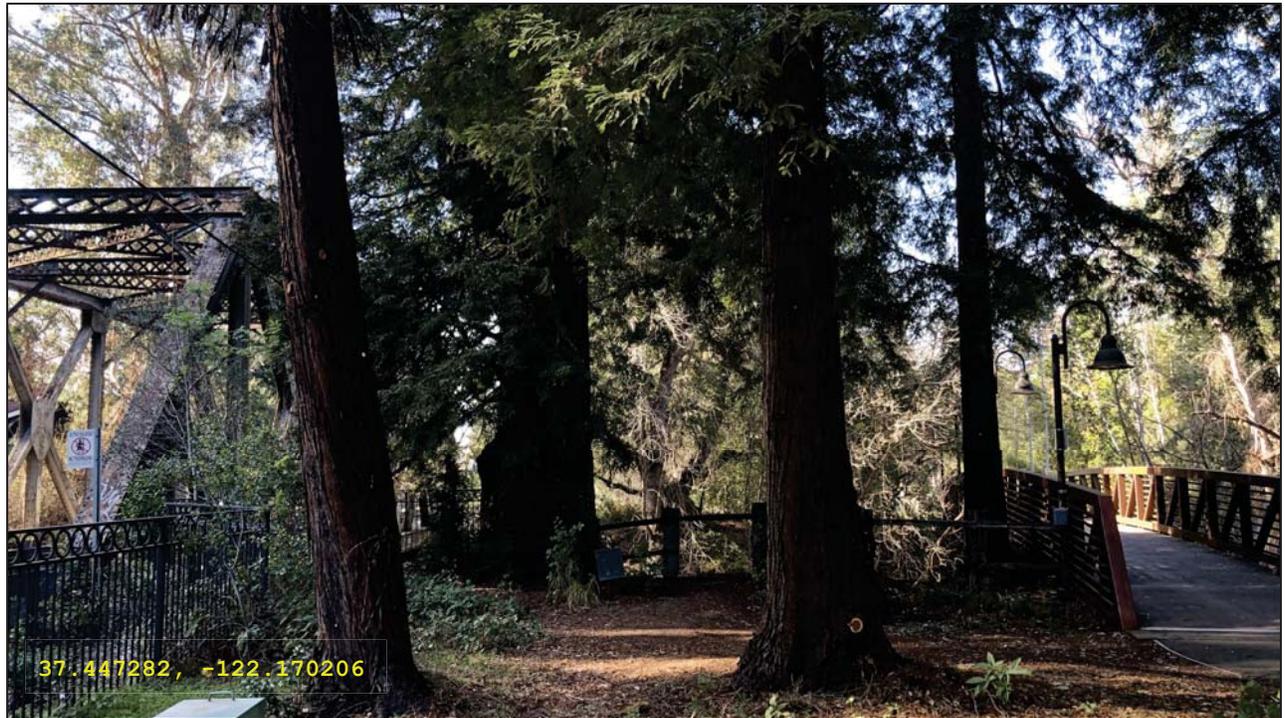
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# Our Roots

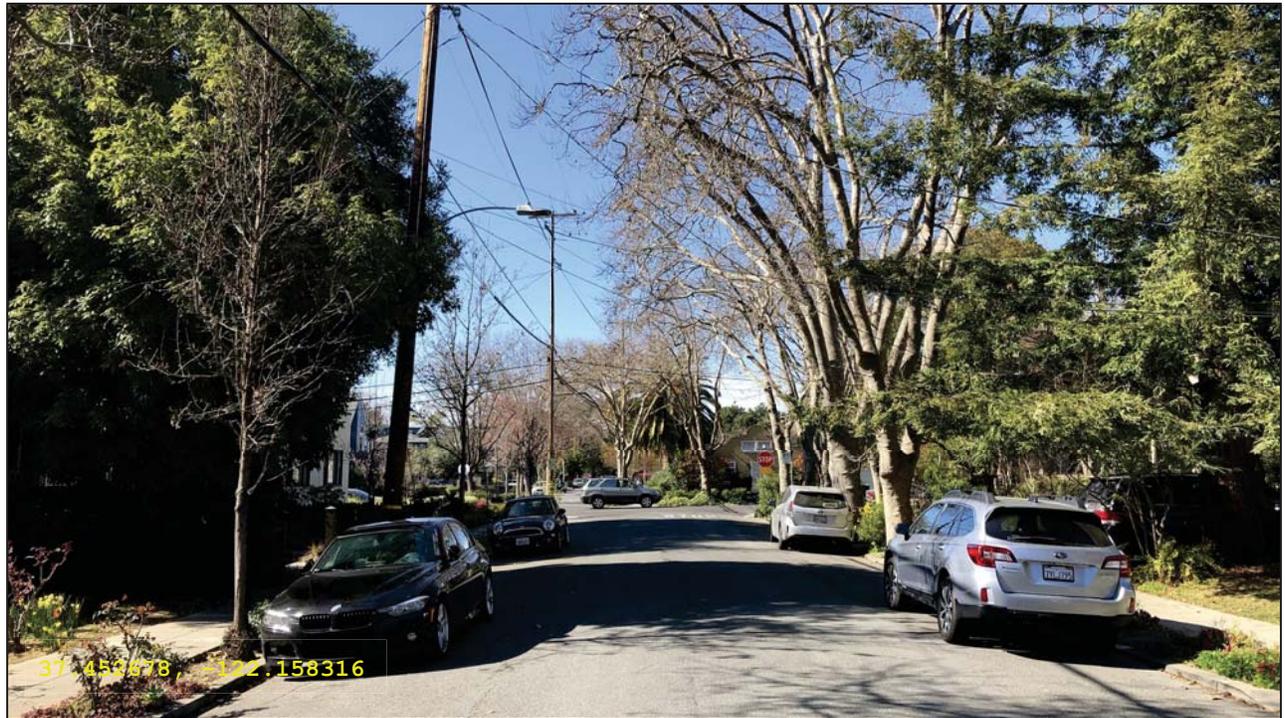
So I want to start with where we come from and what this place is about.



Our roots obviously run deep, and have been here for longer than any of use. El Palo Alto. Our namesake.



But the picture broadens very quickly. And the city park of the same name. Here you can also see the historic rail bridge which originally connected the Stanford Farm to San Francisco. and the footpath crossing San Francisquito, which is seeing major planning now to address flooding and climate change. Our neighbor Menlo Park is right there, regionalism is more important than ever.



And then we're grounded by our roots, especially the people and neighbors around us. This is my street. Nothing too fancy, but I like my neighbors. In the past few weeks, one neighbor has recommended a dog sitter, and another loaned us a ladder to replace a bulb that was very high.

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# Services And Schools

But it's not just our neighbors and trees which make Palo Alto a wonderful place to call home. The city takes care of so many things. From Utilities to Police, finance to parks and recreation, this is a great place to call home. Of course our schools are the cornerstone of our local pride. And we also face significant challenges in terms of transportation and infrastructure.



Like clockwork, our trash and recycling are picked up every week. This is Ricardo, who works for green waste, a contract service which handles solid waste for the city. This is a case where it makes sense to contract the service out, and in two weeks, the city council will discuss new solid waste recycling protocols.



In contrast, many people know that Palo Alto runs effective and efficient utilities. What most people don't know is that our utilities are more than half of the city budget. Having control of our utilities is also a great lever for climate change initiatives. For example, the council recently passed electrification codes for new residential construction, and we're also working on recycled water pilot projects with Stanford and Valley Water.



An area where we don't have as much control is our challenge with grade separations. This is one of the most complex planning, design, engineering and civic engagement projects PA has ever faced. Churchill is particularly difficult. There's lots of school traffic, students biking, and it's a useful east-west connector. But due to the narrow road and right of way, finding a solution that preserves the connection is difficult.



The council does need to make progress this year. In a few short years, train service will be increased, and will be quieter and cleaner. These are crews installing electric poles at nights. Two weeks ago, CM Filseth and Cormack went to Sacramento to advocate for money for our grade separation project - and the general response was that we need to make a decision.



The city is making serious progress on infrastructure for the future. Fire station 3 is part of the city's infrastructure plan - It will open March 21. Other projects include the bike bridge across 101 - opening by the end of the year, a new public safety building near Cal Ave - breaking ground this year, and... a parking garage.



The new parking garage. This will be the largest structure in the Cal Ave district. Personally, I question whether this \$50m project will be a white elephant in a few years, given the rapid changes in mobility, along with our growing climate crisis.

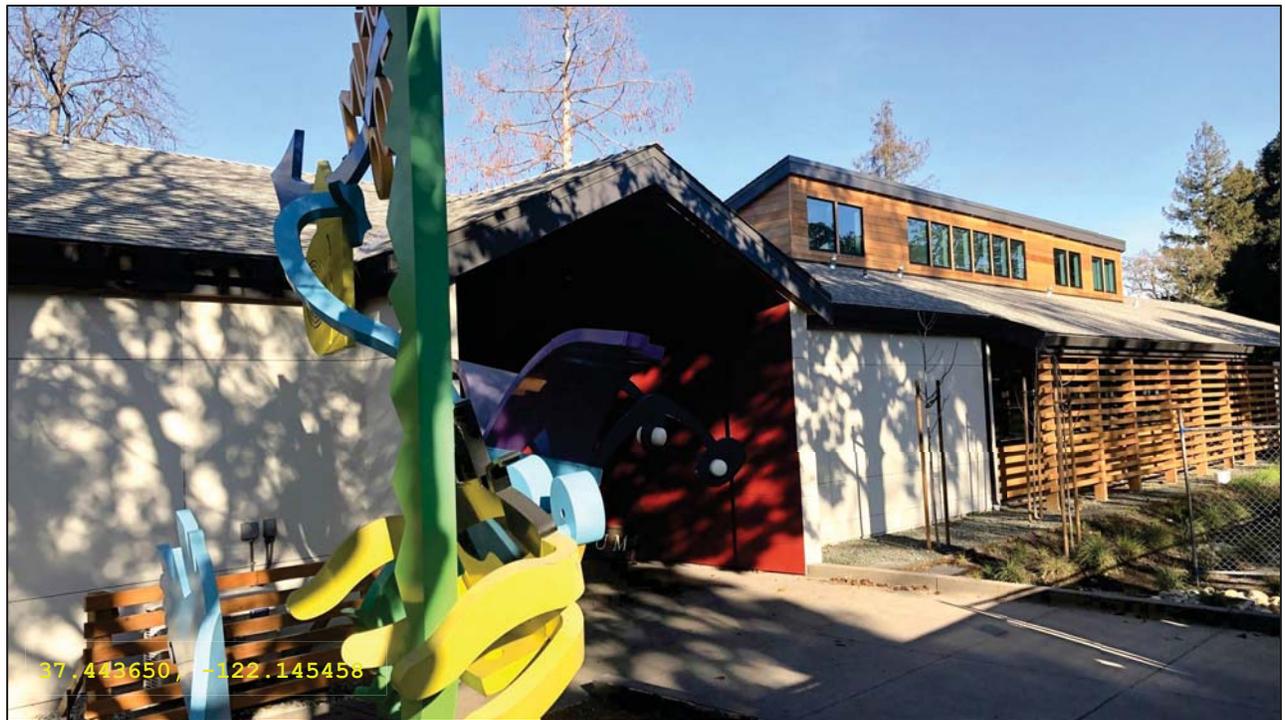


Over the past two years, Stanford Healthcare has opened state-of-the-art children's and adult hospitals. Even though we hope we never have to use them, Palo Alto is blessed to have a level 1 trauma center and cutting edge care and research in our backyard.

Stop for a moment: to address the novel coronavirus.

- The City of Palo Alto works closely with the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department on public health issues, including our response to the global outbreak of coronavirus.
- They are the lead agency, but our City Manager and Chief of Emergency Services are involved daily on this issue.
  - Although risk remains low, there are 11 confirmed cases of coronavirus reported in Santa Clara County at this time. There are currently no cases in Palo Alto.
  - Although the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department anticipates additional cases will be reported, we are advised that risk to the general public continues to remain low
  - We will continue to monitor any changes to Health Department reports or advice. A coronavirus webpage is now available on the City's website at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/coronavirus](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/coronavirus).
  - We ask all community members to follow healthy practices to limit the spread of flu or any other virus. Wash your hands often, avoid touching your face, and stay home if you feel ill.

PAUSD is taking similar precautionary steps.



Changing topics - something a bit more joyful. The Junior Museum and Zoo. Opening fall 2020. Donors and community volunteers play a huge role in Palo Alto. However, with the xpanded footprint and service, the museum is likely to charge a \$10 fee for entry. We're trying to cover some of our costs.



We should be rightfully proud of our schools. They are among the best, and why so many people move here to raise a family. But also concerned that our district has seen numerous years of declining enrollment in kindergarten. It's a national trend, but one I think is closely related to our housing crisis.



Speaking of which. This is the site of a future affordable housing project for teachers and district. Thank you Supervisor Simitian for spearheading this project. This is a great effort that the city council is supporting, but we need more scalable and long-term solutions. We can't subsidize and sectionalize our way out of this problem.

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# Housing Choices

Which is why I'd like the rest of my speech to focus on SB50. Just kidding.

Look: SB50 died this year again largely on worries about the loss of local zoning control. That's ok. But then the challenge is: can we in Palo Alto responsibly use our local control to positively plan and build housing for a growing and changing community?



For example A beautiful home. This could be for one family, or in this case, a multi unit building which is home for 4+ families.



And this is Stevenson house, Affordable housing for seniors in South Palo Alto. This was created with Planned community zoning - effectively, write your own zoning for a good purpose. Council has recently revived this somewhat planning tool for housing projects only. Near parks, groceries, and transportation. I think we need more housing like this.



In contrast, we have Orchard Park. It's a new residential development of 16 single family homes, selling for about \$5M each. This was previously the site of an affordable housing project with 60 units for low income seniors. The Maybell project. That would have been a better outcome in my opinion.



Palo Alto is also of course home to many beautiful neighborhoods. This is the street I grew up on. It's Bryant Street, and I learned to bike because it was safe and quiet, and had simple bollards to control car traffic. The first Bike Boulevard in the nation! In light of some of the controversy about recent bike projects, council is again going to evaluate bike projects which include simple and effective design solutions like Bryant Street.



In contrast to that beautiful neighborhood, Silicon Valley is also wracked with housing insecurity and homelessness.. RV's along El Camino. We all see them every day. And the city is now working with the county and other partners to find temporary assistance



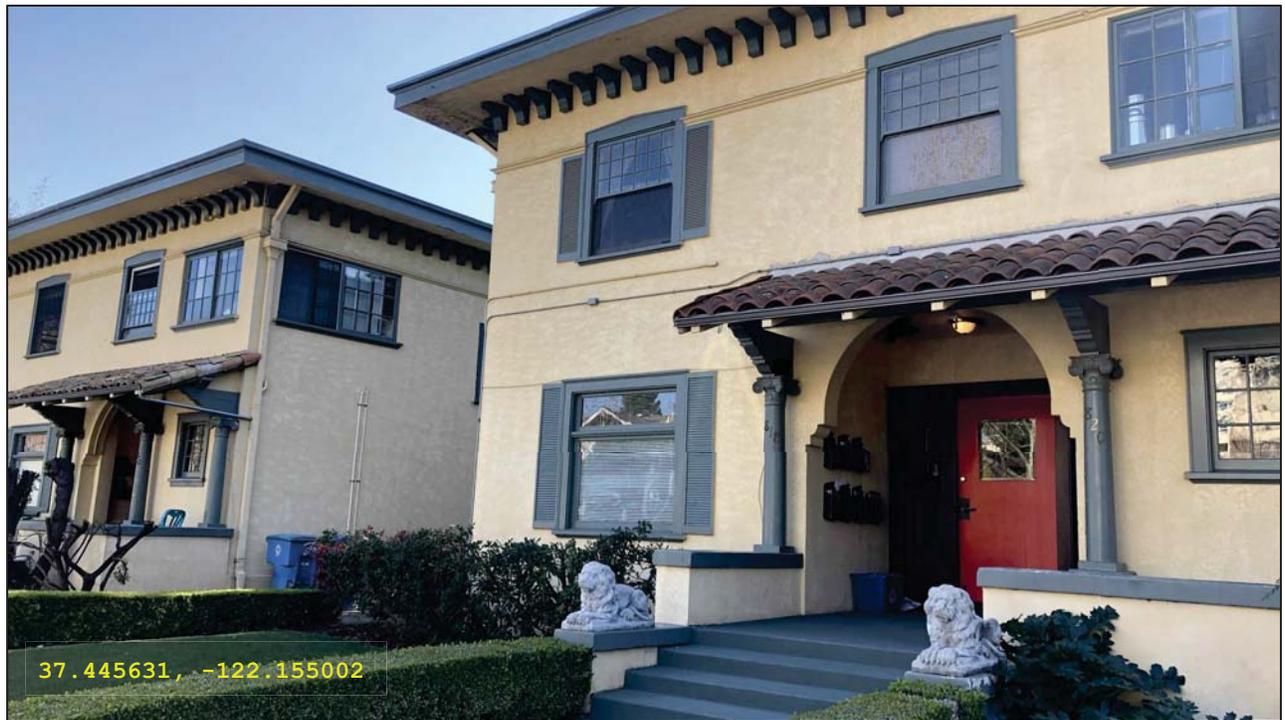
We do have many opportunities to exercise our local control and to create new neighborhoods and housing opportunities. We just have to do it. There's a community plan for North Ventura. I have serious questions whether this project will come to fruition. Put simply: do we have the will to solve this housing crisis? Or are we going to dither?



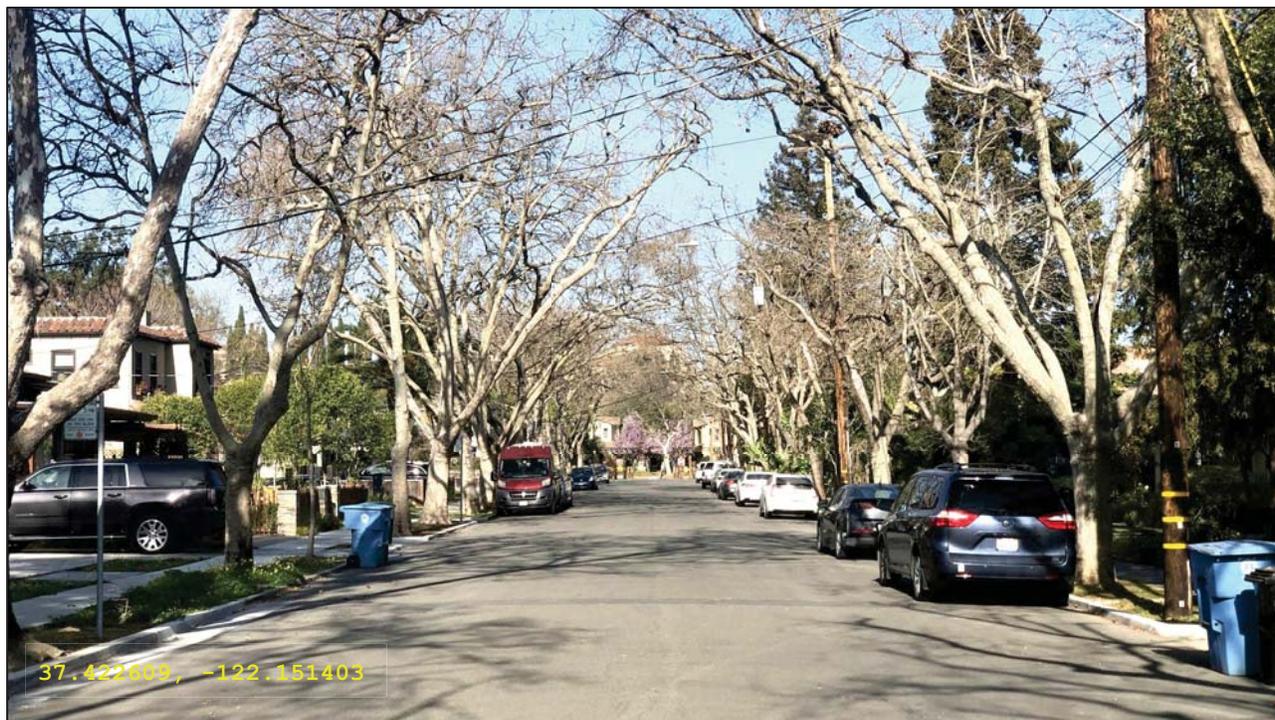
Palo Alto lost natural affordable housing at The Hotel President. There's now a contentious hotel project proposed for this building. Council will deal with that as it comes. But: I find it funny that one of the most beautiful buildings in town would be illegal to build today. Too tall, too dense, and too little parking. Why can't we do something like this again?



We've made progress in fits and start. This is a workforce housing project at Page Mill and El Camino, where 3+ years ago, council approved a 55 unit housing project. We had to create a custom zoning overlay to enable this project, and delivery of the homes is still years away. We need to streamline our processes.



And finally some older multi-family homes downtown. Right next to single family homes. I think this is great neighborhood character.



And not far from Cal Ave, another great Palo Alto Street.

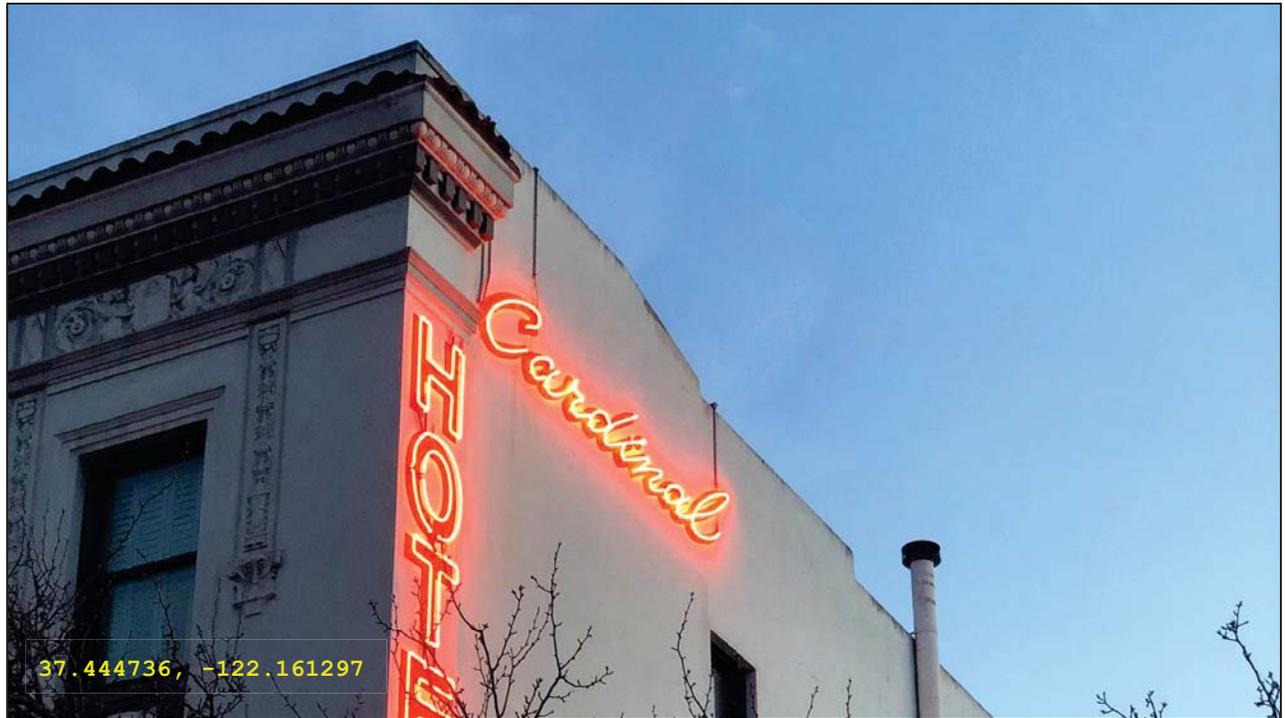
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# Business And Commerce

In Palo Alto, we speak a lot about the jobs-housing imbalance. Depending who you ask: it's 3 jobs per employed resident. I don't think that ratio tells the whole story about what jobs and business and development means in Palo Alto.



Two things I love here. First - Michaela's Flowers has been there forever. I get my wife flowers here a lot. You can also see one of Palo Alto's alleyways which cross downtown and Cal ave.



And The Cardinal Hotel. A nice landmark downtown, and with 2018's increase in the hotel tax, this business is funding projects like our new police station and bike bridge. I love the neon.



Speaking of lights - here's University Ave, heaving on a weekend night. It's pretty cool: I like seeing all the young people out and about. And over this year, I hope we explore ways to reinforce and enliven our commercial core.



But there's obviously some downside. This is Page Mill and Hanover. About 8:30am. This is our jobs-housing imbalance in a picture. Lots of people coming in to work and virtually no one leaving. This is what happens when you have a thriving economy but don't build housing. We've effectively externalized our housing demand to other communities, and the result is traffic.



At the same time, our economy isn't as strong as it once was. Stanford Research Park employees around 30,000 people, and produces tens of million in tax revenue. But vacancies are up, and some major businesses have left town.



And I'm sure you all see empty storefronts and long time businesses closing in our commercial areas. Some of it may be due to the changing nature of retail. But I also worry that Palo Alto has become overregulated and less competitive compared to other cities. With a recession on the horizon, we need to address this.



And whether you're a worker at a startup or a cafe, or going to a Sharks game. A lot of people in Palo Alto rely on Caltrain to get here. Some businesses downtown have 70% of their workers who commute by rail, bus, or bike.



And in Palo Alto we have cutting-edge technology. Certainly not a solution to traffic, but I think it's really important that we are building the future here in Palo Alto.



Finally, Palo Alto is also home to many thriving and community-oriented businesses. People love philz; it's a community gem.



Just like the nuthouse. A wonderful touchstone of a different side of Palo Alto. I love hanging out with my family and having beer and peanuts.

You may have heard that the nuthouse will potentially close if the lot is sold. So I challenge everyone here and those listening - if you have the resources and interest, please step up to help save this community gem!

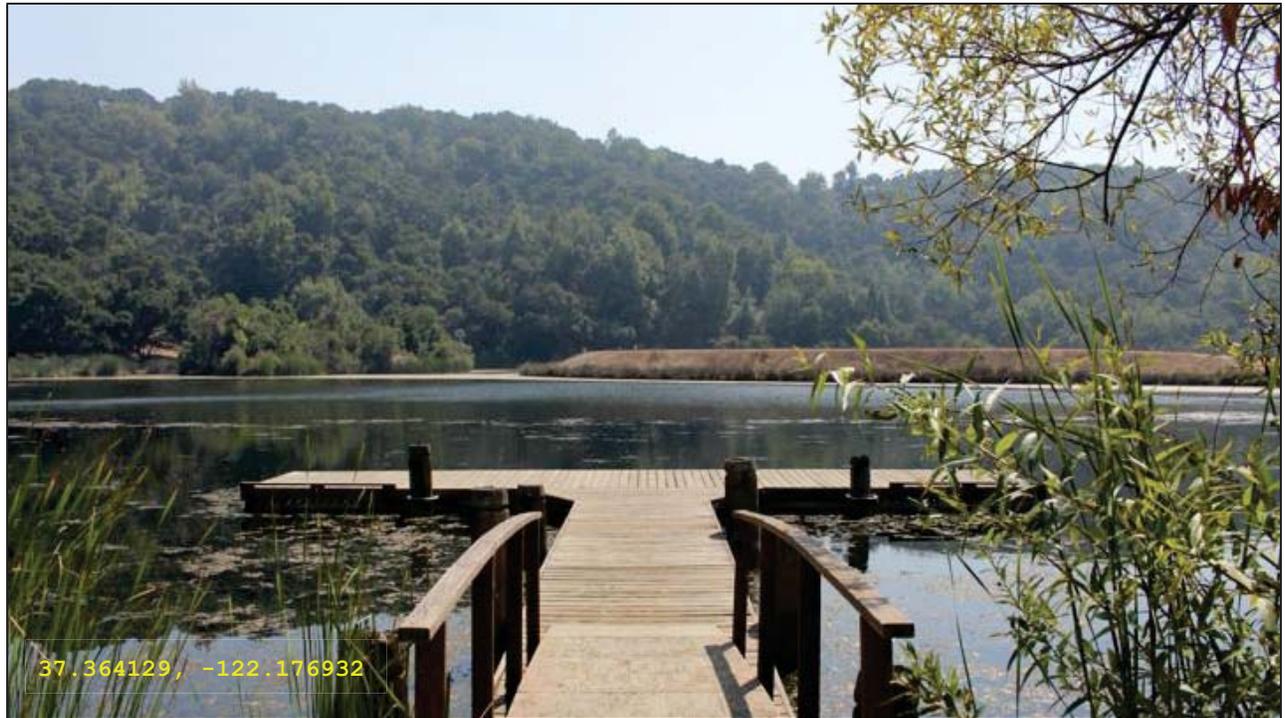
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# The Environment

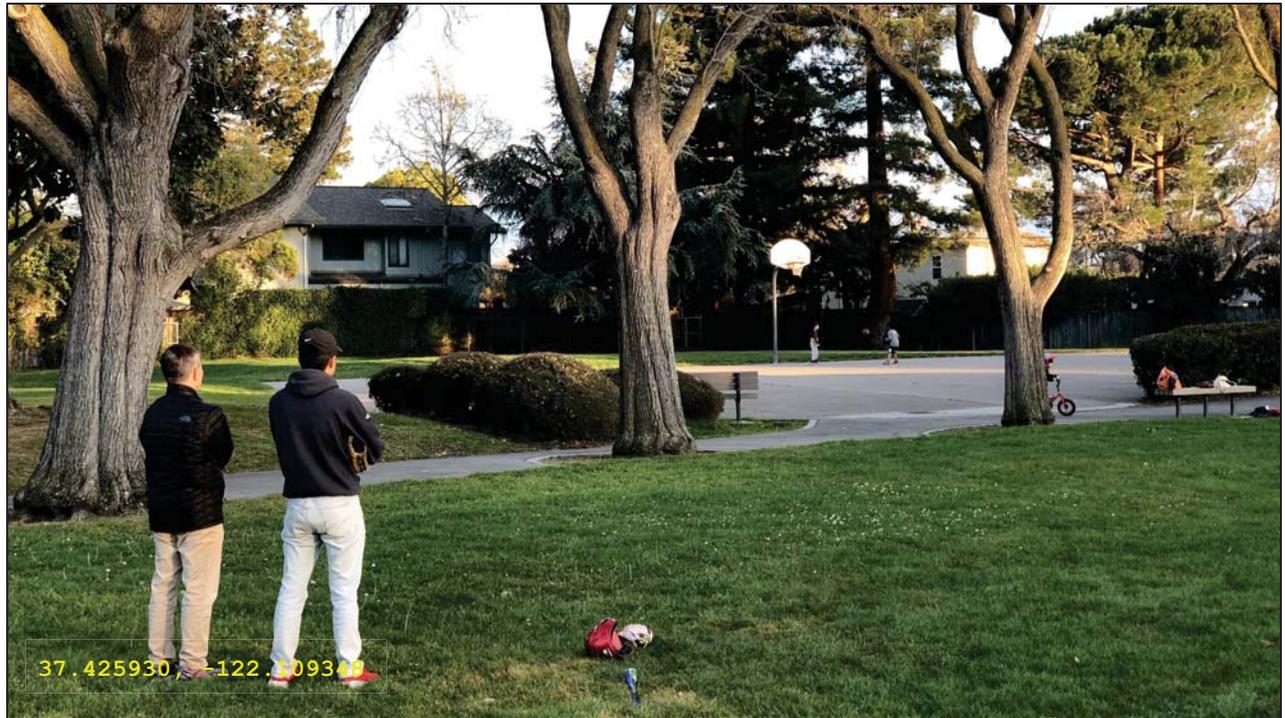
We're named after a tree. But Palo Alto offers much more than just that. It's one of the reasons we have a great quality of life. But some of it is threatened by climate change. We have to think strategically and innovate where appropriate.



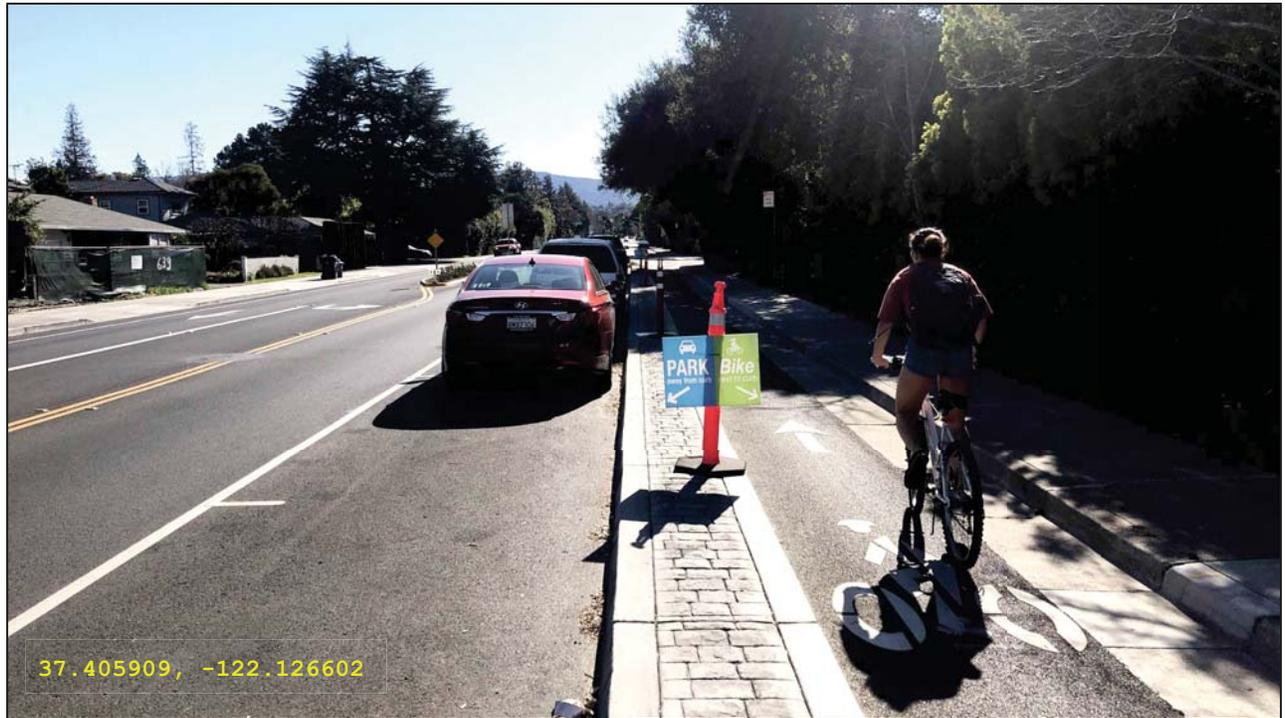
Start with our baylands. Quiet and beautiful. We're blessed that our forefathers preserved the baylands and the foothills.



The foothills. I learned to fish here. But both are under strain from a changing climate. Sea level rise on the bay, and increased fire danger in the hills. Council is studying and planning for both of these issues in 2020.



Palo Alto is home to over 4,500 acres of parks. Some are preserves like the foothills, and others are just a great place to watch your kids play basketball.



And Palo Alto kids bike! This is the new Charleston Arastradero separated bike lane.  
1: I'm happy this project is connecting so many schools and institutions. 2: our staff is really focused on increasing communications, and I hope this sign - PARK and BIKE - is clear enough.



Palo Alto residents are also making their own efforts at sustainability. Solar panels on a home. Great sustainability solution and I want to see more of this. Thanks Sam for the photo :)



37.439117, -122.111521

..and we have one of the first electric garbage trucks in North America. It's a pilot, and it's the right thing to do.



I'll end this section with Master's Grove at sunset. Just a nice place to walk.

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# Community

So we have the environment, and services, and schools, and jobs and ways to get around. But it wouldn't be that much without community: the people institutions art and culture which make this place unique.



This is the Rodin gallery at Stanford. Technically not part of Palo Alto, but this is one of my favorite places around here, and we're so lucky to have abundant arts and culture and sports around us.



A quick walk through Cubberley shows all the interesting and different community uses. On this day, I saw gymnastics, volleyball, voting, a community church, and language lessons. You'll also see some of the less-than-stellar buildings and grounds. The place needs some work.



On a personal note, My wife and I go there for the puppy lessons. They only help marginally. I guess the owners need more training.



I've always been impressed and happy that Palo Alto has a strong faith community.

A short story about this Cornerstone Community Church: A colleague at work recently asked because this property will soon be converted to housing. And his child's korean-language preschool will have to move out. They couldn't find space in Palo Alto so they're moving to Santa Clara or Redwood City.

Housing is super important for us, but so is preschool and a language school. There are hard choices for our community to make. I wonder if we can get to "yes, and" instead of "if, but"



In PA we're also blessed to have two local newspapers. For those who don't know, that's Gennady Sheyner, covers the city hall beat- you're now part of the story! The weekly and daily hold us accountable and keep the public informed. Except for those anonymous online comments.



I hope we can all find some of the fun and whimsy of Palo Alto.



And finally, this is my extended family. Well some of them. Probably the most important part about Palo Alto to me. My parents are both retired, and I'm really happy that my wife and I live across town. We get to see and hang out with them every day.

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# A City That Works For Everyone

Finally, I want to bring us all back to a city and community that works for everyone. Whether you live here, work here, volunteer here, or just travel through. I want Palo Alto to be a welcoming, inclusive, vibrant, and safe place.



The city council makes a lot of decision at city hall. Our staff and council make decisions every day on behalf of and for this community. Next week we will discuss recycling, XYZ, and XYZ.

That range of issues is the reason I've gone through all of these pictures. To remind us of the much broader community we serve and participate in.



And none of it would happen without the 1,000 plus employees at city hall. This is our pre council meeting where the vice mayor and i work with staff to plan that evening's meeting. These folks work on your behalf day in and day out.



Palo Alto is made up of non profits and neighborhoods, business and tourists. Native born and recent transplants. Students and honored seniors. The over-engaged and the under-informed.

There are so many people and places and groups and ideas I can't cover tonight... **I can never capture it all**, which is why I think it's time to hear from some other people.

Tonight, I've asked a range of community members to join us and share their perspective about Palo Alto. These people represent a diversity of views, institutions, neighborhoods, businesses and visions of Palo Alto. I hope these guests can broaden how we think about our community. Our first guest will be \_\_\_\_\_, who is \_\_\_\_\_. Welcome \_\_\_\_\_.

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Jade Chao	Resident & PTAC President
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Mike Greenfield	Resident & Entrepreneur
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Ok back to El Palo Alto. Our namesake. It's a broad and sustaining image, just like all of our speakers. We've got deep roots. And there are many details it takes a long time to understand.

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Palo Alto Mayor Adrian Fine

2nd to last slide. I promise. This is the city's logo with that namesake tree.

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**Palo Alto Mayor Adrian Fine**

But: the city now has an updated logo. And you'll see a healthier, bigger, fuller El Palo Alto. After watering and care, our namesake tree is stronger and healthier, and we had to update our logo.

I hope that is a good metaphor for the state of our city. Palo Alto is Strong, and I hope it's only getting better.

Thank you so much.