

MARGARET ABE-KOGA QUESTIONNAIRE

Downtown Offices and First Floor Retail; Castro Street Businesses

Healthy cities need great public places. Castro Street is like our city's living room where Mountain View residents get together with family and friends, meet neighbors and celebrate as a community. In the wake of COVID-19, public gathering and dining spaces like Castro Street are more important than ever as we ask what will our city look like when we are past this crisis. Offices on the first floor of Castro Street create dead zones where there is no reason to stop and engage, offer blank lobbies or desks and create dark, blank spaces at night. Dead zones negatively impact neighboring restaurants and retail because pedestrians want spaces that feel safer, are more lively and offer more reasons to visit.

- *If elected to the City Council would you vote to continue to support policies and decisions that restrict the ground floor of Castro Street buildings to restaurant and retail only and not allow offices, office lobbies and office cafeterias?*

Yes, I have always supported requiring first floor use to be retail/restaurant to provide a pedestrian friendly environment. An example counter to this concept is the office building on the corner of Castro and Church Streets. Because my residence is within 500 sq feet of the building, I was not able to participate in the vote on a request for a waiver to the first floor retail requirement. The Council majority voted to allow the waiver, and the occupants use the first floor as a cafeteria for their employees. It is a source of disappointment each time I pass by the building and see company employees enjoying meals that the rest of the community is unable to partake in, and recently, I more often see the blinds drawn down. These practices certainly do not help to activate the sidewalks for pedestrians.

- ***What would you do to make reopening Castro Street a success? When we went into Sheltering in Place, we immediately began to hear the struggles of our small businesses, especially on Castro Street. Thus, I initiated the Small Business Resiliency Microloan program to be able to provide immediate financial assistance to our small businesses. I worked with Google to allot to the Small Business Resiliency Program, some of their funds from a \$1M grant they provided in lieu of the I/O conference normally held in Mountain View in the spring but which they cancelled due to COVID. When staff asked me what I thought about closing Castro Street to vehicle traffic to allow the restaurants to provide outdoor dining, I immediately said "yes" as I thought it would help the businesses and because I knew our residents had been interested in a pedestrian mall on Castro Street for a very long time. Although the Castro StrEATS program had some challenges in the beginning, staff has been working closely with the businesses to tweak the program during this pilot period. If the Castro StrEATS proves to be successful, I would be open to making it a permanent condition of Castro Street which in turn could ease the transition to the expected closure of the grade crossing at Castro and the train tracks.***

I have also been in continuous contact and conversation with the businesses to hear from them suggestions on how to improve the program. As more businesses reopen, we will need to support them through marketing efforts. I have personally been working with the Chamber to encourage their assistance in doing outreach. I worked with Google to provide the Chamber a \$50K grant for them to spearhead a marketing program for our businesses especially in the downtown.

One of the discoveries I have had in working on Castro StrEATS is the critical role an Economic Development Director plays. That position has been vacant for about two years as I don't think was a priority for the past City Council. When the new City Manager came on board, I immediately implored her to recruit to fill the Economic Development Director position. Although I think highly of all of our staff, I discovered that there are distinct differences in perspectives amongst our planning and public works departments and economic development. With Castro StrEATS where public works and planning staff took the lead, their focus differed from what our businesses' focus have been and caused some conflict. The Economic Development Director is the bridge between these differing departments. I am pleased that our City Manager has taken to heart the urgency of filling this position and expect to hear of a hiring soon.

Also, I believe that the last five years or so have been heavily focused on housing development that other parts of the City have been neglected including our downtown. We have had quite a few vacant storefronts. I have been advocating for a comprehensive review of our various regulations around downtown business such as on signage, sidewalk dining, parking in lieu requirements and adequate parking as a whole as well as requirements around conversion of retail space to restaurant use. There are a number of extremely onerous conditions our City imposes on businesses. I believe we need to do a comprehensive review of these regulations and requirements to bring them up to date and allow for more flexibility to enable businesses to thrive.

Historic Preservation

Historic buildings act as anchor buildings and create a sense of place around which vibrant restaurant, shopping and entertainment districts thrive have thrived. Cities like Sunnyvale and Santa Clara which have eliminated their historic downtowns are now seeking to recreate them. Mountain View started its historic preservation planning over a decade ago but never completed the process. In particular, the process lacks preservation tools and incentives needed for preservation to succeed in a rapidly growing city, so that we can retain the viability of Castro Street as a walkable urban destination for residents and visitors.

- ***If elected to the City Council would you vote to support completing Mountain View's historic preservation process in Council's 2021 Work Plan?
Yes. We were reminded in 2018 by a resident that back in 2013, the Council (which I was on) approved a work plan to revise and complete a Historic Preservation Ordinance, but the work plan was never completed after I termed out of the Council in 2014. In 2019, as we began our Council Goal setting process, I supported the goal of completing the ordinance. We had the item on our list to do for this year but due to COVID, the schedule has been delayed. I will work with the City Manager to see if we can address the item before the end of the year, but if not, certainly will carry it over to our next two-year goal setting which will occur in early 2021.***
- ***Would you actively support strong incentives like transfer of development rights (TDRs), land swaps and revolving loan funds as a part of the process? What additional mechanisms would you support to ensure that we preserve our city's historic buildings and places? Yes, it is important to have tools to assist residents in preservation if it is a priority for our City. It can be too onerous to require residents to undergo preservation improvements on their own. I support all of the strategies listed and would look at future revenue collected from our Short***

Term Rental Tax or a potential TOT (transit occupancy tax on hotels) increase to establish a financial assistance/loan fund.

Transit Center and Plaza

The 100 block of Castro Street with some of our most historic buildings has been the liveliest walkable block of our city for decades. It is a gateway to our city for visitors and residents. While city staff is moving ahead with the infrastructure for a new transit center, Mountain View does not yet have a real DESIGN for the new transit center facilities and massive plaza, which will be used by commuters and the community and complement our Historic Downtown District. Specific funds have not yet been set aside for the design of this important public space.

Our organization, Livable Mountain View, has been advised by city staff that the Council must prioritize and vote for this to be included in the Council's two year Work Plan which will be voted on in 2021. Livable Mountain View is advocating for our city to have a world-class design through an open competitive design and bid process with stakeholders and Council input.

- *If elected to our City Council would you prioritize, and vote for, funding a design competition for the development of our transit center and plaza in the upcoming two year Work Plan?*

Yes, I would vote to prioritize the design of this project and would be open to a design competition or whatever mechanism would ensure us top-notch design for the Transit Center Redevelopment Project. I would note that COVID may have some significant impacts on this project as the future of Caltrain is in question, and should we continue to keep Castro Street closed to vehicle traffic. We may need to rethink the Plan as a result, and hopefully come up with an even better plan.

Cannabis Stores

As of 2019, there was not a single city in the Greater Bay Area with a cannabis retail storefront in its walkable downtown. Many communities opposed cannabis retail storefronts in their downtowns because such stores would put excessive demands on our limited downtown parking, create an atmosphere less friendly to families, and alter one of the few places teens can explore freely in an urban environment. Many parents do not feel comfortable allowing their children to hang out around cannabis storefronts. Mountain View's Chief of Police has stated publicly that there would be no enforcement of regulations relating to cannabis without a police report of potential violations, that such reports would be of low priority and that they could not be enforced without increased police department staffing.

- *If elected to the City Council would you vote to prohibit cannabis stores in downtown Mountain View if the matter came before the Council?*
- ***Yes, I am on record as having voted against Cannabis stores in downtown Mountain View and will continue to hold that position. With COVID and the proliferation of delivery services due to sheltering in place, I hope that the public also realizes the sufficiency of having delivery only cannabis businesses. I believe there needs to be clearer regulations and enforcement guidelines from the State in order for cannabis stores to be successfully implemented into a City. I also do not think Mountain View should be the only city other than San Jose in the County to allow retail cannabis shops.***

Office-Housing Balance and Local Control

Mountain View has been a Bay Area leader in linking the approval of new office projects to the development of new housing. For example, the office-housing balance is a central principle in the city's new East Whisman Precise Plan. Furthermore, new residential developments are now required to provide a 15% affordable (subsidized) housing component.

California state legislation such as the former Senate Bill 50 (SB-50) and related bills seek to eliminate local control and block cities like Mountain View from controlling office development (and therefore job growth) by linking it to the creation of housing. Such bills in their various forms mandate upzoning without requiring the construction of affordable housing. They also would end Mountain View's ability to require community benefits such as parks, trees, and bike lanes. These benefits are essential to keeping Mountain View livable as the city's density increases.

- *If elected to the City Council, would you oppose state and local efforts for blanket upzoning?*

Yes. Last year, I represented the Cities Association of Santa Clara County on an ABAG/MTC Housing Legislation Ad-Hoc Committee where we reviewed the numerous housing bills that were introduced in the State Legislature. I have opposed SB 50 and most of the other bills due to their diminishment of local control. Also some of the bills required less in terms of affordable housing percentages compared to what we in Mountain View require. Although I do feel that some cities need such impositions from the State to get them to allow more housing development, I firmly believe Mountain View is in the unique position of being a leader in allowing housing development, and I have worked to delineate ourselves as "a good actor" and from the "bad actors". I have advocated for the State to "reward" cities like ours that have been meeting the housing challenge by providing more resources to be able to build more affordable housing units. I believe my advocacy has been recognized by our State representatives and have been effective in convincing some of them to change their positions or amend their legislation if they have authored bills. I will continue to be vigilant in working with our regional and state legislators to ensure our voice is heard rather than be dismissed along with the "bad actor" cities.

- *What actions or policies would you support that would directly address the need for affordable housing, and to address displacement and homelessness in Mountain View and the Bay Area as a whole?*
- ***Over my twelve years on the City Council, I have championed all of the initiatives we have approved and implemented to encourage more affordable (BMR) units. I championed across the board housing impact fees, especially on commercial development as I believe that type of development has spurred the need for more housing. I have supported the increase of the BMR inclusionary requirement to 15% and to require the build of the units rather than in lieu fees. I have voted for every affordable housing project proposed. As a result, we have increased our BMR unit count from around 500 when I started on Council in 2007, to about 2000 units presently with another 400 units in the pipeline. I have supported the \$2.5M spent on homeless efforts and the opening of safe parking lots to help those living in oversized vehicles a safe place to stay while they work with caseworkers to find a permanent housing solution. I would be open to expanding more spaces in the lots if the oversized vehicle parking on narrow streets restriction referendum passes. I am personally exploring***

transitional and rapid rehousing options, and have been advocating for prioritizing those living in Mountain View for the new BMR units. I would also like to explore innovative housing options such as tiny homes or modulars that could be built more quickly and cost effectively. In the past, these modulars have not turned out to be more cost effective as there has been somewhat of a monopoly on this industry, but the hope is that there are more options coming online that will in turn lower the prices. On the ownership side, I initiated the establishment of a first-time homebuyer assistance program for our City employees, which was recently revised to make it more conducive to the current market. For a longtime, I have advocated for the establishment of a down payment assistance program for middle income households. We began to make some headway this past year in addressing the "Missing Middle" and hope to engage further and come up with a program in the next term should I be re-elected.

Downtown and Moffett Precise Plan Update

The Precise Plans on both sides of our downtown train station have not been updated in decades. Good transit-oriented development prioritizes denser urban development, while preserving the places in our city which our residents cherish, like parks and historic districts. Our outdated and often ignored precise plans leave Mountain View's small historic core threatened, while neglecting the opportunity to make Moffett Boulevard a walkable and attractive transit-oriented avenue with its own amenities, like housing over restaurants and retail.

- *If elected to the City Council would you vote to keep the current Council project to "Review and consider amendments to various aspects of the Downtown Precise Plan, with the work phased to prioritize preserving the character of the downtown core and preventing, to the extent possible, preemption by State legislation," in the Council Work Plan and act to ensure preservation of our Historic Downtown?*

Yes. I was one of the advocates in including this Council goal when possible (I have had to recuse on some of the votes due to my real property interests near downtown) and will continue to support it in the next iteration of Goal setting scheduled for early 2021.

- *Would you vote to support a project in the Council Work Plan to update the Moffett Precise Plan to create a walkable and attractive transit-oriented downtown complete with ground floor retail and restaurants and upper floor housing along Moffett Boulevard?*

Yes. When we engaged in the General Plan update in 2008-2012, the Moffett neighborhood was identified as a change area and a Precise Plan update was scheduled to complement the General Plan Update. After I left Council in 2014, the Moffett Precise Plan seemed to be dropped as the new Council chose to return to the North Bayshore Precise Plan to include housing. That Council also allowed for several major Gatekeeper projects in the Moffett area. As these projects have been coming online, I believe it has illustrated the need to do a Moffett Area Precise Plan, and to expand the original boundaries to incorporate all of these gatekeeper projects, as they have been moving forward piecemeal with a lack of a comprehensive view of the area in terms of traffic congestion, parking, and amenities. The original concept from the General Plan Update was to make Moffett Blvd an extension of Castro Street with retail and walkability. I believe it is time to revisit that concept.

Your Action Plan

We have found that council members who have an action plan are the best prepared to achieve their goals.

- *What will be your top priority as a council member to enhance Mountain View's livability*

My first and foremost priority will be to continue to lead us out of COVID, weather the COVID induced recession, and rebuild our community together with everyone. Since the pandemic hit in March of this year, I have worked hard as Mayor, to successfully respond to the myriad of concerns and needs of our community. Working together internally and with public, private and non-profit partners, I initiated the largest rent relief program in the County; a small business resiliency program; opened safe parking lots for vehicle dwellers; enhanced food, hygiene, and safety assistance for homeless/low-income families; brought COVID testing to Mountain View; and in light of the civil unrest around race relations, I fostered community dialogue on diversity while working to ensure equitable and inclusive city service delivery. We now need to work together to rebuild our community. I have the experience in leading our City out of crisis. As Mayor in 2009, I led the City out of the Great Recession and helped develop Mountain View to be the great place it is with a solid budget, and innovative approaches to address housing, transportation, and climate change. To preserve our high quality of life, I championed safe and strong neighborhoods, added more parks, improved infrastructure and top notch city services. My fiscal prudence and work on innovative revenue generation measures in the past decade directly contributed to a balanced City budget this year with no cuts.

Depending on how long the pandemic lasts, we may face a city budget deficit in future years. The City's financial strength is of utmost importance and can take an all-out effort to maintain during lean economic times. During the Great Recession, the budget was all consuming for several years. Without a strong city budget, we would be unable to provide top notch services, strong infrastructure and improvements and sustain future growth. Our small businesses are in dire straits. We must focus on economic development and in helping these small businesses recover and thrive.

I believe the world, including Mountain View will be a very different place when we come out of the pandemic. We are already exploring potential changes to the real estate market as telecommuting has brought to question the need for so much office development. A substantial percentage of Bay Area residents are exploring or have already left the area and we are seeing rent decreases in the 15% range in Mountain View with housing prices also softening. Frankly, there are benefits to these changes such as less traffic congestion due to telecommuting which in turn has resulted in cleaner air. With less need for office, perhaps land will be freed up to build more housing. It will be important for the City to closely monitor the changing trends and adapt accordingly. We will also need to reexamine the way we provide service and adjust them accordingly, most likely becoming more outward facing. And as these events have brought to light the inequities in our society, perhaps the new environment will create opportunities to close the affordability gap more and provide a more equitable playing field for all. We are already engaging in conversation internally as the City will be embarking on a comprehensive review of City services and programs with plans to engage the community in a visioning and strategic planning process. I look forward to going out to the community to have conversations on what our residents and businesses would like Mountain View to be in a post COVID world.

