

Los Altos Hills Club 11.9.2021 Perspectives on Los Altos

Michelle, thank you very much for that kind introduction and for inviting me to join you today to share my perspectives on the evolution of Downtown Los Altos and its prospects for the future.

Some of Los Altos' evolution is depicted in two murals at the new community Center:

One is of what you might call the Indigenous or Ohlone era when indigenous people lived here for thousands of years until just over 250 years ago when Europeans arrived.

The other mural is of what you might call the Orchards era – I remember growing up here surrounded by apricot orchards.

I think we're now in the Silicon Valley era.

My perspectives of Los Altos' evolution are based on my living and being active here.

Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Life is what you make of it."

I believe our community is what we make of it.

And I mean that both in terms of what we collaborate in creating – what we make of it - and in terms of our perceptions or attitudes about it – what we make of it.

I have deep roots in the community.

My grandfather, William Cranston, graduated from Stanford in 1901, married Carol Edith Dixon, who he met at Stanford, and continued a family real estate business started by his father, who built many Victorians in the late 18 and early 1900 – over 30 of which are still inhabited in San Francisco.

William and Carol's home and office in San Francisco were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and they moved down the peninsula to Palo Alto, where my father, Alan, was born in 1914. Later that year, the family moved to a farm at the corner of Fremont and Campo Vista in what is now Los Altos Hills. They later moved to a home at the end of Cypress Drive, in what is now Los Altos. I'm told Edith Avenue is named after my grandmother, Carol Edith Cranston. William bought and sold real estate along the peninsula, including in Los Altos. He developed many properties in the Los Altos Area and built several of the buildings on Main St. He was active in building the Scout Hall and other early community projects. So, some of Los Altos is what he and others made of it in their time.

My father graduated from Stanford in 1936, continued the family real estate business, and got into a few other things.

In the mid 1950s my father and other downtown Los Altos property owners became concerned about the competition the new Stanford Shopping Center might create and banded together to convert property they owned into all the parking plazas we now get to enjoy. So, some of Los Altos is what he and others made of it in their time.

I grew up in what is now Los Altos Hills until 1958, when my father was elected State Controller and we moved to Sacramento. We spent many holidays visiting my father's sister, R.E. and her husband Jack, who lived in Los Altos Hills, and after college, law school, and working in southern California for several years, I returned to Los Altos Hills in 1993 with my wife, Colette, and daughter, Evan, who now works for JLL – the second largest commercial real estate company in the world – and is continuing with the family real estate business.

Since returning to the community, I've been very active with the family real estate business and efforts to collaborate with others to improve the community: to make of it an increasingly great place to live, work, raise a family, retire – you name it.

As Michelle mentioned, I'm active with several local organizations:

In 2011, I co-founded Los Altos Forward – a project of the Los Altos Mountain View Community Foundation - which promotes community vibrancy in downtown Los Altos and started

- Los Altos First Fridays – have any of you been to a Los Altos First Friday?
- We also started Club 55 – have any of you been to a Club 55? They're unfortunately on hold for the pandemic.
- We also started Sit & Share - placements of nice outdoor furniture where people could just hang out - in front of Linden Tree Bookstore, The Costume Bank and Chase Bank.
- We also sponsored several workshops with Fred Kent of Project for Public Spaces on Placemaking – creating healthy, inclusive, and beloved communities.

In 2013, I co-founded, and am now President of, Los Altos Property Owners Downtown, which *advances the long-term prosperity, charm, and uniqueness of Downtown Los Altos.*

In 2016, I co-founded the Los Altos Community Coalition, which played a key role in advancing development of the Los Altos Downtown Vision Plan, which the Los Altos City Council adopted by a 4-0 vote on August 28, 2018, "As a guiding document that we can all aspire to."

The City began implementing the plan by amending zoning for the CRS (Commercial Retail Sales) District to "permit contemporary fitness and personal service type uses" on State and Main Streets and "Office-administrative services" in some areas, and by adopting a parklet program, which was significantly accelerated & expanded during the pandemic.

I also arranged for a friend with a winery to donate 200 of the wine barrels that you see around many of the parklets.

I'm now working with others to make the parklet program permanent and to continue implementation of the Downtown Vision Plan to make Los Altos an increasingly great place to live.

All my volunteer work in Los Altos is primarily about collaborating with others – too many to name here – to make of it a place that people want to go to have fun, see others, dine, shop, play, read, whatever.

Here are a few thoughts about downtown Los Altos' prospects for the future.

But first, a reminder: as Yogi Berra said, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future"

I heard what I think is the most interesting perspective of this area – Silicon Valley – from Tim Brown, who in 2000 was working for IDEO in London. David Kelly, IDEO's Co-founder and CEO, called Tim and asked him to come here to take over as CEO. Tim balked and told David he liked living in London. David told Tim: this is like being invited to Florence in the Renaissance.

With the Mediterranean climate and amazing innovative economy, I believe David Kelly's description is accurate and we are fortunate to live in one of the most amazing places on earth, with great prospects for the future.

Within 11 miles of us are the headquarters of 3 of the 6 largest Companies in the world by Market Cap: Apple, Alphabet (Google) and Facebook – now Meta.

Los Altos is at the epicenter of Silicon Valley.

The Los Altos Town Crier recently reported that according to financial news outlet 24/7 Wall St., Los Altos is the most educated city in California: 84.2% of the population 25 years and older has earned at least a bachelor's degree.

This isn't to say we don't have some challenges.

A recent poll by Joint Venture Silicon Valley and the Bay Area News Group found that:

- 56% of respondents said they are likely to leave the region in "the next few years." This is a nine-point uptick from 2020, when the same question was posed by a pre-pandemic survey.
- 76% of respondents identify the cost of housing as the most serious problem in the Bay Area, followed by the cost of living, homelessness, the increasing frequency of wildfires and drought.

The poll continues: “Are there any bright spots? Most definitely. Though it may seem contradictory, 65 percent of respondents say they feel a strong sense of belonging to the Bay Area.

On October 19, the Wall Street Journal published the WSJ/Realtor.com housing index, which ranks cities for appreciating housing markets and lifestyle amenities. “Small U.S. cities dominated The Wall Street Journal/Realtor.com Emerging Housing Markets Index in the third quarter, as high housing costs and remote-work opportunities drive many home buyers to seek out more living and outdoor space.”

I found it interesting that “San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara” ranked 56th on the index Up from 79th last quarter).

This suggests to me the folks who may decide to leave the area will have little difficulty selling or renting their homes.

One of the most challenging issues Los Altos faces is providing affordable housing for people who are part of our community but can’t afford to live here.

Two examples:

Restaurants and retailers here have great difficulty finding workers who can’t afford to live here.

And we need housing for teachers, hospital workers and emergency service personnel: If a significant earthquake were to happen tonight, we might find that for up to 8 or 9 days the only police, firefighters, health care and city workers who can help us are the ones who were on duty when the earthquake struck, which might be very few people. Very few of the emergency service personnel upon whom we depend live here.

Finally, I wonder what impact the current pandemic will have on Los Altos’ future.

The New York Times recently published an item: *Past Pandemics Remind Us Covid Will Be an Era, not a Crisis that Fades*

“We tend to think of pandemics and epidemics as episodic,” said Allan Brandt, a historian of science and medicine at Harvard University. “But we are living in the Covid-19 era, not the Covid-19 crisis. There will be a lot of changes that are substantial and persistent. We won’t look back and say, ‘That was a terrible time, but it’s over.’ We will be dealing with many of the ramifications of Covid-19 for decades, for decades.”

So perhaps we’re now in what may eventually be called the Silicon Valley Covid era.

Reflecting on the perspective that being here now may be like being in Florence in the Renaissance, I think it’s interesting to note the relationship between the renaissance in Florence and another pandemic – the Black Death.

“The Black Death (1347-1350) was a pandemic that devastated Europe and Asia populations. The plague was an unprecedented human tragedy in Italy. It not only shook Italian society but transformed it. The Black Death marked an end of an era in Italy. Its impact was profound, resulting in wide-ranging social, economic, cultural, and religious changes. These changes, directly and indirectly, led to the emergence of the Renaissance, one of the greatest epochs for art, architecture, and literature in human history.” DailyHistory.org

Other pandemics have had similar long-term impacts on societies.

I’m curious to see what longer-term changes will result from the pandemic in the Bay Area and elsewhere; some current trends may be informative, such as:

- Remote working.
 - The great resignation.
 - A smaller workforce causing difficulties hiring for a range of jobs.
 - Less business and recreational travel.
 - Supply Chain issues disrupting Just in Time manufacturing, offshoring, and outsourcing.
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- Finally, I see a desire for better places to work in place, not only homes, but communities, better suited for the Covid era.

I think Los Altos for many is just such a place.

If another pandemic led to the creation of the renaissance in Florence, I’m very curious to see what the current pandemic leads to in Silicon Valley, which, again, David Kelly described as like being in Florence in the Renaissance.

I believe Silicon Valley will play important roles innovating solutions to the economic, environmental, and social challenges we face. All things considered, I believe many people will continue to want to live in Silicon Valley, and particularly, in Los Altos and Los Altos Hills. I believe we live in one of the most amazing places on earth.

According to Abraham Lincoln, Peter Drucker, and others, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Our community’s future will be what we make of it.

Thank you very much for inviting me to reflect today on our town’s evolution and prospects for the future.

And thank you for helping to create a great future for Downtown Los Altos and the broader community.