



# CITY COUNCIL SUMMARY MINUTES

City Council  
Special Meeting  
March 11, 2022

The City Council of the City of Palo Alto met on this date in virtual teleconference at 4:00 P.M.

Present: Burt, Cormack, DuBois, Filseth, Kou, Stone, Tanaka

Absent: None

## CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Burt called the meeting to order and asked the clerk to call the roll.

## Public Comment

No public comments in person or online.

## Action Items

1. Interviews for the Architectural Review Board.

The City Council interviewed the following applicants for the Architectural Review Board:

- A. Alfred Mandel
- B. Curtis Smolar
- C. Yingxi Chen
- D. Kendra Rosenberg
- E. Joao (Johnny) Baptista DaRosa
- F. John Kunz

Mayor Burt requested in-person candidates to speak from the table and outlined the format for each interview: introductory remarks, questions, and a brief wrap up, time permitting.

## **1.A. Alfred Mandel**

Alfred Mandel has lived in Palo Alto for 42 years and in the downtown area for 29 years. He retired at the end of 2021. He stated his desire to support the community and the City.

At the University of Oregon, he interned at the Gilliam County Planning Department, working in environmental preservation and conservation of energy. In the City Council and the Planning Department offices, he worked on architecture review, site suitability, environmental considerations, and harmonious application of architectural design within the environment.

He later worked for the state legislature writing environmental legislation. He wrote the filibuster for the Bottle Bill (CRV on cans and bottles) in 1977, which is now used in 48 states. He earned a master's in Urban Regional Planning and one in Environmental Design from the University of Oregon, School of Architecture. He does not have AIA credentials.

He has remodeled five houses but has not worked on any large commercial projects outside of university. He described himself as detail oriented, easy going, and focused.

He said that because of the pandemic and other issues related to rent and utilization of commercial properties, particularly on University Avenue, factors like rent and customer traffic must be balanced. The retail market changed in favor of bigger companies. The pandemic exacerbated the problem, but it was already ongoing and one reason why four large parking structures were built. He questioned how to balance the equitable use of land and property for retail space and make it affordable while having employee parking. He stated that a vibrant community needs money, which comes from taxes charged from businesses, but it must also be a practical location for businesses.

In terms of economics versus design aesthetics, he called for the Architectural Review Board (ARB) to harmoniously consider what is best for the community, commercial real estate, commercial developers' desires, aesthetics, and energy conservation. He said Palo Alto residents tend to stay for a long time, so the ARB needs a long-term point of view.

He stated that uniform building code and zoning should cover mixed use or R1 or R2 uses and should be unilaterally applied across the City regardless of geographic location. He mentioned cost differences in different areas due to desirability, and he suggested balancing this through architectural review in situ to see if it is compatible, harmonious, desirable in construction, and meets the City's requirements. He noted a proposed development on Charleston Avenue for 50 new units, which will be out of scale with

everything around it. He called for due consideration to the economics and voiced the need to be flexible and considerate.

Mayor Burt reminded the council that the available ARB positions do not require an architectural degree and noted Alfred Mandel's degree creates an ambiguity. Mayor Burt spoke of a former city attorney in charge of land use who brought a complimentary perspective to the ARB and claimed to be intrigued by Alfred Mandel's urban planning and other related backgrounds.

### **1.B. Curtis Smolar**

Curtis Smolar described himself as an attorney who has been practicing for approximately 25 years, during which he counseled clients in all areas of land use, planning, and zoning in the Bay Area. He secured approval of projects ranging from office to retail to residential developments, including discretionary entitlements, zoning variances, and conditional use authorizations. He commented on his ability to interpret the codes and laws to help the architects implement them. He mentioned his experience arguing in front of Planning, city councils, and courts and his experience with CEQA.

He is not a licensed architect. The largest commercial project he has worked on was for a private university in San Francisco, which was a \$50M to \$70M mixed-use project spanning multiple blocks in downtown San Francisco. It involved dormitories, offices, and other uses.

He described himself as collaborative and referred to his work with architects and contractors on interpreting codes. He also described himself as trustworthy and honest and stated that he gives real answers, even if inconvenient, versus political answers.

He claimed his job was not deciding upon higher-density housing in low-density residential neighborhoods; his job would be to look at the code and law and see how it applies. He said he would consider the character of the area and if the project is too big or bulky, but he would support local zoning and how it is currently applied. He stated he believes in multi-family housing in appropriate places when looking at community standards. He has been both a landlord and tenant. He has represented both sides and donates his time pro bono. He emphasized his job on the ARB would be to represent the City and not his own agenda, and he insisted he would work within the City's framework to apply the codes and laws.

He described his potential contribution to the ARB as the experience of someone on the other side and mentioned the need for compromise. He planned to listen and be empathetic while trying to find a solution after consulting architects, Planning, and Zoning. He said he would collaborate on a solution that both follows the law and is realistic.

In closing, Curtis Smolar stated that his skills would be complementary and useful to the ARB and he would be a great asset to the ARB and the City.

### **1.C. Yingxi Chen**

Yingxi Chen is a licensed architect. Before starting her own practice, she worked with two architectural development firms where she was involved with different projects ranging from school to hotel resort to ski lodge to car dealerships. As a junior designer, she prepared construction documents by assisting in keynoting the drawings and drawing details based on the senior architect's sketches. This experience gave her a better understanding of how things are put together.

She then became more involved in the front-design phase, working directly under the principal architect to study and analyze the site, do space planning, and prepare color boards. This experience gave her a more holistic view of designing a product.

She identified her recent focus as custom home design, working directly with clients, and communicating expectations and concerns. She described attending design review meetings and addressing neighbors' concerns. She stated these interactions with diverse people and agencies allow her to look at the project from different views and from a broader perspective.

She described buildings as a permanent commitment and assigned responsibility to architects to design quality buildings for people to live and work. She called the open ARB position a meaningful way to shape a better community.

Yingxi Chen has worked on a couple of corporate office buildings, including campus planning, a cafeteria, and restaurants. She has lived in Palo Alto for four years.

She described herself as an effective communicator and quick learner. She grew up in China and came to the US for graduate school. She also studied architecture in Europe for a semester. She pointed to her use of effective communication to overcome language barriers and her ability to read situations to interact efficiently. She discussed her experience talking to clients without professional, architectural backgrounds, and she mentioned her use of conceptual images to aid understanding.

Regarding privacy concerns of residents in newly proposed buildings, she stated that each project and situation is unique. She discussed her approach to being clear about the client's wants and needs and representing them when talking to neighbors to find a balance or adjustment. She agreed to the importance of protecting privacy of residents and mentioned Palo Alto's

high standards of zoning requirements like limiting building height. She commended meetings which allow conversations for better solutions.

She described some of the ARB meetings and projects as too long. However, she supported full discussion before actions and having multiple architects who provide valuable input from different aspects. She approved of reevaluating and correcting things when there is additional information.

Yingxi Chen described open spaces and trees as useful means of aesthetics and shared her belief that each city has its own character. She described Palo Alto as a low to mid-density housing city and a tree-loving community with nice parks. She stated that good architectures work well with landscapes and existing trees to provide better views and privacy.

### **1.D. Kendra Rosenberg**

Kendra Rosenberg has been a Palo Alto resident her whole life. She is an architect with experience getting plans submitted through Palo Alto. Recently, she has focused on working in Los Altos and Los Altos Hills to divest herself from Palo Alto to join the ARB without conflict of interest. She listed her interests in the development of Palo Alto, the development of homes, and the ADUs with the new SB9. She shared her desire to make sure Palo Alto stays beautiful.

She is a residential designer. She is licensed in other states, but she did not take the California Architectural Review Board. She has passed all seven NCARB exams. She obtained a Bachelor of Architecture from Catholic University in Washington, DC and a Master of Architecture at USC in Southern California. She worked at HKS Hill Glazier Studio in downtown Palo Alto and then went to Duxbury Architects in Los Altos where she focused primarily on residential. She worked for Peter Mason at Mason Architects for a year before starting her own firm five years ago.

Her first architectural job was related to aviation architecture at Dulles Airport. She worked on things from kiosks to airport terminals. Her biggest commercial project was working on a new NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) campus. She also worked on large hotels including the Rosewood on 280, the Four Seasons on the 101, and the Four Seasons in Calistoga where she predominately worked on the hotel lobby, ballrooms, and individual villas/casitas.

She described herself as a creative problem solver. She stated her goal is to find the best way to solve a problem for all parties involved. She also described herself as upfront, reliable, and transparent.

In terms of architectural review, she noted that most of the neighboring cities have a two-step process: planning and building. However, Palo Alto does it all at once, except internal reviews. She described a recent project in Palo Alto where her team was months into the project, getting structural plans and Title 24 done, but the project could not continue. One halt was based on the shape of the lot and site plan. This was six months into the project with thousands of dollars spent, and they had already had two reviews with the City before finding this issue. She claimed that with the two-phase step, by the time planning is approved, there is some confidence the project can be built the way it is planned. She conceded the two-step process takes longer but then compared it to the many rounds of comments in Palo Alto.

She drew attention to issues she sees with trees and electricity in Palo Alto. With trees, she mentioned drought and water tolerance issues and fire concerns. She called for flexibility in moving trees away from houses to prevent damage to foundations and roof structures and to provide a fire break. With electricity, she pointed out the 400-amp panel cap on houses, which cannot have gas, and the single service per property. She listed the factors making this cap difficult: ADUs that take 100 to 200-amp panels while the main house can take 200 to 400 amps and the required Tesla charger, battery backups, and solar panels. She called for the ARB to be prepared for solutions to these problems.

She admitted her dislike of the Grocery Outlet on Alma, calling it an eyesore and uninviting with its big, concrete wall and the way it is positioned. She named the Enchanté Hotel at the corner of San Antonio and downtown Main Street in Los Altos as one she likes. She said it turned out beautifully and softened the corner and called it an inviting, welcoming façade.

### **1.E. Joao (Johnny) Baptista DaRosa**

Joao Baptista DaRosa is a licensed architect in Macau, Portugal, but he is not licensed in the US because he did not want to go back to university. He does real estate development and is a builder. He has practiced architecture for 36 years doing design and entitlement. He teaches urban design at a university and is involved in a nonprofit, providing pro bono services.

He lives in Castro Valley but has an office in Burlingame. His first job was in Palo Alto, in Hamilton. He has done many residential projects and some commercial projects on University Avenue many years ago. He has worked from Monterey County to Napa Valley.

He called Palo Alto the leader of Northern California, saying it has topnotch diversity and great cooperation and culture. He talked about its beauty and uniqueness and said he wants to be part of that. He claimed Palo Alto does

not need to learn from neighboring cities but harmonize with them while learning from the world.

He described himself as having three keys (reliability, responsibility, and integrity), two hearts (compassion and passion), and one mission (loving all the work he does).

He has managed architects and is nearly finished with a winery, Materra Wine, in Napa Valley, a personal project ranging from production to a guest house. They are in the last phases of hospitality, which include wine tasting and a restaurant. He has done a lot of commercial projects and is very involved in Millbrae's planning to redevelop the downtown. He has worked on many restaurants in Millbrae and projects in downtown Burlingame and South San Francisco. He was in Millbrae for 28 years before moving to Burlingame, but he now lives in Castro Valley.

He described buildings as having a lifecycle like humans but longer. When creating a building, he advised looking at what the culture has already built in the area. He described ecological urbanism as things needed to build a proper, sustainable building: environment, social, cultural, and economics synchronized together. He called for architects to care about the past, meet today's need, and consider the future to make the buildings last for decades.

Joao Baptista DaRosa stated he wants to be on the ARB because he can bring an outside perspective and a balance that will allow the ARB to avoid biases. He said he wants to give back to society and not just chase money.

### **1.F. John Kunz**

John Kunz became interested in architecture at 3 years old. He lived near the Frank Lloyd Wright Robie House and loved it. He is a walker and biker and sees architecture as a gift to the street.

He has been teaching for 25 years at Stanford in the Civil Engineering Department. The themes of his classes were collaboration and modeling. He found the 3D model to be enormously powerful. He said he advocates to students and in consulting to involve everybody who possibly can help make a project better or make trouble. He claimed this philosophy has made a dramatic impact in the process of projects. He has been inspired by the interest and enthusiasm of students as they learned about built environmental history, or architecture over history, and the way they relate to it. He said he hopes to engage the community to inspire young people. He described himself as collaborative and really open in interactions.

He called for increased height in Palo Alto, saying he is sensitive to the issue of the cost of living. He recounted a conversation with Palo Alto's chief of

police who said when he arrived, all the members of the police department were residents, and now, he is the only one. If there is a big problem, they cannot get there quickly. John Kunz called for access within the community for public servants and said single-family dwellings cannot accomplish that, ADUs or no. He referred to a limited amount of land, and he asserted height is the only way to get high asset utilization.

He has lived in Santiago and traveled all over the world. He found the most pleasant dense environment to be Santiago, which has tall buildings with green on all four sides. He called for Palo Alto to build up in areas without a lot of high asset utilization of space and near transit along train tracks and major roads. Several years ago, he sponsored some students to do 3D models of buildings big enough to pay for undergrounding the rail through the City of Palo Alto. The air rights had to be sold for \$1B to pay for the tunneling. When showing people their models, people said they would rather have high-rises and soccer fields. He concluded that visualization to a large audience is powerful and called for the ARB to utilize 3D models.

He is not a licensed architect. He has been a consultant to many projects. His biggest project was as a consultant to the high-speed rail in London 15 years ago. He recalled that after the commissioning, the Prime Minister said, "This is the first time in the history of the British Empire that a public project like this was brought in on time and on budget." John Kunz was involved in the whole project: engineering, construction, and architectural design, which included where to put stations and exits and appearance.

He said the Sunrise building is a gift to the streets. He praised its high asset utilization and said it gave the residents a nice place to live and walkable amenities, helping a needy subset of the community. He called it a joy to look at.

#### Council Member Questions, Comments and Announcements

Mayor Burt encouraged applicants to consider future openings and to find other ways to serve the community.

Council Member Cormack acknowledged the clerk and her office for finding new applicants through outreach and social media engagement.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 5:11 P.M.