



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOLA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

Mind Your Manners

Los Altos isn't Washington DC—and the political norms that now permeate our nation's capital should not find their way to our small town. But the distortions of the truth, half-truths and misrepresentations that have hijacked our current City Council election would make even the most seasoned politicians shake their heads in disbelief. We never claimed that politics was for the faint of heart. But we also don't think that local politics should either exhibit or tolerate that kind of behavior by candidates or their supporters. Reducing complex issues to 4-word soundbites does not serve the public well and also does not speak well of those who do so. And what started as misrepresentations and distortions have now reached a crescendo, and from our point a view, a breaking point. It simply has to stop. And voters need to ignore what is being thrown around as “truth”; it ain't.

Los Altos Residents Association interviewed Mayor Enander to discuss many of the allegations which have been made against her. You can hear her responses in the short video “Anita Enander sets the record straight”. The link to the video is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReFU7xjfv00>

We don't believe calling people outright liars (Miss Manners says we shouldn't, so we won't), but we're starting to get the impression that it certainly appears to be the case. Who is distorting the truth? Candidate Pete Dailey, his supporters, and notable members of Los Altos Community Voices (LACV), a group consisting of Robin Abrams, Kim Cranston (downtown property owner but NOT a Los Altos resident), Marie Young, Bill Sheppard (a commercial real estate developer), and several others, including a few prior Mayors. And while we have respect for former City Council members (three are on our Board of Directors) we know their judgement isn't infallible.

Case in point—that same group of former Council members (affectionately known as “the Gang of Seven”) chastised the City Council in September 2019 regarding the micromanaging of the then City Manager Chris Jordan. Because, in the opinion of the Gang of Seven, he was doing a good job and the Council's micromanaging was getting in his way.

That is the very same Chris Jordan whose management of the City nearly brought Los Altos to the brink of failure, both financially as well by losing competent City staff, all the while retaining those less competent. The new City Manager, Gabe Engeland, who replaced Jordan, has since been spending his time righting the ship and cleaning up the mess that Jordan left. But we digress.

We do believe that pointing out the differences between candidates is important—we did that in our most recent article “Happy Days are Here Again”. If you didn't read it, follow this link for a PDF copy:

https://friendsoflosaltos.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Happy_Days_Are_Here_Again.pdf.

And we also certainly understand that voters will choose their preferred candidate based upon their own values and preference. But the *Town Crier* and your mailbox are getting filled with fliers, advertisements and articles from individuals and groups who are intentionally distorting the truth. They have an agenda—and that agenda is to intentionally stuff the Council with those who want to support their particular special interests. We believe it's important to ensure residents' voices and interests are not overwhelmed and drowned out by developers and those with special interests.

So what are some of the distortions and misrepresentations?

We talked about a number of the misleading or outright false statements made against Mayor Enander in our last article. Since then, additional false statements have been made. We will deconstruct a few of them but do encourage you to watch the Los Altos Residents Association video for additional insights.

- *Enander disrespects both City staff, City-hired experts and citizen Commissions which has led to turnover and low morale.*

Absolutely not true.

Enander has worked closely with both the City Manager and City staff and has a great working relationship with them. Asking questions of staff and outside experts during Council meetings is what the City Council members are supposed to be doing. In fact, that's what we elected them to do. We have seen too many cases of at least one Council member, when design review guidelines came up, not asking questions because by his own assertion he didn't know enough to ask questions. The turnover among City staff is largely a function of the sub-par compensation and work conditions that were in place when Chris Jordan was City Manager.

The Council appoints citizens Commissions to provide recommendations, but we elect Council members to consider those recommendations and make the final decisions – not to blindly follow each recommendation. If the majority of the Council appoints extremists to citizen Commissions who don't represent community values, as they recently did by appointing Joe Beninato to the Planning Commission, it is not disrespectful to not blindly follow a commission's recommendation.

Understand how Council really works

We really don't want to tackle each and every distortion of the truth. But we do want residents to understand how these “half-truths” come about. First it is important to understand that often on a single issue, there are multiple votes by Council. Case in point:

- *LACV claims Enander voted against parklets and the Community Center.*

Not true

There were three different proposals for the restaurant parklet on City parking spaces downtown which City Council voted on. The first did not pass, although Enander voted in favor of it. The second did pass but Enander did not vote for that one because it would have allowed the parklet program to continue permanently without any subsequent review. The third proposal was passed unanimously since it amended the second proposal by requiring

the program to be reviewed by Council after a year. Clearly, she was in favor of the program, but had concerns about how it would be implemented and reviewed.

Enander did vote against accepting a single bid for the construction of the Community Center, even though she did vote months earlier for its construction funding. Again, she was against the acceptance of just a single bidder, a wise approach. Indeed, the project was far more expensive than anticipated and continues as a large debt for the City.

There are other examples of when a Council member votes against something, it may not represent a vote against the issue/item per se, but a vote against the specific proposal.

Case in point:

- *LACV and Pete Dailey claim Enander does not believe human activities are the cause for global warming.*

Not true

Enander voted against the climate action plan because it proposed administrative mechanisms and an oversight administration that were financially unsupportable. In addition, it required an undue burden on residents to replace all gas furnaces and water heaters with those powered electrically. On the other hand, Pete Dailey wants the City to employ numerous additional employees focused on imposing global warming new requirements in Los Altos, to be funded by fees from allowing additional high-rise developments.

Furthermore,

- *LACV claims Enander voted against a project described in the downtown vision plan.*

Completely deceptive

What the group is referring to is the proposal for a downtown theater, which most of the members of LACV support. In fact, the downtown theater has been a pet project of a number of LACV members going back several years. However, there was no specific vote on the theater project—it was not called out as a single line item.

In fact, the proposal Enander voted against was for spending \$38K of park rehabilitation money on a private project which had been originally sanctioned by Council with the stipulation that no City money would be spent on determining the feasibility of such a project. We consider it irresponsible for Council members Fligor, Meadows and Weinberg to have authorized that spending of park money when the needs of so many park facilities languish for lack of funding.

How can you tell when someone is bending the truth?

Psychologists have made a living by providing advice on how to tell when someone is bending the truth. We're not psychologists, but we do have a simple rule of thumb for these kinds of situations. When we find that a person or a group is spreading multiple serial distortions, it becomes almost impossible to separate out what might be real and what is a misrepresentation, and our rule of thumb states that in those circumstances you can't really trust anything they're saying.

During the current City Council campaign, we have caught LACV and Pete Dailey in numerous deceptions, misstatements, and half-truths about Anita Enander and her performance while on City Council. Our suggestion would be that If Daily and LACV believe Dailey is so much better qualified a candidate than Mayor Enander, Daily and LACV should spend their advertising dollars talking about their candidate's superior qualifications rather than engaging in spreading incorrect and deceptive information about the competition.

We're only a few of the nearly 20 thousand voters in Los Altos, but we resent (and you should too) a small group of perhaps 20 residents trying to control the messaging about candidates and unduly influencing votes by misrepresenting facts, cherry picking information, and providing half-truths in order to lead voters to erroneous conclusions about a candidate and whom to vote for.

We can only strongly suggest that as responsible, informed citizens you to do three things:

1. Ignore the people and organizations who are taking the low road and smearing candidates
2. Become informed about where the three candidates really stand on the issues
3. VOTE

And that is the way we see it.

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