

2018 Cupertino City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Silicon Valley at Home (SV@Home) is an affordable housing policy and advocacy organization working to ensure housing affordability for all who work and live in Silicon Valley. As a candidate running for office, we invite you to participate in a survey regarding affordable housing. Responses to this survey will be shared widely with community members, and SV@Home members and partner agencies.

Please complete the survey by September 7th, 2018

Email address *

Candidate name

Liang Chao

A. What are your housing priorities?

Quality affordable (below-market-rate) housing for families, seniors and people with disabilities

B. To date, Cupertino has failed to meet any of its state mandated housing goals. Earlier this year, the Legislature considered a proposal to allow higher default densities around transit corridors in an effort to create more opportunities for housing and affordable housing across our neighborhoods. Do you support or oppose this type of state intervention around the housing crisis?

With 1002 units in RHNA allocation, Cupertino has approved over 800 housing units within the first 2 years of its 8-year Housing Element Cycle. Three projects with 600 more units and 188 units and 19 BMR senior units were approved with little resistance from the community. Unfortunately, the City did not foresee that SB 35 would only count permits pulled towards RHNA, not units approved. Had the City known, the City could have given a much shorter timeline for project approval, instead of a period 10 years.

In addition, the Housing Element submitted by the City of Cupertino in 2015 did not make a plan to identify sites specifically for BMR housing, per HCD comment. The City does require a higher BMR percentage of 15%, than the 10% state requirement. However, that's not enough. San Francisco requires a higher amount 20% and their city were able to get 40% BMR for some projects.

Another obstacle towards BMR housing is funding. The City needs to increase the mitigation fees for office development, since rapid office growth is the root cause of rising housing price in a housing shortage.

The legislature to allow high density near transit stops is SB 827, which was opposed by a long list of affordable housing groups because the bill will create incentives to replace existing affordable units with highly-priced market-rate units. SB 827 did not provide sufficient protection for the vulnerable population who depend on affordable housing near transit. It is well known that LA has been building transit-oriented development, but it has resulted in 15% drop in transit ridership in recent years because these new market-rate developments pushed out the low-income population who did take transit. SB 827 did not get the support of many many affordable housing groups who are truly concerned about building BMR housing, not just market-rate housing.

C. Do you support and will you advocate for Measure-A funded projects in your jurisdiction? If yes, how will you work with your community to ensure support and acceptance of supportive housing for the homeless and families earning less than \$30,000 a year?

"Through the assistance of Santa Clara County Measure A funds, six units will be reserved as permanent supportive housing units for homeless seniors with disabling conditions. The Veranda is one of the first developments to take advantage of Measure A funding." (<https://www.cupertino.org/home/showdocument?id=19639>)

Cupertino already has one Measure-A funded project. The community has been supportive of the Veranda. I went to the opening ceremony. I spoke in length to the Director of Housing Development of Charties Housing, Kathy Robinson, who brought us Veranda. I hope to see more of such quality affordable housing projects in Cupertino.

D. How many homes do you think are appropriate as part of the Vallco Specific Plan? How many of these homes should be affordable to lower-income households? And how many of them should be affordable to moderate-income households?

I believe in inclusionary BMR housing with units that are comparable in quality and size as market-rate housing. And Cupertino already have adopted Affordable Housing Manual with such policies. I believe projects that qualify for density bonus should not be allowed to take exceptions on the quality and size of BMR housing, as the Vallco SB 35 application has done.

The Vallco SB 35 application is supposed to provide 50% BMR housing, but all 1200 units provided are tiny studios and one-bedrooms, much smaller than the market-rate units provided in the project. These BMR units are not comparable in quality or size. As a result of these exceptions, only 5% (0.5 million square feet) of the entire project (10 million square feet above ground) is dedicated for BMR housing. The property owner also requested parcelization so that these BMR units will likely be isolated from the rest of the residential development.

In my opinion, any provision for BMR housing should be based on a minimum requirement of the total square footage, not just on the number of units. For example, at least 30% of the total square footage should be for BMR housing, not just 50% of the units. This would encourage larger 2/3/4-bedroom BMR units suitable for families and people who need caretakers, the segment of the population who need BMR housing the most.

The City should also set a requirement on the different income levels of BMR housing so that the spread of BMR housing from RHNA could be provided for. The City should also consider adding a category of Extremely Low Income.

I believe in following the law, in this case, the General Plan process. Vallco Specific Plan should comply with the General Plan. If there is a need to modify the General Plan, the City should follow the state-mandated process to engage with the residents to amend the General Plan. I believe in grassroots democracy where we inform, engage and empower the residents.

How many homes are appropriate? It should be determined by a true community-drive process. Not one that's hi-jacked by outside forces who have their own agenda. In this day and age, with all the communication tools available, there is no excuse to not inform, engage and empower the residents.

I do not believe in piece-meal planning. Any zoning decision should take into account of overall city planning, not piece-meal project by project. When we make good planning decisions and approve good projects, the community will want more of these good projects. When we force feed the community with poorly designed projects, the community will resist. Sustainable growth is also healthy and balanced growth so that the infrastructure could be enhanced with growth.

To solve any problem, we should address the root cause, not just putting on band-aid. The rapid office growth and the lack of transit to connect job centers with more affordable areas are the root cause of the problem we see. Blindly building more housing in already congested and already highly priced area would not solve the problem, when the growth of office space continues to outpace the normal rate of housing & infrastructure growth. Santa Clara County has over 21 million square feet of office space in the pipeline, already approved, but not yet built. There has been a 20% vacancy rate. Should we continue to add millions of office space at Vallco to add significant more demands for housing and significant more commute traffic.

I believe in evidence-based decision making. The evidence shows that people tend to live in the same community, while their job location changes frequently. When the evidence shows that only about 5% people live within walking distance of their jobs, building housing next to jobs would simply not reduce traffic. The key issue for Vallco Specific Plan is how much office space will be included and how many more people will commute to Cupertino on top of the already congested traffic. Trying to avoid the big elephant in the room and only talk about housing is not a good attitude in problem solving.

E. Do you support amending the zoning code to allow additional multi-family and mixed-use zones in Cupertino? If so, where do you think these uses are appropriate?

Almost every site along Stevens Creeks Blvd is already zoned for mixed use with residential use. Almost every site along De Anza Blvd. is already zoned for mixed use, with residential use for west of De Anza Blvd. However, there is only one site that's zoned for Regional Shopping/Commercial General. That's the Vallco Shopping Mall site. Cupertino area residents now drive to the Great Mall, Westridge and other regional malls to shop. Having a truly revitalized shopping area at Vallco will reduce these long trips in the congested traffic significantly. Therefore, having local shopping destination would reduce the overall greenhouse gas emission.

The commute traffic account for only 20% of all daily trips. The other 80% of trips are for other errands, doctors' visits, school trips and other trips for business dealings. People don't just go directly from home to work and back. Therefore, healthy city planning provide healthy retail, entertainment, fitness and dining opportunites, instead of forcing residents to go out-of-town for daily needs.

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