Setting Priorities for the Year

I am delighted to start 2018 as your mayor, and look forward to working alongside Vice Mayor Eric Filseth, and our other Council members on the priorities we adopted at the annual retreat on Feb. 3.

We have carried over three priorities from 2017 – Housing, Transportation and Budget and Finance and added Grade Separation to our priority list. The Council also added a special goal under Budget and Finance to focus on an infrastructure funding plan. The Finance Committee has already started this conversation at their meeting on Feb. 6. Grade Separation may be a new priority, but it is a topic the community has been talking about for a long while now. We are on a timeline to make a decision about a preferred alternative by the end of the year. That is an aggressive timeline, but securing our fair share of Measure B funds may be dependent on coming to a decision in 2018.
During our Council reorganization meeting, I shared that housing and traffic are my personal priorities, along with continuing our progress as a healthy city. Through these efforts, we were named the healthiest city in Santa Clara County last year. This is an achievement to be proud of, and I am confident that the good work on this front will continue.

**Work Plan to Spur More Housing**

At our retreat, we started an in-depth discussion of a Housing Work Plan that aims to produce more affordable and workforce housing. The proposal explores ambitious initiatives, including zoning reforms, partnerships with other agencies to help build more below-market-rate housing, as well as using the City’s affordable housing funds. Many of the ideas are the result of a memo last November from Councilmembers Adrian Fine, Cory Wolbach and myself that called for more aggressive action to address the region’s housing crisis. We spent some time at the Council’s Feb. 5 meeting talking about the Housing Work Plan and will finish our review and
recommendations at the next meeting on Feb. 12. You can read more about it here.

Digging In: First Infrastructure Project of 2018

There was a lot to celebrate on Jan. 30 during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rinconada Fire Station No. 3 replacement project. Replacement of the outdated 1948 fire station is part of the Infrastructure Plan adopted by the City Council in 2014, and marks the first project to break ground in the new year. The new station will meet current building, seismic and Americans with Disability Act standards, and the design will also attain LEED Silver Certification. Existing protected trees will be incorporated into the new civic structure, not to mention a new interactive public art feature along the Newell Road frontage. Since it's a public safety building, it only makes sense that safer pedestrian, bike and vehicle access are also part of the plans.

Planting Seeds for a Greener Future
I already shared my personal goal for Palo Alto to continue growing as a healthy city, and the annual Canopy Tree Planting and Awards Ceremony helps contribute to our Healthy City initiative. On Jan 25, I had the honor of planting my very own tree for this annual event - a cork oak tree. You can watch it grow outside the Downtown Library, and click on an interactive map here to see where all the other mayors' trees have been planted around town over the years. Palo Alto's Urban Forestry department maintains nearly 50,000 trees throughout the City, both public, private and trees in park lands. The ecological benefits of our trees include storm water mitigation, air pollutant removal and greenhouse gas sequestration.

Still to Come: State of the City
February is typically the month for the State of the City address, but we will look to do things a little differently this year and plan for the event sometime in early spring. The recent weather and flower buds on trees make it feel like spring is in the air already!

**Palo Alto Earns High Marks for Good Living**
Finally, we heard the latest numbers from the recent citizen survey that show the vast majority of those who responded feel that Palo Alto provides a great quality of life, and is an excellent place to raise a family. Sure, there are always things to improve, but even when we are talking about housing, for many of us, it’s really about building a home. The reasons that many of us chose to come to Palo Alto to raise our families haven’t changed. We shared a cup of coffee with somebody on our block, said hello to our children’s teachers and made a life here. We hope to be creative and find housing – or places to call home – for others.

Liz Kniss
Mayor