



## **Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOLA)**

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

### **Our Early Holiday Gift...**

The kids are back in school. Autumn is upon us, stores are filled with Halloween costumes, and Christmas decorations and holiday gifts will soon fill shelves.

Autumn also means that election season is upon us, and the promises and lies of campaigning politicians will become even more prominent at the federal, state, and, yes, even local levels. We don't want to wade into that morass but instead will provide our list of hopes for the next Los Altos City Council which we be seated in early December. Sort of an early holiday present, as it were.

So, what do we hope and wish for our community of Los Altos?

1. We hope the elected Council members will, going forward, represent the entire Los Altos community, not simply their own personal views or the views of the residents who elected them. We have a diverse community, and all voices and perspectives need to be listened to and those ideas need to be incorporated into the policies adopted by the City Council.
2. The City needs more fiscal discipline and less tilting at windmills. The plan to maintain our roads has been subtly abandoned, and the ensuing potholes are the result. Replacing the antiquated police station may not be as sexy as a downtown park or performing arts center, but public safety depends upon our police having facilities that don't flood during heavy rainstorms and aren't overcrowded.
3. Bicycling and walking are great alternatives to taking cars, but they aren't a silver bullet. A wise City Council will realize that the continued effort to make all our streets bicycle friendly is just inviting more accidents. This is particularly a concern on high traffic roads with many road cuts. We worry about the plans to put cycling lanes on El Camino where the biggest danger isn't cars running into cyclists, but cyclists being hit by cars turning into driveways and into intersections, something protected bike lanes will only worsen. Ditto for the nascent plans to narrow San Antonio Road. As they say, plans for both are accidents waiting to happen.
4. The new City Council should add more diverse perspectives to our commissions and give commissions more voice in what happens in town. In the past, commission members represented a diversity of viewpoints. Our most recent Council has drifted away from that approach. As commissions have been a traditional path to Council candidates, we broaden the pool of candidates by making this change.

5. As the new Council evaluates proposals for housing on Plazas 7 and 8 (and 1 and 2), we hope Council members will think long and hard about the cost and practicality of consolidating parking under the proposed downtown park (and paid for by the City, not the developer), as at least one Council member appears inclined to favor. We have a very small downtown with limited means of getting into and out of town. The current geographic dispersion of parking plazas helps avoid traffic and circulation issues. As many know, we already have backups at Foothill Expressway and San Antonio Road during the evening commute. Consolidating much of the downtown parking only exacerbates the problem, not to mention the very high cost of construction and inconvenience as more levels of underground parking are added.
6. The City Council, to their credit, is acting responsibly to address the threatened lawsuit which alleges racial discrimination in the way Council members are elected. However, district voting in a small, already diverse city such as Los Altos, is likely to produce elections where there are fewer candidates to choose among for each district election. While we realize that rank-choice voting has its downside, that downside is less than if we were to have only one candidate (or none) running for a vacant seat. We hope the Council will work with concerned residents to fully explore rank-choice voting which can once again bring general elections back to our community. We are surprised and disappointed to learn that some candidates and sitting Council members are not inclined to work toward restoring general elections.
7. Our design review guidelines, which were revised several years ago to meet the State-mandated objective standards, need to be updated. We have enough projects along First Street and El Camino to see what is working and what isn't. Ditto for residential guidelines which were hastily drafted to address a deadline. Cities such as Palo Alto provide good examples of how to meet the requirements while still tailoring them to different types of neighborhoods. Los Altos should see what Palo Alto (for example) has done and add or modify as necessary for our requirements.
8. Historic preservation isn't a four-letter word, yet there has been little effort to better preserve important City landmarks including Halsey House and not enough work to ensure the preservation of historic homes. We would welcome a Council that helps to craft incentives for those who preserve houses, not put further roadblocks to those efforts. Our current City Council has made the task harder by increasing fees for historic home which require renovations.
9. We hope the tone of Council meetings will become more civil, especially in how Council members address each other and consider alternative points of view from fellow Council members and the public. We have been sorely disappointed by Council members being dismissive of their colleague on the dais and making unproven (and in most cases false) accusations of residents. The community deserves better behavior from those who are supposed to be leaders and who should set a good example.

While it is nice to put the wish list together, the real work is in making it happen. We encourage you to ask the tough questions of the candidates running for office and focus on the ones who will really address the important issues, not simply the popular ones.

And that is the way we see it.

Friends of Los Altos – Board of Directors

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