

May 12, 2026

The Honorable Josh Becker  
California State Senate  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: City of Palo Alto – 2026 State Budget Requests**

Dear Senator Becker,

On behalf of the City of Palo Alto, I would like to extend our sincere appreciation for your continued leadership and advocacy on behalf of our community. Your focus on advancing policies and investments that promote sustainability, innovation, and public safety has had a meaningful and lasting impact, and we are grateful for your continued partnership.

As part of the State's 2026–27 budget process, the City respectfully submits the following priority funding requests for your consideration. These projects reflect a coordinated approach to addressing infrastructure needs, enhancing public safety, and supporting long-term community well-being:

**Natural Grass Athletic Field Pilot Program – \$2,300,000**

The City seeks funding up to the total project cost of \$2,300,000 to advance Phase Two of a pilot program evaluating the feasibility of high-performance natural grass athletic fields as an alternative to synthetic turf. With increasing demand for recreational space and growing attention to the environmental and lifecycle impacts of synthetic materials, there is a need for data-driven evaluation of sustainable field solutions.

This project will construct and manage a sand-based natural grass field engineered for intensive use, incorporating advanced drainage and maintenance practices to maximize durability and usability. The pilot will evaluate performance metrics including playable hours, maintenance requirements, water use efficiency, and lifecycle costs. Results from this effort will inform future planning decisions in Palo Alto and provide a valuable model for jurisdictions across California seeking to balance recreation needs with sustainability goals.

**Caltrain Corridor Safety and Youth Mental Health Improvements – \$7,700,000**

The City is requesting funding for any of the projects listed in this section to support a coordinated set of safety and community health support for youth mental health and improvements along the Caltrain corridor. The Caltrain corridor runs through Palo Alto in neighborhoods, close to schools, parks and community facilities and serves as a vital transportation resource. It has also been the location of recent tragic fatalities including incidents involving youth. This underscores the urgent need for both immediate and longer-term interventions and solutions to support rail safety and youth mental health.

Funding would support a flexible package of improvements that may include any of the following:

- Implementation of a Track Watch Rail Safety Program to deploy trained safety monitors at high-risk Caltrain grade crossings, providing a visible and proactive safety presence and enabling rapid response to potential incidents – \$2,000,000

# City of Palo Alto

*Office of the Mayor and City Council*

- Development of railroad quiet zones through installation of safety infrastructure such as raised medians, enhanced warning systems, and four-quadrant gates to meet federal safety requirements – Project cost is \$5,700,000 (partial funding would also be beneficial)
- Complementary safety and prevention strategies, including measures that deter trespassing and improve awareness along the rail right-of-way

This integrated approach recognizes that rail safety and community mental health are closely linked. In addition to reducing the risk of incidents, these investments would mitigate the ongoing psychological impacts of repeated rail-related events and environmental stressors, including frequent train horn noise. Collectively, the proposed improvements advance state priorities related to transportation safety, suicide prevention, and community resilience.

## **Cubberley Community Center Acquisition – \$2,000,000**

The City is also requesting funding to support the City's acquisition of an additional portion of the Cubberley Community Center site, 8 acres of which the City currently owns and 7 of which the City plans to acquire from the Palo Alto Unified School District based on a Memorandum of Agreement. Cubberley is a vital public asset that serves as a hub for arts, culture, education, recreation, and community programming. The site is outdated beyond its useful life and unable to meet current community needs. The planned acquisition, which would allow the City to stabilize and reconstruct a 15-acre site, will support a long-term vision to modernize facilities, expand services, and make a vibrant community space near new proposed housing developments in Palo Alto. To realize the community and recreational services in the Cubberley Conceptual Master Plan for this site, the City needs to first acquire the additional 7-acres from the school district, and the requested funds are critical to allowing the City to secure the land. This investment will ensure that the Cubberley Community Center continues to serve as a vibrant and inclusive community hub for decades to come.

Together, these requests reflect the City's commitment to advancing projects that improve safety, environmental outcomes, and overall quality of life. We respectfully request your support for these priorities as part of the State budget process.

Thank you again for your continued leadership and partnership. We look forward to working with your office to advance these important investments.

Sincerely,



Vicki Veenker  
Mayor  
City of Palo Alto