

7 SEEK TO LEAD A CITY IN TRANSITION

Three incumbents, four newcomers vie for three seats on East Palo Alto City Council

by Lloyd Lee

This fall, seven candidates running for East Palo Alto City Council not only want to tackle some of their community's more evergreen issues — which have worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic — but also

to set a promising path for a city that's in flux.

The incumbents — Lisa Gauthier, Larry Moody and Carlos Romero — are each seeking to secure a third term on the council to continue their work on affordable

housing, job opportunities and commercial development, among other issues.

But as the city grapples with one of the highest rates of COVID-19 cases in San Mateo County, some of its persistent issues — resident

displacement, job losses, supporting youth and seniors, and public safety and health — have become more urgent.

First-time challengers Stewart Hyland, Webster Lincoln, Antonio Lopez and Juan Mendez want to

ensure that residents are protected during the health crisis and are included in the city's future. They are all well-versed in the city's issues as well as its potential and hope to build upon the work of their predecessors, but with different solutions.

LISA GAUTHIER

Shaping an East Palo Alto for her family

First elected in 2012, East Palo Alto City Councilwoman Lisa Gauthier is seeking a third term this fall.

Over the past eight years, she served as mayor in 2015 and 2019 and vice mayor in 2018. Like her veteran colleagues also seeking reelection, she believes that the solutions to the city's intersectional issues take time and another four years on the council is necessary to see some development projects through to completion.

"We're not a one-issue city," she said. "There are a lot of things that we're doing and a lot of the resources and answers we need takes money. If we don't have the money to do it right away, we can't get it done."

For Gauthier, the future of East Palo Alto is one that can accommodate all residents regardless of their income.

The city is an affordable housing community, she said. But she also suggested that current tenant

protections in the city such as rent stabilization, which allows for incremental rent increases each year, don't do enough to maintain that community.

"We can have affordable units, but once a tenant who is in an affordable unit moves out, that unit then goes to market rate, so it's affordable to whom at that point?" she asked. "Ideally, we need to figure out: How do we keep that rate from being raised to market rate?"

With earning levels of low-income residents at a plateau, and as rents continue to soar, Gauthier said she wants a portion of the city's housing to remain affordable, though she couldn't speak to a specific percentage.

Market-rate housing, on the other hand, is an issue that takes care of itself, she said.

One area Gauthier does feel the city needs to address more, however, is housing for "the middle" — the individuals who get their degree and a job that

pays around the median income, she said.

Gauthier sees mixed-use projects with retail and housing as the key to increasing the city's commercial development. She also wants to make more space for the kinds of small businesses that thrived decades earlier when the city was unincorporated and wasn't home to large corporations.

"If we're not saying, 'Look, we're going to make sure that there's space for you to develop your business' ... I think we're also doing our city a disservice," she said.

One of the more immediate threats to the city is the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affects East Palo Alto, which has the highest case rate compared to the rest of San Mateo County. Part of the problem in Gauthier's perspective is effective messaging.

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STEWART HYLAND

If there's a nonprofit, there's a way

Stewart Hyland doesn't have experience as a city councilman, but his work for the past two decades is deeply tied to one of the main pillars of the East Palo Alto community: its nonprofit organizations.

"I've always worked in nonprofits, either as a community organizer or as a union organizer," he said.

Because of his extensive work with groups such as One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Initiative, Faith in Action and, currently, the Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County, to name a few, Hyland said he already has an intimate knowledge of the council's process and the larger community concerns.

"(I) have an understanding of how folks are being affected by what policies that are in effect and also a little bit about budget work," Hyland said.

If elected to the council, Hyland said he wants to ensure East Palo Alto residents see the benefits of Measure HH, a

2018 voter-approved parcel tax on large office developments to fund career training programs and affordable housing; support the city with its Ravenswood/Four Corners TOD Specific Plan; and retain the city's current residents through affordable housing, while also inviting new tenants.

Hyland has called for a "broad-minded" approach when thinking about whom the city should serve through affordable housing. Though he's not the only candidate who has emphasized the creation of units for middle-to low-income earners, Hyland is the only one so far to openly address a specific subgroup of lower-income residents: the formerly incarcerated.

"I think single-room occupancy will be great for a lot of our folks that are returning from being incarcerated," he said.

At the same time, he stressed that it doesn't mean East Palo Alto can't accommodate an economically diverse community. The problem, Hyland suggests,

is finding the common ground among all types of housing and tenants.

"This economy is so out of whack, it doesn't make any sense to separate ourselves by class," he said. "We need to think more holistically."

One tool Hyland wants the city to look into its inclusionary zoning to create affordable housing alongside market-rate units and, as a result, help preserve the cultural diversity of the city.

On commercial development, Hyland said he wants to move forward with the city's existing Ravenswood/Four Corners TOD Specific Plan. (A couple years ago, Hyland gathered primarily Spanish-speaking parents for community discussions about what the development should look like.)

"I thought we laid out a good plan," he said, appreciating details like floor-area ratios, which dictate the size of the buildings that can go on plots of land, and

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Magali Gauthier



Magali Gauthier

WEBSTER LINCOLN

East Palo Alto's homegrown data scientist

Webster Lincoln, 33, has positioned himself as a homegrown data scientist who, if elected, will bring critical thinking and problem-solving skills and an understanding of the community's spirit, culture, history and challenges to his role on the East Palo City Council.

"I'm new to politics, but I have strong and deep roots in this community," Lincoln stated in his campaign statement. "My goal as a council member is to improve quality of life, health, and housing security for all members of our community."

Born in Oakland, Webster was raised in East Palo Alto and attended Menlo-Atherton High School. He continued his education at San Jose State University, where he obtained his bachelor's degree in psychology, with a double minor in biological science and chemistry, and is pursuing a master's degree in biological science. He has had multiple bylines in biomedical journals during his career as a data scientist at various companies along the Peninsula, including his current role at Genentech.

"Regardless of the stigma that East Palo Alto had in the '90s ... there's success within the community," Lincoln said in a Facebook Live event he hosted on Oct. 4 on his campaign page. "I hope to inspire other people and make sure that East Palo Alto also remains a place, where regardless of your socioeconomic status or your skin color or where you live, there's always opportunities for people to make it."

Lincoln is seeking a seat on

the council to ensure that East Palo Alto's future accommodates its residents — something he believes the council hasn't always kept in mind when making policy decisions, especially those that could lead to gentrification. He points when the council set aside its long-standing first-source jobs rule of hiring to make way for Amazon in 2017.

"There's a big divide in the community," Lincoln said. "Some people say (Amazon) is good for revenue, but other people say, 'No, it causes displacement.'"

Lincoln hopes to bridge that divide by seeking policies and developments that are representative of East Palo Alto's residents.

When it comes to housing, for example, Lincoln said the city needs to focus on developments that increase access to affordable housing.

According to his campaign website, he would focus on inclusionary zoning ordinances, increase multifamily housing zones and provide incentives for homeowners to build second units on their property.

Lincoln also believes that the city needs to encourage mixed-use developments with housing as well as projects that can accommodate small businesses and startups.

The city has already made efforts to ensure new commercial office space will benefit the community through Measure HH — the 2018 voter-approved parcel tax on larger office developments, which will fund housing and job training programs. Lincoln said the measure,

however, is not enough.

"We need to focus on development that supports people and helps prevent displacement within our community," he said. "I want to move good development forward, but I don't want it to be at the cost of our residents and our diversity."

On top of affordable housing and equitable development, Lincoln is pushing for greener building standards.

By establishing a climate change task force, the city should start taking an emissions inventory to keep track of East Palo Alto's overall climate impact, he said. That data could then be integrated into all of the city's decision-making, including new developments.

Police reform is also a top priority in Lincoln's campaign.

"I think we need to take a step back and really look at what is policing," he said. "What's the need for policing? And what really should police be doing in our communities?"

Lincoln said he believes the city should create a task force to evaluate how many arrests and traffic stops are the result of racial profiling and other bias. He hopes to significantly reduce negative interactions between the police and local residents, partly by redirecting traffic enforcement duties away from officers and handing them to unarmed civilians. (The Berkeley City Council approved a similar proposal in July.)

Lincoln also supports reallocating some of the city's police budget into a "Restorative Justice

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Lisa Gauthier

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The city needs to think beyond social media platforms, which many residents may not use, she said, and suggested the city use its police cars, bullhorns and even ice cream trucks to remind people to socially distance and wear a mask.

She acknowledged that many residents can't pay rent during this time and that the city is looking toward nonprofits such as Live in Peace, where Gauthier sits on the board, for rental assistance. But at the top of her mind is stopping the spread of the disease.

"The most important thing we can do right now: stop the spread of COVID-19; open up the economy; and allow people to get back to work," she said. "If we don't open up this economy, it's not going to just be the renters who are going to be in trouble."

In addition, Gauthier would focus her third term on the city's

youth by building "leadership development resources," according to her campaign statement. Gauthier said the city should hear more from younger people of the community by creating a youth commission, something she noticed other cities have established when she attended the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

"If you don't engage our youth, we're losing them and we don't want to lose them," she said. "We want them to know their voices are valued."

The East Palo Alto Police Department can also play a role in empowering the city's youth. Gauthier, who participated in a Black Lives Matter protest in the city on June 3, doesn't believe that some of the younger, progressive community members' calls for a complete defunding of the Police Department are realistic.

Instead, she sees an opportunity for a more collaborative relationship between residents and the Police Department, particularly with the youth community,

through programs like the Fitness Improvement Training zones, where locals and officers interacted while doing exercise.

Gauthier's pursuit for a third council term is also personal.

"I am a product of this community," she said.

Gauthier was 2 years old when she moved to East Palo Alto in 1967 and later enrolled in the Ravenswood City School District, attending Runnymede Elementary School (which has since closed), Brentwood Academy and Costafio Elementary School.

The councilwoman and government affairs manager for Study.com, an education tech company, is a single mother of three. She's not raising a family in the same East Palo Alto she grew up in, but she hopes they'll live in one that's better.

"Pretty soon I'll have a grandchild who will also be in this community," she said. "So the decisions that I make will impact my family and this community moving forward." ■



Courtesy Webster Lincoln

Here's how you can vote in East Palo Alto

Three drop boxes are now available, and in-person vote centers will open Oct. 31

by Tyler Callister and Jocelyn Dong

Voting in the 2020 presidential election officially got underway last week in San Mateo County as the Elections Division mailed ballots to all registered voters.

Voters have several options for returning their completed ballots. They can mail them back in the postage-paid envelope to the San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division. It must be postmarked on or before Nov. 3.

Voters can also bring their ballots to any of 39 drop box locations in the county, including three in East Palo Alto. Those ballot boxes are at University Circle, 1900 University Ave. (the inside box is accessible during regular business hours); Ravenswood City School District Office, 2120 Euclid Ave. (the inside box is accessible during regular business hours); and the Government Center, 2415 University Ave. (the outside box is accessible 24 hours a day).

In addition, voters can go now to any of three in-person vote centers throughout the county, which will be open through Oct. 30, weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. These vote centers are located at the Redwood City Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder, 555 County Center; San Mateo Registration & Elections Division, 40 Tower Road; and the South San Francisco Main Library, 840 West Orange Ave.

Closer to Election Day, two in-person vote centers in East Palo Alto will be open from Oct. 31 to Nov. 2, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 3. These will be located at the Lewis and Joan Platt Family YMCA, Half Gym, 550 Bell St., and Saint Francis of Assisi Church, 1425 Bay Road.

One pop-up vote center will open on Nov. 2 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Nov. 3 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the East Palo Alto Academy Multipurpose Room, 1050 Myrtle St.

At the vote centers, people will be able to get assistance with non-English language ballots, disability access and more.

Voters who are disabled or visually impaired can also use the county's Remote Accessible Vote by Mail System, in which voters can fill out a screen-readable ballot, print it out, and either mail or drop off the ballot at the San Mateo County Registration & Elections Division.

Anyone voting in person in San Mateo County will be asked to wear a face covering, maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from others and use hand sanitizer before and after voting.

To track your ballot and find out when it has been counted, subscribe to "Where's My Ballot?" at wheresmyballot.sos.ca.gov.

For more information, visit smcacre.org/elections. ■

ANTONIO LOPEZ

Uplifting the community, starting from the bottom

Antonio Lopez knows how to sound persuasive.

He talks as if he's spreading wisdom behind a lectern and waves his hands with flourish when he makes a point. It's a useful tool, or at least one he hopes is helpful, for convincing skeptical voters who question if a 26-year-old doctoral candidate in literature at Stanford University, with no formal background in local politics, is prepared to govern a city of around 30,000 people.

"If you have the desire to make an impact, no matter what your age, you can do that," said Lopez, explaining how he felt inspired to pursue a career in public service by his peers at Oxford University, where he was enrolled through the Marshall Scholarship program after completing his undergraduate degree at Duke University. "I felt very encouraged being in that environment."

He's a writer by background, the East Palo Alto native said. His first collection of poetry with the nonprofit publisher Four Way Books is set for release next year. Writing has always been his tool for social justice advocacy, he said — whether it's through

his poetry or through guest opinion columns at his college newspaper.

Coming back to the Gardens neighborhood from some of the most prestigious universities in the world, Lopez said he feels he's now in a position of privilege that he's obligated to use to guide a city that's improving but still has many vulnerable residents.

"It is absurd that we are in one of the wealthiest regions — not in the entire country but in the world — and we have people who are homeless," Lopez said. "It's just laughable that you can have extremely affluent companies in our midst, especially in the heart of the Silicon Valley, and can have these issues. To me, it is a horrible satire."

Lopez sets out more progressive actions compared to his fellow candidates when it comes to the issues of affordable housing and the city's efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

On his campaign website, which outlines a "10 Pt. Program," Lopez says he wants to put an end to East Palo Alto's single-family zoning and suggests building apartments in

those residential areas.

When asked how much affordable housing the city needs, Lopez said, "As much as possible."

He also proposes that the city seek out avenues beyond philanthropic efforts to provide low-income residents with "comprehensive rent forgiveness."

Resident displacement is an ongoing concern in East Palo Alto, but Lopez fears the problem may have worsened during the pandemic as many renters could be facing crippling amounts of debt with a creeping due date since the city's eviction moratorium expired on Sept. 30. (State Assembly Bill 3088, also known as the "Tenant Act," currently protects residents from evictions if they pay 25% of any missed rental payments between Sept. 1 and Jan. 31, 2021. East Palo Alto has a later repayment period that starts on March 1, 2021.)

"If Facebook donates a million dollars, that's admirable, but it's not enough," Lopez said. "And frankly, when we think about the dignity of this community, waiting for our wealthy tech

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Magali Gauthier

JUAN MENDEZ

'A new perspective'

Juan Mendez says he has been determined to give back to his community of East Palo Alto since high school. But it wasn't until he started studying public policy at the University of California, Berkeley that he learned about the real impacts he could make at a local level through city politics, veering him away from a pre-law track.

"Law school was about applying the law and not so much about creating it," he said.

Today, at 23 years old and having graduated from UC Berkeley this May, he's the youngest person to be running for a City Council seat this year in East Palo Alto.

Already, he's gained some government experience. As an alternate on the East Palo Alto Planning Commission, Mendez said he's acquainted with the drawn-out process of approving developments and is learning what commissioners and council members of other cities are doing about it.

"I've been more involved with the city and trying to understand where the city is right now, what it's missing and where it's heading," Mendez said of his work, which he started in May 2019.

As Mendez made that transition during college, East Palo Alto too was changing. In 2017, Amazon moved in. Then a wave of other developments, he

estimated about 27, started coming into the city.

His home was changing in real time. His interest piqued and he decided to meet the council at a special retreat in 2019 to get his foot in the door.

Then the COVID-19 health crisis hit — bringing more uncertainty for East Palo Alto residents — all but cementing Mendez's desire to get involved with the city and its future.

"I think, now more than ever, we need to be strategic with what we're doing," he said. "What can I do to ensure we are taking the rights steps?"

The first-generation college graduate is campaigning on four priorities: affordable housing, a greener East Palo Alto, education and traffic congestion.

From his vantage point on the Planning Commission, Mendez said that one of the city's current issues is that the process to build affordable housing takes too long: 18 months, he claims. That's if everything goes well, assuming the applications are on time and everything is approved by the commission — and that's part of the problem, Mendez said.

"In those 18 months, we lose residents on a monthly basis (because) they can't afford to live there, especially now with COVID impacting their income," he said.

Mendez proposes to expedite

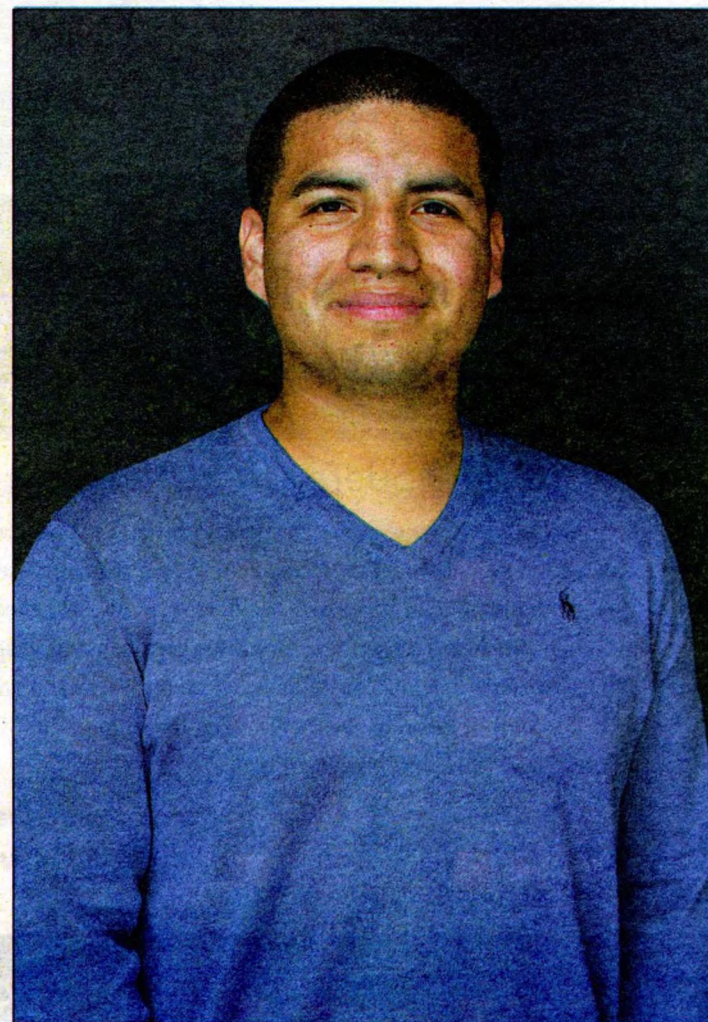
the process, putting affordable housing as a top priority on his list of city development projects. For example, if there are any buildings the city already owns, primed for affordable housing, the council should have the power to shorten the timeline.

He also believes that the council could start pushing office developers toward building mixed-use developments and create a program that incentivizes homeowners to build safe accessory dwelling units on their properties.

"I don't have a specific percentage (of affordable housing), but the more the merrier," he said. "We need more affordable housing in East Palo Alto even though the city is already leading the way."

In thinking about low-income renters during the pandemic, Mendez said the city should extend its eviction moratorium, which expired Sept. 30. (State Assembly Bill 3088 bill, also known as the "Tenant Act," currently protects residents from evictions if they pay 25% of any missed rental payments between Sept. 1 and Jan. 31. East Palo Alto has a later repayment period that starts on March 1, 2021.) He also hopes to negotiate with landlords to reduce or erase tenants' debts.

Mendez is also making calls to revisit the city's Climate Action Plan, criticizing in particular



Magali Gauthier

how the current goals such as the emission reduction were set in the early 2000s and are outdated.

"The city set a Climate Action Plan in that by 2020, they want to reduce 15% of our gas emissions," he said. "We're in 2020, we still haven't seen ... whether

we met that benchmark. ... If we have, let's set a new robust goal that reduces (emissions) by 25%."

Traffic congestion has become a growing concern for

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LARRY MOODY

Embracing East Palo Alto as a Silicon Valley city

In Larry Moody's words, the East Palo Alto City Council's work over the past eight years wasn't very "sexy," but it was necessary.

Having served as mayor and vice mayor since his election to the council in 2012, Moody points to a list of critical, but mundane tasks completed during his tenure — accomplishments he says have helped build the city's foundation: appointing new city staff, such as a new city attorney and a city manager, addressing East Palo Alto's water issues — "Oh we're good with water," he exclaims — and completing the city's general and specific plans, which guide development.

"As a city, we've agreed upon what the future is going to look like for us," Moody said.

Now, the father of four and employment specialist at JobTrain is seeking a third term on the council in order to build out an East Palo Alto that is every bit a Silicon Valley city. For Moody, part of that means creating a community with amenities that can attract local residents and surrounding neighbors, specifically eyeing the Ravenswood Business District — a 200-acre mix of existing businesses and land primed for redevelopment.

"I'm so opposed to anyone that thinks we need to revisit that plan," Moody said, referring to the 2013 Ravenswood/Four Corners TOD Specific Plan. "We know we want mixed-use; we want retail; we want food and entertainment options; (and) maybe a small grocery store."

It's not only an opportunity to keep dollars in the city — especially from young adults who might prefer to spend their disposable income in San Francisco or Oakland — and to create more

jobs in the service sector but also a reason for companies to invest in East Palo Alto, he said.

Moody believes that companies, specifically in the tech sector, should treat East Palo Alto the same way Facebook has treated Menlo Park or Google has Mountain View: They should provide community benefits and help build up the city's infrastructure, he said. But Moody qualified his statement by suggesting that it's incumbent upon the city to give these companies a reason to come to East Palo Alto in the first place.

"We haven't created an environment for them to invest into East Palo Alto," he said.

It's similar to his sentiment on why the city's first-source hiring ordinance, which mandates new businesses in East Palo Alto to hire local residents as 30% of its workforce, had no "teeth" when Amazon moved into the city.

Instead of depending on the city ordinance, Moody hopes to lean on Measure HH, a \$2.50-per-square-foot parcel tax on office developments that passed in 2018, which creates revenue for low-income housing and job training programs for local residents to enter into science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

"That's Larry's language," he said. "That's Larry's writing on HH."

Moody's push for East Palo Alto to embrace its Silicon Valley identity is different, however, from becoming "Silicon Valley's dormitory," as he put it during a recent candidate forum when asked about affordable housing.

Affordable housing remains a priority in the councilman's campaign for reelection, as it does for all the council candidates.

Moody said, for example, he has spent the last two years talking with faith-based organizations about the idea of building affordable housing on top of the city's many less-frequented church properties. "It's a tough subject to raise to churches," he said. He hopes to follow through with existing affordable housing projects on the agenda such as the 965 Weeks St. development, for which Moody said he helped secure funding from Facebook in 2017.

But East Palo Alto shouldn't be the only one bearing the responsibility for creating below-market-rate housing, he said, claiming the city is already leading the affordable housing front in the Bay Area.

"The goal for me ... is to find other pathways to develop affordable housing in East Palo Alto but also to encourage our neighboring cities to do their fair share," he said.

The youth community is also on top of Moody's mind — third on his priority list to be exact, according to the councilman, who says he was one of the first directors of the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Peninsula.

With many youth recreational programs in the city, Moody sees a need and opportunity for East Palo Alto to "get back into the parks and recreation business." One of the main ways he plans to do this is by seeking a joint-use facility agreement with Ravenswood City School District.

"The city's school district is the largest landowner in the community," Moody said. "They have great athletic fields, but they're struggling with declining enrollment in the district."

Youth programs would help fill those empty fields, he said.



Magill Gaubler

The plan would generate facility-use revenue for the district, create jobs for more coaches and mentors, and possibly start a collaboration with the city's Public Works Department, which would take care of maintenance, Moody said.

Moody added that the district has a chance to get involved in the housing industry, especially to create housing for its workforce. One of the key issues being discussed by the district's Board of Trustees is where to build housing for its teachers.

Moody enters the race with an extensive resume of community

service, dating as far back as 1993 when he directed East Palo Alto's Midnight Basketball League for at-risk youth, according to his campaign website. He also served as a board member of Ravenswood City School District and the EPA Sanitary District and directed the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

"What happens for us right now is (a) critical opportunity to move forward ... to move forward with these relationships," Moody said. "If we make the mistake of placing first-time individuals in those (council) seats, their learning curve is going to be so high." ■

Webster Lincoln

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Fund." His campaign website states that the fund would provide down payment assistance for displaced residents looking

to return to East Palo Alto; small business loans and grants; and support for science, technology, engineering and math education programs.

For traffic congestion, Lincoln acknowledges that it will likely require longer-term solutions

that will extend beyond a four-year term on the council. Still, he hopes he can push support toward a southern connection to the Dumbarton Bridge that would link the Bayshore Freeway south of the Embarcadero Road and Oregon Expressway in Palo Alto.

Another possible solution would be to extend public transit from the east bay, since most of the traffic isn't coming from East Palo Alto, Lincoln said.

"We really need people on the council who do their research, read the documents and are

forward thinkers," Lincoln said. "Right now, we're in a place where we can negotiate how this development is occurring and moving forward. At the end of the day, I'm running for City Council to represent and align with the people." ■

Stewart Hyland

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the various proposals for mixed-use developments.

Hyland was also a huge proponent of the Measure HH parcel tax in 2018, rallying community support by knocking on residents' doors, he said. Hyland's next move is to ensure East Palo Alto residents see the fruits of the measure's career pathway and affordable housing components.

"It's just taking a long time to get that off," he said. "Especially

the career ladder piece — we haven't yet hired a consultant to do the research on what the best practices are."

In Hyland's vision for a job training program through Measure HH, prospective residents would be prepped for a job or internship before office construction projects are finished. That way, by the time the spaces are complete and a company is looking to accept workers, a cohort of East Palo Alto residents will be ready.

Hyland said one immediate action the city could take is to partner with nearby school districts

and community colleges to speak with companies considering a potential move to East Palo Alto about the best steps to develop a certain career path.

During the pandemic, Hyland has spent some time helping homeless individuals through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, closely interacting with those deeply impacted by the health crisis. He commends the city for having some of the strongest tenant protections in place for renters, but also knows, through his work at the Housing Leadership Council, that it's not enough for many residents and that the city

has requested money from Samaritan House to provide rental assistance.

When asked if the city should provide financial assistance to renters, Hyland said the city should continue leveraging its relationships with nonprofits and other donors for further assistance.

Hyland also belongs to the camp of East Palo Alto residents who believe the city has a strong relationship with its Police Department. There are changes he would also like to see, such as less harmful de-escalation tactics along with a more extensive

training curriculum for cadets.

In thinking about what role he would fill that is currently missing on the council, Hyland said his decision to run mainly came from dissatisfaction with the pace of decision-making, citing the city's progress on Measure HH.

"It's good to have a good understanding of what's going on, and I think I showed that," he said. "But the other side is (having) someone that's not comfortable with that pace that may want to move things along faster and be more responsive to what the community's needs are." ■

CARLOS ROMERO

Longtime activist sees city's potential beyond COVID-19

Carlos Romero, 63, has a resume of community service in East Palo Alto that spans almost four decades.

From joining the city's Rent Control Board in 1984 to serving on the East Palo Alto City Council since 2008, Romero is a frequent advocate for social and economic justice. He believes that his commitment to the community and professional work as an affordable-housing consultant make him a more effective leader for the city.

"That mixture of history and my professional background brings to the council a very important analytical piece that's necessary to help move the community forward," said Romero, adding that the wheels of government are slow and progress takes time.

Romero said that while he served on the council over the past decade, the city marked significant milestones: the new pedestrian bridge over U.S. Highway 101; the passage of the Measure HH parcel tax; bolstered tenant protections; a completed flood protection project; and funding for three housing developments with a total of 385 affordable units.

"Over the last 10 years, this has been one of the most active councils in terms of affordable housing," Romero said.

If elected for another four years, Romero said a large part of his work on the council will

be seeing through projects, programs and policies he's pursued in his previous terms, including the Measure HH parcel tax passed by voters in 2018, which has yet to be used to establish a concrete job training program or more affordable housing developments.

Romero anticipates that the city could initiate the planning or funding of two affordable housing development projects that could yield roughly 100 to 175 units with the annual revenue coming in from Measure HH.

But the immediate future of affordable housing is at risk, Romero said, with a city facing "a potential massive displacement of tenants" due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The last thing we want is a wholesale cleansing of low-income people of color because of the COVID crisis," he said.

Romero has proposed a tenant mediation program that would allow tenants and landlords to negotiate a moderate payment plan or a reduction in rent. Unlike similar programs in Palo Alto, San Jose and Mountain View, the city could couple it with its just-cause ordinance, which provides residents certain protections from eviction.

Romero believes the program could be effective since the consequences of mass eviction don't benefit renters or landlords.

Despite the pandemic,

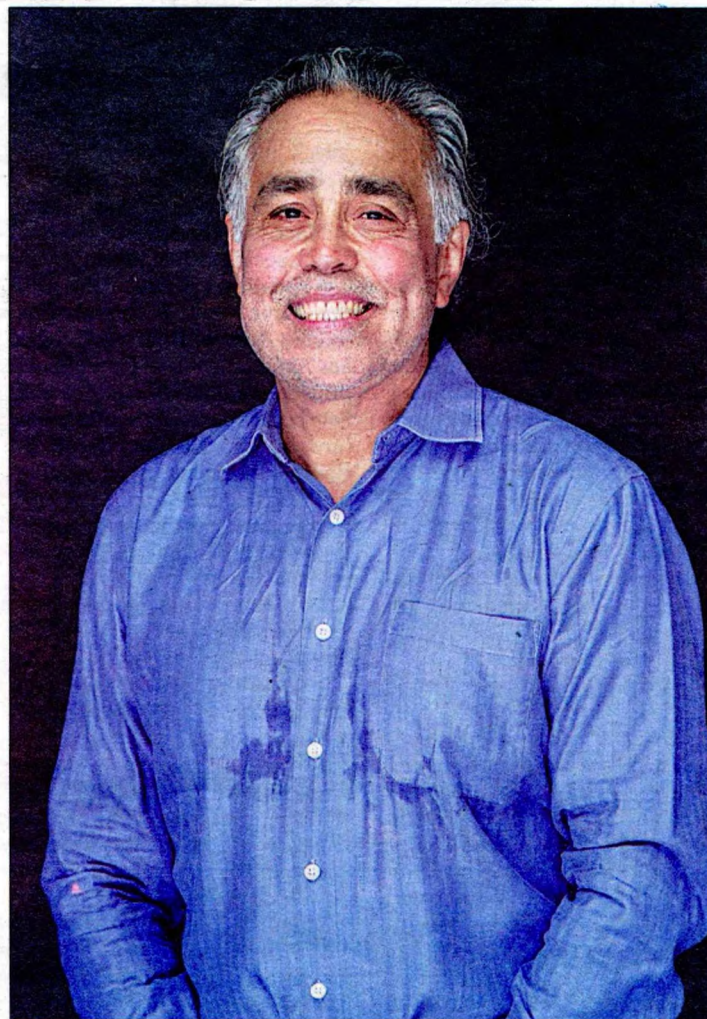
Romero said there's still a healthy interest among developers in pursuing commercial projects, particularly surrounding the Ravenswood Business District.

Romero said he's interested in revisiting the Ravenswood/Four Corners TOD Specific Plan to consider expanding development caps placed on office, retail, industrial and community-use developments.

It's the one area where Romero diverges from incumbent Larry Moody and challenger Stewart Hyland, who have both expressed that the specific plan already lays out exactly the type of developments they hope to see in the city.

Romero also sees an opportunity to finally realize the job training program that was promised to residents through the Measure HH tax parcel. This year, the city received \$1.7 million through the measure, he said. Part of that money will be funneled into career ladder programs to help train residents for higher-paying jobs.

The city recently hired Bright Line Defense, a policy-oriented nonprofit, to help create program options that comply with Measure HH in the next six to eight months, Romero said. He believes this will help strengthen the first-source hiring ordinance when it comes to higher-skilled jobs since the city can use the tax to possibly subsidize



Magali Gauthier

internships as long as a company agrees to create a program for East Palo Alto residents.

Romero is a 38-year resident of East Palo Alto but started working in the city 42 years ago when he was a freshman at Stanford University.

"I am by vocation ... a

consummate activist (and) organizer who believes that any city elected official needs to understand and have close connections to the community in order to effectively govern," he said. ■

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Antonio Lopez

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companies to give us money, to me ... that's insufficient."

Lopez didn't offer concrete ways in which the city could pursue rent forgiveness, but he said it would need state and federal aid and that he would look into all other possibilities.

For the youth community, Lopez is determined to help set students on the same four-year college track he experienced. That could come in the form of city-sponsored internship programs, he said, or pushing for

more funding to local education nonprofits like the Thiebaut Method, according to his campaign website.

"When we think about uplifting our community, it starts from the bottom," Lopez said. "That's why this campaign is heavily about investing in our youth."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many seniors are homebound due to the health risks, Lopez suggested mobilizing the youth through a citywide program — which he would dub the City Ambassador Program — and create something akin to hotline centers, which seniors can contact if they need any

assistance in accessing services in the city or on the internet.

He also offers other community-oriented and -powered solutions — characteristic of a city like East Palo Alto, which relies on many nonprofits — when it comes to the issue of food insecurity and the city's lack of access to organic produce. (At a local farmers market hosted by the Fresh Approach nonprofit, several Latino residents said staple supermarkets in their city like Cardenas don't sell organic produce.)

"We need a community garden ... several community gardens quite frankly," he said.

Lopez pointed to vacant lots

and empty spaces throughout the city, such as the one at the end of O'Connor Street by the Baylands trail, which he claims is a "perfect site" for a community garden.

Another pillar of his campaign is making East Palo Alto's streets safer for pedestrians. Illegal parking on the city's sidewalks often pushes walking residents onto the street, according to his campaign website.

If elected to the council, Lopez said he would advocate for parking permits, one-way streets, speed bumps and the use of empty church parking lots as more residential parking space.

The writer acknowledges that he enters the race with no experience in local politics. But Lopez makes the case that as a young Latino, who came from a low-income family and experienced racial discrimination at his school, he will add an invaluable voice to the council.

"I applaud the work of the incumbents," Lopez said. "But I also think it's important to have that perspective of the next generations coming in line to say, 'Hey, I'm also part of this city. I also want to afford to live here,' and someone who has that direct experience ... is super important moving forward." ■

Juan Mendez

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East Palo Alto residents for the past five years. Mendez lays the blame on regional development around the city rather than city growth through projects such as the University Avenue building that houses Amazon. It's why he makes the case for impact fees charged to regional projects and says East Palo Alto needs to be included more in

discussions around future regional developments.

In the meantime, Mendez said he's looking at Menlo Park's Willow Road overpass at U.S. Highway 101 as an example of the type of expansion he wants to make to East Palo Alto's current infrastructure, which could entail more lanes for cars and cyclists as well as sidewalks.

"We look at our (University Avenue) overpass, and it's like you're fighting for your life when you make that cross over that bridge," he said. "There's

residents dodging cars and ... I've seen way too many accidents happen there. So where are we with our expansion?"

Mendez was a student of the Ravenswood City School District and now plans to rebuild an alliance with the district as a city councilman in order to "properly fund" the city's education system, according to his campaign website.

The East Palo Alto Academy alumnus said the city is not short on resources or after school programs the youth community

can get involved in; however, he thinks major companies such as Facebook, Amazon or Google should create more opportunities such as internship programs that will be reserved for the city's youth.

"What we're missing is a new perspective, a new energy and new ideas on City Council," Mendez said. "I just feel like, as a city, we've had this mindset of complacency and just being OK with what the work that they're doing, when we need more people doing even a little bit more." ■

About the cover: With new development mixed with old, East Palo is a city in transition. Photo by Magali Gauthier.

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