



City of Palo Alto
City Council Staff Report

(ID # 9952)

Report Type: Special Orders of the Day Meeting Date: 12/17/2018

Summary Title: James Keene Proclamation

Title: Proclamation Expressing Appreciation and Honoring City Manager James R. Keene on his Retirement

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Clerk

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Proclamation Honoring James R. Keene on his Retirement



Proclamation

EXPRESSING APPRECIATION FOR A LIFETIME OF OUTSTANDING PUBLIC SERVICE TO JAMES R. KEENE, UPON HIS RETIREMENT AS PALO ALTO CITY MANAGER

WHEREAS, after 10 years as Palo Alto City Manager and four decades of public service, James Keene is retiring from government management; and

WHEREAS, in referencing Aristotle, “*The City is a partnership for living well*,” Jim observed: “Today, more than ever before, the future of our world depends on how we live together in cities. The City confronts us with the reality that we cannot escape from each other. Our destinies as citizens are intertwined—with how our families grow, how our businesses thrive, and how we respect and care for our environment. In our time, the life of our cities will depend upon the vision, courage, and compassion we bring to creating and nurturing our own partnerships for living well,” and Jim has dedicated his life to the pursuit of these ideals; and

WHEREAS, Jim graduated magna cum laude in History from the University of Maryland and earned his M.A. in Urban Studies, and he has continued dedication to lifelong learning and mentoring as a teacher at the University of Maryland, Northern Arizona University, and in executive programs at Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Virginia; he is also a National Academy of Public Administration Fellow; and

WHEREAS, under the guidance of public policy legend, Charles Levine, Jim launched his public service career at the Bureau of Governmental Research; he continued through service in Montgomery County, Maryland in the County Executive’s Office and as a City of Rockville Budget and Management Officer; Jim later served as Deputy County Administrator for Loudoun County, Virginia, where he received the Marsha Mashaw Award for the Top Assistant in the state; he moved west in 1991 to expand his leadership and good government management as the County Manager of Coconino County, Arizona; City Manager of Berkeley, California; City Manager of Tucson, Arizona; Executive Director of the California State Association of Counties; Western Director for the International City/County Management Association (ICMA); and longtime Board Member of the Institute for Local Government; in 2016, ICMA recognized Jim’s lifetime of achievement with the coveted Mark E. Keane Award for Career Excellence; and

WHEREAS, Jim’s career of fiscal and capital infrastructure management has been exceptional: in Flagstaff, he pushed for co-location of municipal police services with the construction of a new regional jail and overcame fierce opposition to broker a legislative and tax package to fund road improvements in the Navajo Nation; in Berkeley, his success in rebuilding the city hall, fire stations and libraries, as well as the construction of a new essential services public safety building, led the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2000 to name Berkeley the Community of the Year; and in the City of Palo Alto, Jim successfully led the City through and out of difficult years in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008; he oversaw the renovation of city hall, fire stations, all five libraries as well as the design and construction of the LEED-platinum-certified Mitchell Park Community Center, the California Avenue Streetscape, the San Francisquito Creek flood control project, and the complete renovation of the Baylands Golf Links; Jim secured the passage of new transient occupancy taxes to fund a new public safety building and other infrastructure projects, renegotiated the Stanford fire agreement, and restructured intractable employee pension costs; all while repeatedly maintaining a AAA bond rating for the City; and

WHEREAS, Jim’s lifelong commitment to a sustainable environment has culminated in noteworthy achievements of Palo Alto under his vision, including the City of Palo Alto Utilities being the first in the world to achieve 100 percent carbon neutral electricity in 2013 and 100 percent carbon neutral natural gas in 2017 and establishing Palo Alto as one of the first cities to adopt a comprehensive Climate Action Plan, earning Palo Alto its distinction as the first city to receive a Platinum Level Beacon Award for leadership in addressing climate change; under Jim’s leadership, Palo Alto initiated the Baylands Comprehensive Conservation Plan and completed capital improvements to the Baylands Nature Interpretive Center and Boardwalk; and Jim championed adoption of the Palo Alto Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan to support Palo Alto’s status as the 3rd highest bicycle commuting city nationwide; and

WHEREAS, Jim is a national leader in open government and innovation: he has served as a longtime regional leader on the Board of Directors for Joint Venture: Silicon Valley and as a Board Member and President of the Alliance for Innovation; his leadership has established the City of Palo Alto’s reputation as a Smart City by becoming an early adopter of government mobility apps and a trailblazer in open data; Jim created the City Innovation Team, sponsored hackathons, evangelized design thinking, and hired and led the kind of managers who are nationally recognized as innovation leaders in their own respective fields; and Jim earned the recognition of Government Technology Magazine as one of the 25 Doers, Dreamers and Drivers for 2017; and

WHEREAS, working with Neighbors Abroad, Jim’s international civic leadership has strengthened Palo Alto’s Sister City relationships with Oaxaca, Mexico; Linkoping, Sweden; Enschede, The Netherlands; Palo, Philippines, and Albi, France; and he expanded the program to include Tsuchiura, Japan; Heidelberg, Germany; and the Yangpu District of Shanghai, China; and

WHEREAS, as a government executive, Jim has dedicated his servant-leader philosophy not only to the communities he serves but to the employees he leads: he was a pioneer in the emergent employee empowerment movement and the creation of high-performing cross functional work teams and employee town hall meetings to improve organizational culture; in Palo Alto, Jim oversaw the redesign of an inspiring new employee orientation program and championed the expansion of gender-neutral parental leave benefits; throughout his career, Jim has served as an inspirational mentor to employees at all levels, consistently injecting levity into his professionalism and modeling sincere respect for everyone with whom he interacts; and

WHEREAS, Jim’s public service is rooted in civic engagement and community building: in Flagstaff, Jim advocated for interjurisdictional collaboration to rewrite Flagstaff’s General Plan; in Berkeley, he restructured city services with a focus on neighborhoods, helped establish the Berkeley Arts District, and fought for inclusivity with the Sea Scouts, resulting in a Supreme Court decision that affirmed LGBTQ protections throughout the State of California; and in Palo Alto, Jim established a 1% set-aside for public art, helped protect the Buena Vista Mobile Home Park, negotiated a multi-million dollar community benefit fund as part of the \$4.5 billion Stanford Hospital and Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital Project and championed the Know Your Neighbors and Cool Block programs to promote neighborhood cohesion, and earned Palo Alto the ranking of Number 1 most livable city; and

WHEREAS, Jim’s iconic reputation as a philosopher leader has established his status as a frequently sought-after public speaker, inspiring poet and bodhisattva, sharing guidance on the importance of a connected local community and the courage to demonstrate compassion; and

WHEREAS, Jim’s career and the countless benefits to the communities he has served have been sustained by the patience, love and support of his wife, Iris, as well as that of his daughter, Jamie, and his son, Josh, both of whom are accomplished community service providers themselves; and

WHEREAS, Jim Keene’s motto for the work of public service aligns with the words of the late poet Langston Hughes: “*I play it cool/I dig all jive/That’s the reason/I stay alive/My motto/As I live and learn/Is dig and be dug in return*” and we do, indeed, dig you Jim.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Liz Kniss, Mayor of the City of Palo Alto on behalf of the entire City Council do hereby commend Jim’s outstanding public service and gratefully records both its appreciation, and the appreciation of City employees, and the members of the Palo Alto community, for his meritorious service and leadership as City Manager of Palo Alto and throughout his distinguished career, and wish him many joyful days, success, and fulfillment in the future.

Presented: December 17, 2018

SIGNED:

Liz Kniss, Mayor