



# Palo Alto Daily Post

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## Neighbors plead for fire truck

February 5, 2025 4:46 pm

<https://paldailypost.com/2025/02/05/neighbors-plead-for-fire-truck>



An engine crew from Palo Alto Fire Station 3 at 799 Embarcadero Road is helping make up for the gaps in coverage in south Palo Alto. Photo from city website.

BY BRADEN CARTWRIGHT  
Daily Post Staff Writer

After seeing the destruction from the fires in Los Angeles, residents are clamoring for the city of Palo Alto to restore a fire engine to the station at Mitchell Park, where surrounding homes are made of wood and hundreds of new apartments are planned.

"The danger is real ... South Palo Alto deserves the same protection as other neighborhoods even though we are not as rich or powerful," resident Stephen Rock said in an email to council.

"With 12 schools within a five-block radius of Station 4, the lack of immediate fire protection puts thousands of children at risk daily ... The city's \$1.2 billion budget should prioritize public safety," resident Christian Bailey said in another email.

Resident CeCi Kettendorf, who lives down the street on Grove Avenue, started an online petition on Sunday that had 160 signatures last night.

Kettendorf said she believes responses have been delayed because the nearest engine is in Barron Park, on the other side of the Caltrain tracks.

"Residents feel betrayed at this end of town that our Fire Station 4 has not housed a fire truck for at least two years, leaving us incredibly vulnerable. No notice was given to us, breeding immense distrust," Kettendorf said in an email to the city on Saturday. Firefighters took 15 minutes to respond to an alarm pulled by a kid at the Mitchell Park Library even though the station is on the same block, according to a newsletter yesterday from Palo Altans for Sensible Zoning.

City Manager Ed Shikada announced to council on Monday that he is working on a proposal to add staffing as part of the mid-year budget review on Feb. 24.

With council approval, an "interim service enhancement" could happen in 30 to 60 days, city spokeswoman Meghan Horrigan-Taylor said in an email yesterday. Today (Feb. 5), the city announced it will have one more firefighter staffed at Station 4.

### **Reductions over 10 years**

The fire department has reduced resources over the last decade in response to a new contract with Stanford and revenue loss during Covid, Chief Geo Blackshire told council's Finance Committee on Nov. 19.

The city's previous contract with Stanford had been in place since the 1970s and covered 30% of the city's expenses.

But Stanford and the city renegotiated the contract in 2018 — a "gory negotiation" that went to mediation and ended with Stanford covering 19% of the city's expenses, Councilman Pat Burt said at the Finance Committee meeting.

The city has five engines at six stations and three roving ambulances at all times, Blackshire said.

The engine was removed from Mitchell Park in July 2020 as part of pandemic-related budget cuts, Blackshire said.

The station at Mitchell Park is getting rebuilt, and the goal is to have an engine when it reopens in March 2026, Blackshire said.

Ambulances will be stationed at the Cubberley Community Center during the rebuild.

### **New positions**

Council will consider adding 10 firefighter positions or creating a new position for 25 paramedics who don't go through a fire academy.

Adding firefighters would cost \$3.3 million per year. They have more trainings, higher pensions and greater salaries than paramedics would, Finance Director Lauren Lai said.

Adding civilian paramedics would require negotiations with the union but would save money in the long run, Lai said.

Paramedics make about 30% less and have a shorter hiring timeline, Lai said. They'd have the same medical training but wouldn't fight fires or respond to hazardous materials, Blackshire said.

The city would still send a fire engine to be the first on scene, Blackshire told the Finance Committee.

"It goes without saying that the community would be better served with a fire engine in every station," said Blackshire, who is retiring at the end of the year.

### **Other station's story**

The College Terrace neighborhood was also without a fire engine until an attic caught on fire, and a neighbor helped an elderly person evacuate before trucks arrived, resident Margaret Heath told council in June.

“Minutes and seconds can make all the difference as to how serious a fire becomes, especially in older homes without sprinkler systems,” Heath said.

Council added three full-time firefighter positions for the station on Hanover Street last summer.

## 6 COMMENTS

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1. **jam** says:

FEBRUARY 5, 2025 7:56 PM AT 7:56 PM

“The fire department has reduced resources over the last decade in response to a new contract with Stanford and revenue loss during Covid, Chief Geo Blackshire told council’s Finance Committee on Nov. 19.”

Yup, and PA now has the worst record for fire safety in all of Santa Clara County.

Odd since PA’s had money for all the “retail consultants” with no local knowledge whose surveys pushed only costly redesigns of Cal Ave and University Ave instead simply adding the requested sign at Cal Ave and doing street cleaning on University Ave. The consultants ignored residents who’ve long requested ethnic/Asian markets while pushing sleeping pods.

This double-talk is as absurd as basing “City Priorities” on a few hundred responses to surveys that don’t include reducing utility rates, Community Safety including providing adequate fire and police protection, management accountability, providing cost-effective services — the concerns of real people who are as furious as the 400+ people who’ve signed CeCi’s fire trick petition! =

Odd since it had \$100,000,000 for to outsource a fiber-to-the-home project to compete with the existing big players already offering that service.

2. **CeCi Kettendorf** says:

FEBRUARY 5, 2025 8:39 PM AT 8:39 PM

To clarify the Mitchell Park reference:

The fire engine responding to the fire alarm at Mitchell Park Library took many minutes to arrive from Barron Park Fire Station. Had Fire Station 4 in Mitchell Park been active, they would have arrived in 60 seconds. FS4 is in the same block as Mitchell Park Library! Delayed response is due to the increased distance. We need our Fire Station back. It has been 4 1/2 years!

3. **PJT** says:

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 7:34 AM AT 7:34 AM

Residents have been asking for a fire truck and full staffing of the fire house down here for a VERY long time – this is NOT just in response to the LA fires (a characterization which makes the neighborhood advocacy seem like a knee-jerk reaction, in panic). The Post had an alarming article about the lack of staffing in May 2024 – that’s when MANY of us started writing in to City Council and the City Manager (likely people did before as well, to even get in the Post). The article said sometimes it takes 27 minutes for an ambulance to come because Palo Alto short staffs and the ambulance has to come from San Jose. That’s crazy! All ignored. Nothing has changed. Totally negligent.

4. **Hawkeye** says:

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 7:43 AM AT 7:43 AM

Has Palo Alto’s unfunded pension liability exceeded \$700,000,000 yet?

5. **Anonymous** says:

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 9:35 AM AT 9:35 AM

They should just move a truck back from Safeway in Menlo Park

6. **jam** says:

FEBRUARY 6, 2025 1:36 PM AT 1:36 PM

Yet just today there was an article entitled “ City looks to slow down cars in push to end road fatalities. Palo Alto’s new Safe Streets 4 All plan calls for restricting cars near schools, updating speed limits, adding traffic calming measures” new ways to slow traffic.

Evidently the consultant who wrote the 173-page report never considered that slowing traffic also includes slowing fire trucks, ambulances and other emergency vehicles.

Nor did our staff and other “leaders” who continue to plead poverty about fully staffing and fully equipping our fire stations but paid for the Safe Streets consultant advocating more expenditures on traffic calming.

I’m not calm about this; I’m furious.