

# A Long Letter from Cupertino Mayor Steven Scharf

Dear Cupertino Resident:

For 21 years I've been politically active in Cupertino, fighting the forces that seek to exploit Cupertino for their own monetary gain. Before being elected to City Council I had been speaking out at City Council meetings, asking, usually without success, for City Council members to adopt long term, coherent, policies that took a systems approach to sensible growth.

In 2006 I started the petitions for Measures D and E, successfully overturning developer-backed rezoning Ordinances 2006-1975 and 2006-1977. Residents won by huge margins, sending developers a clear message that Cupertino is not for sale, and that we won't allow our city and our schools to be exploited for the financial gain of developers. This victory sent shockwaves through the developer community which had been used to buying our City Council members with campaign contributions and promises of future employment. This is a battle that we continue to fight. The bad actors, both locally and in Sacramento, do not give up, there is just too much money at stake.

Unfortunately, in 2016, Measure C failed, thanks to a litany of lies by some council members, some former council members, and millions of dollars spent by developers to spread misinformation. If Measure C had passed we would not be facing the possibility of tall towers on the Vallco property as part of the SB-35 Vallco project. Fortunately, the developer's Measure D also failed in the same election. Measure D would have allowed the Vallco property owner to bypass the California Environmental Quality Act and construct "The Hills at Vallco." 2016 is also the election where I got elected to City Council, defeating several developer-funded candidates.

When I moved to Cupertino in 1999, I never dreamed of running for City Council or becoming mayor. If anyone had told me that one day I would be the mayor, I would have told them that they were crazy. But the reality is that to effectuate change you must have a seat on the dais. In a late night meeting of concerned citizens, where people were saying "all we do is complain and no one listens," I was convinced to run for City Council.

In 2018 exploitative entities tried to elect three candidates to City Council, spending huge amounts of money in their effort. The San Jose Mercury News and the Cupertino Chamber of Commerce, endorsed Hung Wei, Orrin Mahoney, and Savita Vaidhyanathan. There was an incredibly intense grassroots effort in the 2018 election and as a result all of the candidates that the special interests, the Mercury News, and the Chamber of Commerce supported, lost, including an incumbent who lost by only 44 votes. This proved that Cupertino voters are not easily deceived and that money cannot necessarily buy votes. In December of 2018, when the newly elected council members were sworn in, we had a 4-1 progressive, resident-centered, majority on City Council. I was selected by my Council colleagues as mayor in a 5-0 vote. In 2019 I was selected as mayor for a second term, again by a 5-0 vote.

We must never give-up the fight for our City. Hopefully, after the 2020 election, we'll end up with a 5-0 majority and will be able to move Cupertino forward and create a better Cupertino for all. Only one candidate that lost in 2018 is trying again, and incredibly is trying to rebrand herself as resident-focused and not controlled by special interests. Hopefully voters will be just as smart in 2020 as they were in 2018.

Since 2016 we've made significant progress on a number of issues of concern to Cupertino residents. Covid-19, with its effect on City revenue, has affected some of the capital projects we need to complete but we have been affected less than some neighboring cities because we have been very fiscally responsible in our spending, even before Covid-19.

The City Council had some major accomplishments during my first term on City Council:

1. We funded the library expansion.

2. The purchase of the Lawrence-Mitty property for parkland was completed.
3. The establishment of our Legislative Review Committee which is vitally important given the large number of anti-affordable housing bills introduced by legislators that are funded by Wall Street real-estate interests intent on ending home ownership and destroying suburban cities. I serve on this committee along with Councilmember Liang Chao.
4. We hired a new City Manager, Deb Feng, who has embraced openness and transparency.
5. We have made progress on building bicycle infrastructure to improve bicycle safety which hopefully will encourage more cycling and less driving.
6. We established the Via On-Demand Shuttle system to address the lack of transit options in Cupertino.
7. We adopted a Code of Ethics.
8. We held our first LGBTQ Community Listening Forum.
9. We overturned a previous City Council's approval of the Tier 2 Vallco Project thanks to an incredible grassroots effort by residents, and despite the presence of paid thugs that tried to disrupt the referendum signature gathering process.\*
10. We approved the expansion of The Forum, which will include a new memory-care facility
11. We opened The Veranda, a 100% affordable senior apartment complex.
12. We took action on the cement plant, though this is still an ongoing issue.
13. We approved new community gardens.
14. We were the first city in Santa Clara County to adopt a mask ordinance to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. Other cities followed our lead, despite opposition from the County, Eventually the County capitulated and adopted their own mask requirements.
15. We established both a loan program, and a grant program, to help residents affected financially by Covid-19 pay arrears of rent.

\* The number of signatures was so overwhelming that the property owner didn't even bother to show up at the City Council meeting where the Council decided, based on the lack of any opposition from the property owner, to spare the City the cost of an election and just adopt the referendums. Incredibly, one current candidate for City Council, held a secret meeting with three City Council members, and the developer, to create a plan to prevent residents from collecting sufficient signatures.

As a mayor and city council member, it's impossible to make everyone happy all the time. Not everything we do is liked by some residents. The Regnart Creek Trail, which runs between Creekside Park and the Cupertino Library, was opposed by some residents whose property backs up (or fronts up) to the Water District's land. We worked with the residents to mitigate their legitimate concerns as much as possible. Most were appreciative of the outreach we did and the solutions we came up with to address their concerns, but there are still a few unhappy residents. The new bicycle infrastructure on McClellan Road will cause the loss of on-street parking by some residents but the safety of cyclists, especially schoolchildren, is paramount, and we decided that publicly owned streets should be used for the benefit of all. As Council Members, we have to act in the collective best interests of the majority of residents and it's often controversial, especially when we decide to use public property for the benefit of the majority of residents and it negatively affects the residents adjacent to that property.

There have been some disappointments in the last four years as well. Due to actions of some corporations, a few residents, and some City Council members, we lost our City Attorney and were forced to spend a considerable amount of taxpayer money to avoid litigation that would have cost us even more money, regardless of the outcome. In 2017, we failed, on a 3-2 vote, to establish Objective Standards on the Vallco property prior to State Law SB-35 taking effect. This failure was the direct result of three Council Members, two of whom are no longer on the City Council, kowtowing to developers and failing to act in the best interest of the City and its residents. The resulting loss of Vallco Shopping Mall was very sad since it had been well on its way to revitalization with entertainment, new restaurants, and shopping. The SB-35 Vallco project, which was approved by the

former City Manager and Assistant City Manager (both now gone from Cupertino), is opposed by most residents for a variety of reasons, including the lack of any affordable housing for families, the disproportionate quantity of office space that will worsen our jobs-housing balance, the height, and the minimal amount of retail space. We have tried to work with the property owner on alternative projects that would be beneficial to both the City and the property owner, so far without success, but we are not giving up.

Creating additional affordable housing has been a critical issue for both myself and other council members. While we were thrilled to open The Veranda, a 100% affordable apartment complex for seniors, these 19 units are not nearly enough to meet the need. Unfortunately, due to the housing glut in the Bay Area, property owners are not building their approved market-rate projects; when market-rate projects are not constructed we do not get the Below Market Rate housing that is part of those projects. Two current candidates for City Council have lobbied, on behalf of developers, against building affordable housing that complies with Cupertino's requirements of inclusion, quality, and size. Instead, they have advocated for the Vallco SB-35 project which provides no BMR units for families with children. We must fight the Astroturf, special-interest funded groups, that advocate solely for market-rate luxury housing that solely benefits their investors. When you see the acronym "YIMBY" (Yes In My Back Yard), it's really "WIMBY" (Wall street In My Back Yard).

One thing that new Council Members learn, shortly after being elected, is that most any project, ordinance, or event that we may want, takes an inordinate amount of time and money to accomplish. There's a big learning curve for new Council Members and even after four years I'm still learning. By the time a Council Member finishes their second term they have just about learned everything they need to know.

We need City Council members that are dedicated, possess critical thinking skills, and that are committed to look out for the best interests of Cupertino, its residents, and its schools. This is not a position for someone with a personal agenda or someone whose primary objective is for everyone to agree on every issue. I believe that myself, and Planning Commission Chair Kitty Moore, are the only candidates that are prepared for the job of being a City Council member. We need to elect council members that are able to evaluate complex issues and look at the long term impact of decisions, rather than just the short term benefit for those that are rich and politically connected.

Sometimes we are forced to approve projects, and make decisions, that we don't like, to comply with State laws that were passed by politically connected special interests. Leadership and collaboration is what yields results that benefit our city.

I am a policy wonk. I am developing my policy papers and beginning to post them on my web site. Some people may find them boring or too detailed but that's fine, not everyone has an intense interest in all of these issues. The important thing in this election is to vote for a candidate that is not owned or controlled by developers. I am one of two candidates running that can honestly make that statement.

I'm not sure how many people are aware of the monetary compensation City Council members receive. We receive under \$700 per month in a stipend, plus up to \$100 for cellular phones and broadband service; it's essentially a volunteer position, though sadly, some Council Members, when they leave office, parlay their experience into lucrative corporate positions with major polluters and developers (no chance of them wanting to hire me!). As mayor, I spend about 50 hours a week on City business. Regular Council Members spend 25-30 hours a week, depending on the meetings that they have to attend.

If elected for a second four-year term, I have some things that I'd like to accomplish. Some of these may not be possible due to the effects of Covid-19 on City revenue, but many should be possible.

1. Adopt our Regional Housing Needs Allocation for the next 8 year period, deciding where to entitle our housing mandate.
2. Begin the renovation of Memorial Park.
3. Complete the Regnart Creek Trail.

4. Address the inequity in property tax revenue that Cupertino receives.
5. Assist CUSD (Cupertino Union School District) in addressing the inequity in school funding.
6. Continue to support State legislation that expands equity and inclusion, and oppose State bills that worsen the affordable housing crisis.
7. Work with non-profits to build Extremely Low Income (ELI) rental housing for the developmentally disabled on Mary Avenue.
8. Work with non-profits, like Habitat for Humanity to build for-sale affordable housing on City-owned residential parcels.
9. Expand the number of months that Blackberry Farm is open.
10. Collaborate with Foothill De Anza Community College District to re-create a constituency that supports the district, and to enable the sharing of the districts facilities, including swimming pools, performing arts facilities, tracks, and libraries.
11. Work with the League of California Cities, the California Alliance of Electeds, and Livable California, to advocate for affordable housing and local control and to oppose displacement and gentrification advocated by WIMBY (Wall Street In My Back Yard) and other Astroturf organizations.
12. Continue to advocate for a Vallco project that the community supports and that is still financially advantageous for the property owner.
13. Advocate for State and Federal funding for Housing and Transportation.
14. Find a solution to the issue of the Rainbow Crosswalk. Unfortunately, our State Assembly member has reiterated that it is not permissible under State Law, but we are looking into acceptable alternatives and the possibility of obtaining a waiver.
15. Address the homelessness issues that have been exacerbated by Covid-19.
16. Encourage property owners to build the projects that the City has approved, including the housing on the Marina Foods property and the Hamptons.
17. Help businesses survive the Covid-19 pandemic.
18. Continue to fund supportive services provided by West Valley Community Services.
19. Provide advice and assistance to those families dealing with mental illness. Current City Council members, and City Staff, need to be trained in how to deal with mentally ill individuals in a caring and compassionate way
20. Try to find a way to reduce the property crime, especially car break-ins, that we are experiencing. This is something we can solve through education and enforcement.

It's been an honor to have served as a City Council member for four years, and as mayor for the past two years. I believe that I have made a positive impact on our city, moving Cupertino forward to create a better Cupertino for all. I'm an engineer, but after being elected I realized that I needed a thick skin; I've been called a demagogue, a vigilante, a cult leader, and a tyrant by those upset that it's no longer open-season on exploiting Cupertino for their own financial gain. Hopefully you'll continue to put your trust in me and elect me for a second term. I have no ulterior motives, I just want to help Cupertino thrive.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, organized citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead*

Sincerely,

*Steven Scharf*

Mayor of Cupertino

**Steven Scharf for Cupertino City Council 2020 FPPC ID #1388099**