

KEY TALKING POINTS

GOAL

The goal of our initiative is to cut in half the citywide growth in office/R&D square footage allowed in our 2030 Comp Plan so that it will be in line with our long-term historical average growth. *We propose a simple change: amend Policy L-1.10 in the 2030 Comp Plan to lower the citywide cap of 1.7 million new square feet of office/R&D development allowed under the life of the Plan through December 31, 2030 to 850,000 square feet. The Initiative also adds a corresponding provision to Palo Alto's Municipal Code Zoning section.*

WHY CHANGES ARE NEEDED

1. Not allow office growth to exceed its historical growth rate. Between 1989 and 2014, the average annual growth rate in non-residential square footage averaged 58,000 square feet per year; the 2030 Comp Plan allows up to an average of 113,000 square feet per year citywide. The Initiative would lower that.
2. The current rate of growth has produced huge problems of congestion: more traffic, limited parking and lack of affordable housing. The National Citizens Survey for Palo Alto show that more than two thirds of Palo Alto residents rate traffic, parking and affordable housing as a major problem and that share has jumped by a substantial amount over the last five years.
3. Rapid business expansion is the main cause of rising land prices and the cost of housing.
4. Palo Alto already has more than three jobs for every employed resident. This is the highest of any California city and one of the highest ratios in the country. The higher rate of growth allowed by the 2030 Comp Plan would exacerbate that ratio.
5. No feasible traffic mitigations. Recent traffic studies for projects in Palo Alto and for the Stanford General Use Permit clearly state that the impacts of any additional growth on key intersections around the city “would remain significant and unavoidable”.
6. Caltrain is pointed to as a solution. But Caltrain is currently at capacity. Increased capacity will mean more cars per train and platform extensions plus major infrastructure changes that involve trenching or grade crossings. The infrastructure changes are likely to lead to home removals and crossing/undergrounding work that could cost Palo Alto residents up to a billion dollars in sales and parcel taxes.
7. Palo Alto's contribution to Silicon Valley's success with innovation has relied on mobility. Palo Alto's contribution to Silicon Valley has been characterized by new start-up firms, workers moving from company to company; and the rapid movement of ideas across company boundaries. The emergence of very large companies and increased long-distance commuting would diminish this special role.
8. Residents, not businesses, pay for local government. Despite their rapid expansion, businesses pay only 25% of local property taxes and that share has been declining in recent years.