

# City Council Candidate Responses

**Note: We only have responses from Janet Abelson as Gabriel Quinto did not turn in any responses.**

## 1. What is your position on SB 1186?

*(SB 1186 is bill pertaining to surveillance. The bill would require public debate and a vote by local elected leaders prior to law enforcement's acquisition of new surveillance technology. The bill also requires written rules for existing surveillance technology in order to curtail the possibility of civil liberties and civil rights abuses by local law enforcement).*

**Abelson — (Score: 0)** I have a strong belief in free speech and a person's ability to express free speech. When decisions are made then the public has the right to be involved and the right to express their opinions. I measure the success of this by seeing that the person who does not agree gets to be involved and gets to be heard.

There is more than one way to do public outreach. As a member of various transportation groups, I have worked on ways to actively engage the community in engaging in the public feedback. Those ways included using the internet for chat sessions, email, and going to where people are (Pop Up Events) at different times of the day and week.

Not everyone might be able to attend meetings at city hall so we should go to them and make sure to address any language needs. I would like to see the city do more of this.

## 2. Most of the surrounding cities have passed surveillance ordinances. What are your thoughts on a similar ordinance for EC that includes a public process and goes beyond administrative policy?

**Abelson — (Score: 1)** I would support a policy that stated the new types of surveillance equipment should come before the city council.

## 3. How will you make the budget-setting process more interactive and public?

**Abelson — (Score: 3)** When we start on the budget at city council meetings often times people have left the meeting in the past. We have a new approach that we are implementing which has the budget system of the city online where anyone can access the information and view it in

many different ways. I think that may make the data more interesting to people. It can be another way for public process.

We do a series of special meetings outside the council meeting on the budgets at different times to allow people to pick from different alternatives for budget priorities with an allotted amount of money. There is also an online version of this available. It is important to get feedback in different ways than just at council meetings.

**5. Pillar B in the EC Affordable Housing Plan calls for reducing the risk of displacement and stabilizing at-risk populations. What is your position on just cause eviction and rent stabilization in order to protect vulnerable tenants?**

**Abelson — (Score: 0)** The first thing I am concerned about with housing is the lack of housing that has been built in a number of years. So as a result we have a housing shortage which is a huge problem. I don't want to do anything to make that worse. There is a shortage of workers to build housing. In order to attract builders to build in El Cerrito versus other communities we have to be careful.

I think the best way to provide housing to the most people is to build more housing. I think the Specific Plan is a way of doing it. El Cerrito has done better than surrounding communities by using the carrot approach rather than stick approach at approving low income housing.

I am worried about burdening our small town with a system that had a large bureaucracy. We have two new recent developments that are 100% affordable housing units including the new senior housing next to city hall. The new Plaza development has 15% affordable and the units are all the same. When there is a greater supply of housing here I believe the prices will go down.

We are on target with our low and very low housing goals. We need to focus on the middle area of income which is our current challenge.

I feel strongly about this issue and I am worried about the totality of people and finding places for everyone and right now we do not have that.

**5. Do you support AB 1598 and do you think an affordable housing authority would be helpful in El Cerrito.**

*(AB 1598 was signed into law in November, 2017. This law authorizes cities and counties to create new affordable housing authorities for the purpose of financing low- and moderate-income housing within their city or county boundaries.)*

**Abelson — (Score: 1)** I don't want to create a new bureaucracy in El Cerrito and we don't have funding to do it. I did see that bill has already been signed by the Governor. There are many

caveats in the bill that could be worrisome to El Cerrito. It looks like it is set up to benefit the state to the detriment of the local jurisdictions. I don't think the bill was written with the city's interest in mind.

**6. What will you do on city council to reduce racial tensions and disparities that arise from unfounded suspicions about people in El Cerrito? E.g. People calling the police based on skin color.**

**Abelson — (Score: 3)** Dispatch is through Richmond right now. The response to that area might be to train dispatch in ways that could improve things.

I could support additional training for the El Cerrito Police. I would like to see an increase in diversity in hiring for the police department. This is difficult as it is hard to find police officers both in El Cerrito and elsewhere.

We can further the No Hate in El Cerrito Campaign which was started by the Human Relations Commission.

**7. What are your thoughts about strengthening the El Cerrito single use food ware policy ordinance, including the possibility of a plastic straw ban?**

**Abelson — (Score: 3)** We have had interesting experiences with the single use ban. Some people from Environmental Committee suggested a take out container that is used when you have leftovers. It was not very successful.

Having prohibitions on certain things that we don't want in our environment have worked well. An example is the styrofoam ban. We want it to be a broader thing than El Cerrito.

The straws can't be outlawed because some people with disabilities can't drink without straws. I am open to something such as allow by request only or something to help to reduce straw usage. I would vote yes for a request only ordinance. We can also do research on what is the best alternative straw and its expense and availability.

**8. How do you view Climate Change in relation to vegetation management and hazard mitigation (e.g., the fire dangers at Hillside Park, implementing the stormwater improvement plans)?**

**Abelson — (Score: 4)** We have a huge plan for fire abatement that covers the entire city. We have been doing it since the Oakland fire. Our fire department goes out and inspects every property and then send them a notice to abate the issue if it is needed. If they don't abate then the city does it for them and charges them at the end of the process.

The Climate Action Plan is our guiding document in this area. We start our big picture with green house reduction goals. In addition we have some separate policies that are not part of the plan. By taking action to reduce our carbon footprint we make a big difference. An example was a council action to convert the source of the city government's electricity to 100% green!

**9. The El Cerrito Climate Action Plan identified a review to be conducted at this time. How do you propose to update and strengthen our climate goals?**

**Abelson — (Score: 3)** We are doing well on meeting our targets so we need to look at expanding our targets. We reduced our impact more than expected. One example is the pool. There are solar panels at the Recreation center and police station. We got enough energy from the one at the Recreation center to heat the pool all year. That was our biggest energy hog in the city prior to that.

The entire city government is on 100% on green energy. This is something that was not in plan but done anyway .

We need to go through each study area and see what we can do better.

**Unscored Questions**

**A. How would you prioritize spending the transfer tax revenue?**

**Abelson —** I shouldn't answer this question. The intent of the tax as it was set is that the monies cannot be allocated ahead of time. So I do not want to do anything to interfere with the process.