

**LIVABLE MOUNTAIN VIEW 2026 COUNCIL CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE**

YOUR NAME: Robert Cox

IF YOU WISH TO BE CONSIDERED FOR ENDORSEMENT BY LIVEABLE MOUNTAIN VIEW PLEASE PROVIDE RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS BELOW. QUESTIONNAIRES WILL BE SCORED BLIND. LIVABLE MOUNTAIN VIEW WILL ENDORSE THE TOP TWO CANDIDATES BASED ON RESPONSES THAT BEST ALIGN WITH OUR ADVOCACY ON THESE ISSUES. RESPONSES WILL BE SENT TO OUR EMAIL SUBSCRIPTION LIST AND THE LOCAL PRESS.

**PLEASE EMAIL YOUR RESPONSES WITH THIS COVER SHEET VIA EMAIL TO
NOT LATER THAN 5 PM SATURDAY AUGUST 29TH .**

1. TREES. Livable Mountain View has calculated that in the past 10 years approximately 7,000-10,000 heritage trees have been cut down due to development projects.

If elected, what policies would you advocate for to preserve heritage trees and how would you accomplish this?

Most of the heritage trees that have been lost in Mountain View during the last ten years have been due to large development projects. These projects have been both residential and commercial (office and retail).

The problem of preserving heritage trees in new residential projects is particularly difficult due to the California state density bonus law. This law provides density bonuses and concessions against zoning when a developer includes 15-20% affordable housing in his development proposal. Since Mountain View requires 15% affordable housing in all large market-rate projects, concessions against zoning come with no additional cost to the developer. In particular, these concessions can be invoked against any requirement the city could establish to maintain heritage trees. Of course, the council could and should talk to each developer and advocate for the retention of heritage trees, particularly large, majestic, stately ones that define the skyline of our city. Beyond this, our council and its lobbyist should work with local environmental groups to advocate for changes in the state density bonus law, so that concessions cannot be used to override local regulations against the removal of heritage trees.

With regard to commercial development, there are several steps the city could take which could result in more heritage trees being retained. Before a new development proposal is considered by the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) or Council, staff could conduct a heritage tree review of the property, inviting public comment. The goal would be work preservation of heritage trees into the development proposal before it gets EPC and council review. Also, our city ordinances could include special consideration for saving large heritage trees along the perimeter of the property being developed, as these have the least impact on the project. Finally, our precise plans should set standards for retention of heritage trees in new development projects.

Beyond heritage tree protection, our city should work to increase tree canopy in our city, in particular, in our parks, school fields, and in the planter strips between the sidewalks and streets. The city should continue to work with and expand alliances with tree planting groups like Canopy to accomplish this work. Trees in these areas are least subject to redevelopment. Tree lined streets encourage walkability while reducing carbon in the air.

2. HISTORIC PRESERVATION. Current council did not act to preserve the historic first three blocks of Castro Street when Senate Bill 79 allowed them to do so.

What policies would you advocate for to protect and restore our historic downtown buildings and how would you accomplish this?

SB-79, and our current council's unwillingness to prioritize action on an SB79 local alternative plan, leaves our downtown historic retail district vulnerable to replacement by development proposals without council approval. If elected to council, I would vote to prioritize, in the council workplan, the adoption of an SB79 local alternative plan to save our downtown historic retail district. I have already sketched out such a plan which I presented to city staff and individual council members at the end of last year. This plan would include declaring the downtown historic retail district and adjacent buildings eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as an official historic district on the city's local historic register. Doing this would allow the council to retain control over development of this vital area, retaining its sense of place and quality as a destination for Mountain View residents and the 75% of people who visit it from outside our city, bringing in much needed sales tax revenue. Note that an SB79 local alternative plan for our downtown can be done without increasing density in other parts of our city. The historic district exemption would be allowed under SB79 rules, because the downtown historic retail district is less than 3% of the one-half mile area around the downtown transit center, and SB79 allows 10% of that area to be declared a historic district.

Beyond SB79, our downtown historic retail district does face some post-COVID challenges that need to be addressed to make it more vital. While the council has adopted some streamlining provisions to speed the replacement of defunct businesses with new ones, Chamber of Commerce Peter Katz has indicated to me that more can be done. Council should work with the Chamber to expedite this. The city should continue support for its façade improvement program and the loan fund for the restoration of historic buildings. Regular cleaning of the pedestrian mall, areas behind the buildings facing Castro Streets, and parking garages is essential. The city should also consider creating new business storefronts along the parking lots in back of the Castro properties, enabling more businesses.

3. LANDLORD TENANT.

A. Identify the most critical issue or issues for landlords in Mountain View.

For landlords, the key issues depend on whether their property is rent-controlled or not.

The biggest challenge for owners of rent-controlled properties is to maintain and improve their aging properties under the constraints of the rent-control, which allows only an inflation adjusted increase in rent each year. This restriction limits how a landlord can pass the cost of improvements on to a tenant. (A landlord can file an MNOI (maintenance of net operating income) petition, but tenants can counter with hardship petitions.)

Key among the desirable improvements is the seismic retrofitting of Mountain View's 488 soft story buildings and upgrading of electric panels for conversion of appliances from natural gas to electric. In conversations with Deborah Vasquez, manager of the Sunshine Gardens Apartments on Dana Street, I have learned that even though Silicon Valley Clean Energy partners with the city to provide rebates for gas to electric conversions, those apartment buildings which are not electric ready are denied rebate approvals. Providing a proportion of rebate funds to making older buildings electric ready so that they can do gas to electric conversions would help the owners of older apartments move forward with conversions. Changes to the city's rent-control ordinances to allow pass throughs for seismic retrofitting, electric panel upgrades, and gas to electric conversion is theoretically possible, but may be not politically feasible. It would require a ballot measure to change the city's rent-control rules. Tenants are very suspicious of any changes to the city's rent-control legislation.

For landlords of non-rent-controlled units, particularly units less than 10 years old, the biggest challenge is the continuing high vacancy rate of 8.5%, which means vacancies are 70% above normal. Such units rent for, on average, over \$4500/month and are generally occupied by those employed in the high-tech field.

Artificial intelligence is revolutionizing the tech field, making tech workers up to five times more productive. Doing so has allowed tech employers to decrease the size of their tech workforces. Fewer tech workers means fewer tenants for these units. Furthermore, remote work has allowed tech companies to do more hiring outside the Bay Area. If Mountain View can grow as a center of artificial intelligence (AI) research, a growing tech workforce may reduce the vacancies. The city should and Chamber of Commerce should market Mountain View as a location for AI research, publicizing wins like the new OpenAI campus on Middlefield Road.

B. Identify the most critical issue or issues for tenants in Mountain View.

The most critical issue for tenants is high-cost of rent for those at the lowest end of the income range. Housing is generally considered affordable if a person pays no more 30% of his income for housing. The median household income in Mountain View is around \$190,000 per year. The average Mountain View rent-controlled apartment rents for \$2800/month, while the average new (less than 10 years old) market-rate apartment rents for \$4500/month. These are affordable (at rates of 18% and 28%) to those making the median household income.

But household incomes in Mountain View vary widely. At 777 West Middlefield (Village Lake Apartments) where I lived, the household incomes ranged from \$50,000 to \$300,000 per year. Those at the low end of the income spectrum could be crushed under the cost of rent.

To help solve this, Mountain View is building new affordable housing projects. Tenants pay no more than 30% of their income in rent. Two projects are under construction now. There are nine others in the pipeline. The chief bottleneck is obtaining funding, which often comes from multiple sources. The city should create an action plan to prioritize seeking funds to enable more new units more quickly.

For each issue what policy/policies would you advocate for and what would be your strategy to accomplish this?

See above.

Thank you.

Livable Mountain View Steering Committee

LIVABLE MOUNTAIN VIEW 2026 COUNCIL CANDIDATE ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

YOUR NAME: IdaRose Sylvester (idarose4mv@gmail.com, 408.504.9860)

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PLEASE EMAIL YOUR RESPONSES WITH THIS COVER SHEET VIA EMAIL TO ida.rose@liveablemountainview.com NOT LATER THAN 5 PM SATURDAY AUGUST 29TH.

1. TREES. Livable Mountain View has calculated that in the past 10 years approximately 7000-10,000 heritage trees have been cut down due to development projects.

If elected, what policies would you advocate for to preserve heritage trees and how would you accomplish this?

I will work to protect healthy mature heritage trees while significantly expanding Mountain View's canopy and shade, which is something I do now on the Parks and Recreation Commission.

The Heritage Tree Ordinance is under revision, and I believe that is our best opportunity to strengthen protections for mature trees on private property undergoing development. We do very little today to actually preserve trees on commercial properties under development, and that should be reevaluated. I want healthy heritage and other trees identified early enough in the development process that they can actually influence site design, rather than addressing them after most major design decisions have already been made. Where removal is proposed, I would support stronger consideration of reasonable design alternatives, better protection of trees retained during construction, and replacement requirements that more meaningfully reflect the size and value of mature trees being lost.

I also believe the City has to practice what it preaches. During the Parks & Recreation Commission review of the tree plan for our new Public Safety Building, I said: "We get very, very few opportunities to build new city buildings where we have full control over what we plant. The ones we do become showcases for best practices and forestry management, including preserving heritage trees when possible and planting native species." I made the larger point that if the City does not follow its own objectives, private developers will not take those objectives seriously. (source: MV Voice, March 19, 2026)

Separately, on the Biodiversity and Urban Forest Plan, I have pushed for measurable tree planting targets, timelines, funding, and accountability on City-owned land. As a Councilmember, I would make strengthening the Heritage Tree Ordinance a priority and make sure that preservation—not simply replacement after removal—is a meaningful part of development review, early on.

2. HISTORIC PRESERVATION. Current council did not act to preserve the historic first three blocks of Castro Street when Senate Bill 79 allowed them to do so.

What policies would you advocate for to protect and restore our historic downtown buildings and how would you accomplish this?

SB 79 is causing significant concern in Mountain View. The first three blocks of Castro Street are more than a collection of individual older buildings; together they create a historic commercial district, a sense of place, and a vibrant living story of our past that is an important part of Mountain View's identity.

The City still has important tools available, and I believe we need to move quickly. I support using a strong SB 79 local alternative plan to protect the historic downtown, completing the update of our Historic Preservation Ordinance and Register, and establishing appropriate historic district protections for the downtown core. I also support clear objective design standards so that new development adjacent to historic buildings complements rather than overwhelms them. The City is already pursuing both a local alternative plan and objective development standards, and I would make completing that work a priority.

Preservation also has to be economically workable for property owners. Protecting a historic building works when there are realistic ways to maintain and restore it. I would support strengthening incentives, including assistance with historic façade restoration, ADA compliance, and other renovations, possible tax incentives, and exploration of

tools that allow property owners to realize some of their development value while preserving important historic structures, such as development rights transfers.

I would also work closely and early with downtown property owners and developers. My focus would be on preserving our historic core, and also improving the overall economic vitality of downtown, and our history is actually part of that strategy. As a MV Historical Association board member, I take great pride in showing off our downtown, and I can say with certainty that most people are extremely interested in our history, and are drawn downtown by it. It should be a major feature that “sells” our downtown to businesses, and encourages more people to come downtown.

I am also very concerned about preserving the Wellheimer family house, formerly home to Chez TJ, and want to work on its preservation. Depending on what the owner does with the property, it may become a test for incentives and creative solutions.

3. LANDLORD TENANT.

- A. Identify the most critical issue or issues for landlords in Mountain View.
- B. Identify the most critical issue or issues for tenants in Mountain View.

For each issue what policy/policies would you advocate for and what would be your strategy to accomplish this?

Note: As a City of Mountain View/Project Sentinel mediator, I work with both tenants and landlords, and have heard a number of real world cases, and know about the balance between them.

- A. I believe one of the most important issues for landlords, particularly smaller owners of older rental properties, is how to maintain and improve those properties while operating within Mountain View’s rental protections. Their economics can be very different from those of large corporate landlords, and preserving well maintained existing rental housing is important to the entire community.

This is especially relevant when buildings need significant safety and sustainability improvements, including soft-story retrofits, accessibility improvements, EV charging, and electrification. We should be looking at incentives, grants, financing, and technical assistance that can help make those investments possible. Carbon Free Mountain View, whose board I sit on, is beginning work with partners specifically on how smaller landlords can make

sustainability improvements and finance that work.

My strategy would be to work closely with the Rental Housing Committee and Rent Stabilization Division, use actual data on costs and outcomes, and look for solutions that preserve our existing rental housing, support responsible property owners, and protect tenants from unaffordable cost increases or displacement. And I would work to find the funding needed to help landlords, which will require deliberate effort and focus.

B. For tenants, the most critical issue is affordability and the ability to remain in Mountain View. We do not have enough genuinely affordable housing, and we also need to protect the older and naturally affordable rental housing we already have. When existing lower cost apartments are lost to redevelopment, replacing the units does not necessarily replace the affordability, and existing tenants can be displaced in the process.

I am also concerned by the high vacancy rates reported in newer market rate apartments while so many residents struggle to find housing they can afford. To me, that underscores that we cannot rely simply on just producing more high end market rate housing and assume affordability will follow; we need housing that actually meets the range of incomes and life stages in our community.

I support maintaining and enforcing the CSFRA and just cause protections, along with effective enforcement when tenants face harassment, habitability problems, or unlawful displacement. I would prioritize preserving existing rental housing, adding genuinely affordable housing, at different affordable income levels, and for different life stages, including for young families, and carefully considering displacement and the loss of existing affordable units when we make land use decisions. I would also continue to fund and support our mediation process where landlord-tenant problems can be resolved before they escalate.

Thank you.

Livable Mountain View Steering Committee