

Palo Alto Matters Vote Tracker 2017-18: Narrow or Controversial City Council Votes

Despite a fair amount of agreement over the past two years, especially around finance, sustainability, and transportation improvements, city council members have often struck a divisive tone, sharply at odds on major process and policy issues. Not surprisingly, those same issues often drive discord in the community. We've done our best below to compile the narrow or controversial votes of the past two years showing where our three incumbent candidates stood. We've also included links to news coverage and editorials to offer some context to the controversies (note: you might have to copy/paste the headline into your browser). The policies below were all adopted on 5 to 4 votes unless otherwise noted.

Visit www.paloaltomatters.org for more voter resources and all our 2017-18 coverage of local issues!

| Date | Policy (mover/second) | Tom DuBois | Eric Filseth | Cory Wolbach | Related News Coverage and Editorials |
|---------|---|------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| 1/30/17 | Sideline community input: Approved surprise motion to remove every Land Use Program recommended by the Citizens' Advisory Committee from the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan. (Wolbach/Fine) | X | X | ✓ | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/02/17/committee-members-slam-council-for-paring-down-comprehensive-plan https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/02/03/editorial-a-reckless-majority |
| | Follow-up 3/20/17: Restored implementation programs to the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan. (Wolbach/DuBois) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | https://paloaltomatters.org/facing-sustained-public-outcry-council-reverses-course-on-comprehensive-plan/ |
| 1/30/17 | Remove downtown office cap: Eliminated cumulative downtown office cap from Comprehensive Plan. (Wolbach/Scharff) | X | X | ✓ | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/07/26/push-to-scrap-downtown-cap-meets-resistance?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles |
| 1/30/17 | City-wide office cap: Set citywide cumulative office/R&D cap at 1.7 million new square feet of development (exempting Stanford Medical Center) (Wolbach/Scharff) | X | X | ✓ | |
| 1/30/17 | Allow flexibility in pacing of office growth: Removed annual limit on office/R&D development from the Comprehensive Plan. (Wolbach/Scharff) | X | X | ✓ | |

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|---------|--|---|---|---|--|
| 1/30/17 | Increase allowable hotel size: Approved Comp Plan program to explore increasing allowable hotel floor area ratio (FAR) from 2.0 to 3.0 downtown and up to 2.5 in other areas. [FAR controls how big a building is relative to lot size] (Scharff/Tanaka) Passed on 5-3-1 vote. |  | abstain |  | |
| 1/30/17 | Preserve neighborhood character: Restored policy L-6 about preserving neighborhood character in Comprehensive Plan. (Holman/Filseth) Passed 5-2-2 vote. |  |  |  | |
| 3/7/17 | ADU expansion: Approved surprise motion to exceed state requirements and staff recommendations to encourage more Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). (Wolbach/Fine) Passed on 6-2-1 vote. |  |  |  | https://paloaltomatters.org/hundreds-protest-bait-and-switch-tactics-behind-citys-new-granny-unit-policy/#more-1600 |
| | Follow-up 4/17/17: March 2017 ADU ordinance revisited with public comment and additional staff analysis - amended and approved on a 7-2 vote. |  |  |  | |
| 3/27/17 | Reduce developer contributions to affordable housing: Reduced below-market-rate housing impact fees for commercial development. (Fine/Wolbach) [The fee schedule approved in December 2016 would have charged office/R&D projects \$60/square foot. This change set the fee at \$35/sf. Hotel impact fees also reduced here from \$30/sf to \$20.37/sf.] |  |  |  | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/03/28/palo-alto-changes-course-on-housing-fees |
| 5/1/17 | Encourage start-ups in neighborhoods: Allow commercial use in residential (R1) neighborhoods to encourage start-ups. Tanaka/Fine motion failed 3-6. |  |  |  | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/05/05/editorial-a-council-adrift https://paloaltomatters.org/young-guns-out-of-step-with-community-swap-housing-for-start-ups/ |

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|----------|--|------------|--------------|--------------|---|
| 5/1/17 | <p>Loosen land use compatibility rules: Rejected motion (Filseth/Kou) to restore Comprehensive Plan policy to “avoid land uses that are overwhelming and unacceptable due to their size and scale.”</p> | X | X | ✓ | |
| 9/5/17 | <p>Loosen annual office limit (pacing of growth): Allowed unused square footage under the 50,000 square foot annual office/R&D limit (applies in downtown, Cal. Ave. and El Camino commercial areas) to roll over to subsequent year. (Scharff)</p> <p>Eliminated competitive quality review (projects that score highest on factors including sustainable design, mitigation of traffic impacts and public benefits such as affordable housing) for new office/R&D development under the annual limit. Instead approve on a first come, first served basis. (Kniss/Fine)</p> | X | X | ✓ | <p>https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/09/01/palo-alto-mulls-changes-to-annual-office-limit</p> <p>https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/09/08/editorial-the-shriving-cap</p> |
| | <p>Follow-up 4/30/18: Made Annual Office Limit (in monitored areas) permanent, incorporating changes approved in September 2017 (allowing roll-over to subsequent year and eliminating competitive quality review). (Scharff/Wolbach)</p> <p>Also required that the limit be revisited in two to four years. (Kniss)</p> | X | X | ✓ | <p>https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/05/01/palo-alto-approves-permanent-office-cap</p> <p>https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/04/27/editorial-hold-firm-on-office-cap</p> |
| 10/16/17 | <p>Study renter protections: Advance Colleagues’ Memo by DuBois, Holman and Kou seeking exploration of a wide range of potential new renter protection policies.</p> <p>Motion to advance the Memo failed 3-6 before a full and divided council audience.</p> | ✓ | X | X | <p>https://paloaltoonline.com/news/2017/10/17/citizens-clash-over-palo-alto-rent-protections</p> <p>https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/09/14/editorial-unprecedented-obfuscation?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles</p> |

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| | <p>Follow-up 9/10/18: Advance new Colleagues' Memo, (DuBois/Holman/Kou/Wolbach), to explore modest policies including mediation, relocation assistance, and one-year lease enforcement, but add discussion of just cause eviction and rent stabilization options.</p> <p>Dubois/Holman motion failed 4-4.</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | |
| | <p>Follow-up 9/10/18: Advanced Colleagues' Memo, (DuBois/Holman/Kou/Wolbach), to explore modest renter protections. Passed 7-1.</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/09/11/temper-flare-over-renter-protections |
| 11/6/17 | <p>Add short-term rentals and empty homes to housing work plan: Include exploration of a stronger short term rental ordinance and means to minimize empty houses to the housing work plan.</p> <p>DuBois/Holman motion failed 4-5.</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | |
| 6/11/18 | <p>Resist initiative to control office growth: Rejected motion to put citizens' initiative to reduce allowable office growth on the November ballot. Instead, commissioned study of impacts (in consultation with Stanford, non-profits, and business community) despite existing analysis, and appointed unnamed ad hoc council committee to prepare competing measure. (Scharff/Fine)</p> | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/07/26/study-ponders-impact-of-curbing-palo-alto-office-growth?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/06/22/editorial-our-incivility-contagion |
| | <p>Follow up 7/30/18: Adopted citizens' initiative to reduce cumulative allowable office/R&D growth through 2030 as a city ordinance. (Kou/Holman)</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/07/30/palo-alto-tightens-the-limit-on-office-development?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles https://www.paloaltoonline.com/news/2018/08/03/editorial-averting-an-unneeded-election?utm_campaign=magnet&utm_source=article_page&utm_medium=related_articles |