

Candidate: Matt Mahan for San Jose Mayor

Questions for Mayoral Candidates From the San Jose Branch of the American Association of University Women

1. What will you do to decrease the impact of this area's enormous wealth gap? While some people pay \$6M-16M for a house, others cannot afford \$1600 for monthly rent.

I grew up in a working-class family and agree that the high cost of housing is causing serious hardship in our community. The solution to the growing wealth gap must include both higher-wage jobs and lower cost housing. Underlying the housing affordability crisis is the housing supply crisis. The solution is both building enough new affordable housing units and units that meet demand at every income level (so we reduce displacement and gentrification). Neighboring cities must also take on more housing and do their fair share. The best way to solve that problem is to build more housing in our Downtown and in urban villages along our major transit lines. Until we bring jobs and housing into balance, housing costs are going to keep going up and that will be hardest on working families which in turn puts a greater strain on the wealth gap in the area. By focusing on making sure the housing to jobs ratio is balanced, it will help decrease the impact of the wealth gap in San Jose and the Bay Area.

On jobs, the city must focus on education, job training, and maintaining a safe and clean city so high wage employers locate here and stay here and so small businesses can open and thrive.

2. The homeless population is a top concern for all. How, specifically, can/will the city work with the county to coordinate resources to address the issue? How is accountability for the success/failure of these programs established?

We have the money to end street homelessness, but the City and County need to adopt new approaches. The County is currently building brand-new units at over \$850,000/door, but we can, at a tenth of that cost, build modular units — safe, dignified apartments — sited on government-owned land. More cost-effective housing will allow us to build enough shelter to actually meet the scale of the crisis. We also need to significantly bolster our county's capacity to treat severe mental illness and addiction in the unhoused community. Behavioral health experts estimate that, at minimum, counties should have 50 public psychiatric treatment beds for every 100,000 people; Santa Clara County has a mere 13. I also support expanding programs like San Jose Bridge, which employs unhoused people to clean up our city, providing the dignity of work and a ladder to further job prospects. Effective, realistic approaches exist but we must stop allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good in this arena.

In order to hold our elected officials accountable for ensuring the success of these programs, I believe that unless San Jose and Santa Clara County elected officials and

senior staff can reduce the rate of street homelessness by 10 percent per year for the next 10 years, we should not get raises. We need to be solving this crisis, not perpetually managing it.

3. How will you keep homeless women and children safe?

As mentioned earlier, I'm advocating for building modular housing – safe, dignified, individual tiny homes – to transition homeless individuals off the streets and into shelter. Warehouse-style homeless shelters are especially dangerous for homeless women and children, many of whom are unhoused due to situations of domestic abuse. In large, shared, co-ed sleeping spaces, women and children are especially susceptible to sexual assault, theft of their personal belongings, or other dangerous situations. Modular housing serves as both a cost-effective and safer alternative. Each unit has electricity, running water, windows, personal storage, and a door that locks. These tiny homes give homeless individuals the security and privacy they need to get back on their feet and onto the path to stability, permanent housing and employment.

4. What have you done to show your support of reproductive rights? What is your plan to make reproductive healthcare, including abortion, more accessible in our community?

I am and always have been 100% pro-choice. Upon the Supreme Court opinion on Roe v. Wade being leaked, I co-signed a letter, authored by the Stonewall Democratic Club, in support of protecting a woman's right to choose. I will continue to advocate strongly, and in every forum, for reproductive freedom. While healthcare is not under the Mayor's jurisdiction, I support working collaboratively with the County to protect reproductive rights in San Jose.

5. With the pandemic and the rise of 'work at home' or other remote work options as an ongoing model, how will this affect the city's tax base, and what are plans to address any projected revenue shortfalls?

I oppose raising taxes during a budget shortfall. California's tax rates are already extremely high and should not become even higher. Over the last ten years, the city budget has doubled, and the County budget has tripled in size (to \$5.2 billion and \$11.5 billion per year, respectively). Let's improve fiscal management and increase productivity in government before we talk about addressing shortfalls with higher taxes. To avert cyclical shortfalls, we need to better fund our "rainy day" reserves during strong years so we can smooth government spending over time. The current \$100 billion state budget surplus for example, should be a reminder that California's public sector revenue is tied to volatile markets and the boom-and-bust business cycle. If our state budget can be \$100 billion in the black, it can also be \$100 billion the red if we aren't prudent. The answer is to plan ahead by projecting revenues and expenditures based on long-term averages and increasing saving in strong years. More broadly, our public sector needs to embrace performance management. Today, when government experiences a surplus, elected officials tend to multiply programs and administrative overhead (all with good

intentions, of course). I've proposed a different approach to budgeting at City Hall: I believe that each year, when we approve our budget, we should identify our top 3-5 strategic priorities, publish objective success metrics and targets for each priority, identify every dollar of spending meant to achieve those targets, and publicly report out measurable performance for each program that is aligned with a priority along with overall progress toward the target. Furthermore, I've argued that the annual pay raises elected officials and senior administrators receive should be proportional to the progress we make toward the pre-identified top-level targets.

We should reduce debts and invest in our rainy-day fund during economic booms to prevent layoffs and service cuts in down years. However, if cuts are required, I will prioritize defending:

i. **Public Safety:** Safety is the most basic responsibility of local government; I'll fight to maintain funding for first responder staffing and equipment.

ii. **Core Infrastructure:** Residents need roads and bridges, sewer and flood control systems, and other basic infrastructure to function in good and bad times. I'll work closely with the City Manager's team to prioritize critical investments while communicating tradeoffs and cuts to constituents.

iii. **Library/Community Centers:** As a parent and former teacher, I know how important our libraries and community centers are for the most vulnerable members of our community, including children and seniors, who often lack alternative spaces that are safe, warm, and provide access to resources. I will fight to keep these public institutions open in tough times.

6. How can the needs of business, developers and workers/employees be balanced through city policies and actions?

By spurring economic development, we can create an economy that is prosperous for all. In many cases, the needs of businesses, developers, and employees can be addressed with similar policies.

First, promoting safe and clean streets. I've heard from countless developers and business owners that San Jose just isn't a desirable place for investment because of the state of our commercial areas. Customers and employees don't feel safe and don't want to spend time in areas that feel neglected and look unsightly. A focus on public safety and trash and blight response programs benefit everyone, so it should be a key priority.

Secondly, smart housing and infrastructure planning. I support building future housing near commercial districts, which will provide more foot traffic for businesses and create more vibrant economic centers. I am strongly supportive of the General Plan's urban village strategy and have been an advocate for streamlining approval of projects in urban

areas. Just like the other policies, building higher density housing where it makes sense will allow for more people to afford to live here—benefiting both those who want to work and the companies looking for employees.

In the current environment, small businesses also suffer through excessive regulations and red tape. We must make it easy to set up shop in San Jose — I don't support any new taxes on small businesses or any new unfounded hoops to jump through. By making our city more conducive to opening small businesses, it will allow healthy competition that is beneficial for both customers and employees.

7. What will you do to decrease the level of federally-funded military equipment inventory?

I assume you mean in our police department. I will work to fully fund our police department but I don't think we need more military equipment. We need cops on the street interacting with residents, not military-style vehicles. Just this past June, the City received a report that the police department has approximately 700 pieces of military grade equipment. While tracking is a good first step, we need to work with the police department and the community to determine how to phase out military equipment. As a Council, we asked SJPD to create rules within a year dictating when they cannot use this type of equipment.

<https://sanjosespotlight.com/san-jose-regulates-police-department-use-of-military-equipment-weapons-tools-armored-vehicles-aircraft-drones-sjpd/>

8. How will you focus on non-violent interventions to keep San Jose safe?

We need to approach lowering crime from every direction, focusing on non-violent interventions. We can prevent crime by providing job training, support for hiring the formerly incarcerated, drug treatment and expanded mental health care. Our jails should not be the primary provider of mental health care and addiction treatment in the County. We need to invest in alternative interventions, including expanding in-patient beds for addiction and mental health treatment. In the long-term, we can help interrupt the cycle of crime by focusing on protecting and educating children. Studies show that 44.7% of inmates experienced childhood trauma and 70% of inmates can't read at a 4th grade level. We need to direct police and non-police resources to protecting children from crime. While the San Jose city government does not run our schools, that is no excuse for inaction. A comprehensive partnership to keep children in school and make sure they succeed in school is one of the most proven tools in lowering crime in the long-run.

9. What will you do to screen potential police candidates to avoid hiring policemen who make the community less safe?

As I meet with voters across our city, I consistently hear that our community wants a well-staffed, well-trained, technology-enabled, responsive and accountable police

department. I believe—and I think most if not all residents agree—that police officers who violate the law and/or policing best practices should be held accountable, whether that means additional training, various forms of discipline, or termination. We cannot build public trust in law enforcement without high standards of transparency and accountability. Regarding concerns raised about racially biased policing, I've supported empowering and expanding the office of the Independent Police Auditor, I believe in strong independent oversight of the department, and, as Mayor, I will continue demanding swift responses to abuses of power. While expanding our police force to achieve outcomes our community needs, we also must be willing to hold accountable those who show a clear pattern of racial bias, misconduct, and abuse. I'm especially encouraged by the possibility of using data to identify evidence of biased policing practices early and intervene with training and discipline as appropriate. Of course, culture change starts at the top, which is why it's critical that we have strong, independent and ethical leaders in our Police Department and across the City. I also support our initial attempts to differentiate 911 triage to better serve our community based on the circumstances of a given call; specifically, our MCAT partnership with the County enables a trained clinician to be the first-responder to mental health-related calls rather than an officer with a badge. I believe that having different response protocols for different types of calls can improve service quality and help our police force focus on their core competency of preventing and addressing serious crime.

10. San Jose's police force has diminished over the past years—what are your plans to address this issue of concern?

As Mayor, I will advocate to restore and expand our police force. Before the 2008 recession, SJPD had 1,815 full time employees, 1,363 of which were sworn officers — today, our number of sworn officers has shrunk to 1,157, with 1,715 total full time employees. San Jose has one of the most thinly staffed police forces of any major city, as referenced in a previous response. I believe that the appropriate staffing level is, at a minimum, the number from Fiscal Year 2007-2008, when San Jose was still called the “safest big city in America.” In order to hire more police officers, we can support ongoing economic growth and attract business and jobs to San Jose, raising city revenues. I am strongly pro-growth and pro-business because in the long-run there is no better way to both fund our core services and help all San Joseans thrive.

I also will push for the City to hire ahead when sensible. If we know that the City will bring in more revenue due to increased economic growth, we should anticipate that future need and additional tax revenue, and then ensure that our Academy classes are right-sized for future growth rather than lagging behind and playing catch up down the road.