OUR TOWN

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE TOWN OF LOS ALTOS HILLS MARCH 2023

THE WILDLIFE AMONG US

American crow

Black-tailed deer

Bobcat

Brush rabbit

Eastern fox squirrel

Gopher

Gopher snake

Gray fox

Jackrabbit

Mole

Mountain lion

Rattlesnake

Red-tailed hawk

Scrub jay

Songbirds

Western fence lizard

How Climate Change Impacts Local Habitat

Climate change will impact the Bay Area environment in many ways, ranging from sea level rise and groundwater rise along the coast and bayshore, to changes in vegetation types and wildfire regimes in the surrounding hills. Even our landscaping will change as we adapt it to longer periods of drought to save water and costs. Climate change forecasts suggest an extended fire season, and large fires occurring more frequently. Increased frequency of fires could lead to decreased shrub biomass, loss of species diversity, and conversion to other vegetation types. Climate change may alter plant life stages such as leaf emergence or flowering period, which may affect reproduction and long-term survival. [CONTINUED ON PAGE 2.]

"With an increase in summer temperatures, the area burned by wildfires has risen fivefold from 1972 to 2018. Warmer summer temperatures and climate-driven aridity are likely to fuel more wildfires in the future... large wildfires (greater than 25,000 acres) could become 50% more frequent by the end of the century if emissions are not reduced, and the average area burned statewide would increase 77 percent."

Scripps Institution of Oceanography

How will climate change impact the natural habitats and wildlife species we currently encounter in Los Altos Hills? It is not easy to predict, and it will probably seem to happen gradually if there is not a catastrophic fire, but ongoing research offers a few theories based on climate models.

Weather Patterns Affect Ecology

Los Altos Hills has historically had a Mediterranean climate, with most rain falling in the winter and spring. Mild cool temperatures are common in the winter, and we rarely have days that exceed 90 degrees in the summer.

Our town is dominated by oak woodland, grassland, chaparral, and creek riparian habitats. Los Altos Hills has been dominated by this vegetation type for at least the last 65 years. A study of the historic habitats of our area by the San Francisco Estuary Institute shows that habitats in Los Altos Hills even longer ago were historically dominated by oak savanna and chaparral. Not surprisingly, these habitats are drought tolerant.

The oak woodland on our hills is dense with a closed canopy and an understory dominated by shrubs. The chaparral is similarly dense, but is low to the ground and while basically impenetrable to humans, it provides excellent refuge for wildlife. The grasslands are dominated by non-native grasses and support some native wildflowers. Riparian zones along the creeks have generally remained protected, except where backyard activities encroach on them, because of codes requiring setbacks in these areas. The lower hills are mainly developed with housing, roads, fences, and non-native landscapes. The development has already stressed our ecosystems by introducing travel barriers and reducing the amount of habitat available for wildlife. Changes in weather patterns and vegetation types will cause additional stress and will likely cause changes in wildlife use.

Impact on Creeks

Regional climate studies indicate that on average over the next 100 years, California may experience substantially warmer and wetter winters, somewhat warmer summers, and more climate

extremes connected to El Niño events. By mid-century, our dry years may become drier, and the wet years occasionally become wetter. Two key changes in rainfall patterns have been identified: progressively less frequent rainfall, particularly in the fall and spring, and greater rainfall extremes. While these changes may cancel each other out when looking only at annual mean rainfall, the timing of rainfall can affect vegetation growth patterns and the availability of water for wildlife. Scientists expect that atmospheric rivers will become a more significant flood risk. These periodic high flows erode creek banks, can change creek flow lines, and regularly clear out vegetation and woody debris that provides habitat. When the vegetation is removed, early invader vegetation may come in. Climax vegetation along creeks may not have time to develop if flooding becomes the norm, and riparian zones could have less diverse vegetation types and structures.

Impact on Vegetation Patterns

The U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Center has examined various climate models to predict how climate change will affect vegetation patterns. Based on some preliminary analysis of the habitats in our bioregion, Los Altos Hills may see a reduction in forest canopy, a reduction in chaparral canopy, and more grassland. Chaparral may expand into currently forested landscapes, but also with less dense canopy cover and more grassy areas. Our wooded hills may become more like oak savannah, with fewer trees and more grassland, with broadleaf forest occupying the cooler canyons. Redwoods and fir trees will probably die off. Drought-induced stress will reduce the ability of vegetation to resist disease, and we will probably lose more oaks and tanoaks, but retain more disease-resistant trees such as bay laurel, particularly since Sudden Oak Death already has a foothold here. Non-native species adapted to disturbance, such as French broom, may colonize and develop single-species stands, reducing biological diversity. The conversion of woodland or chaparral to grassland diminishes the capacity for carbon storage, and will significantly alter habitats available for wildlife. Grassland has less cover for large mammals and birds, fewer species to forage on, and fewer places to nest.

Impact on Animals

In general, scientists in many disciplines have identified that the integrity of vegetation communities and their ecosystems will be challenged by rising temperatures, increased variability in precipitation, longer and more persistent droughts, and more frequent fires. They also theorize that the range of some

plant and animal species will change, as animals move to higher elevations to find the habitats and food sources they evolved with and rely on for survival. The animals currently common in our town may move to higher habitats and be seen less frequently. Other animals, such as those that occupy grasslands (gophers, for example) may become more prevalent.

Because of the rapid pace of climate change, some species will not be able to adapt and will head toward extinction. Species that are already near the point of extinction and species that cannot quickly migrate (such as plants and smaller animals) will most likely suffer reduced populations or possibly go extinct because of the changes caused when the climate changes, on top of the human-driven stresses already imposed on them.

Natural Resiliency

It is quite difficult to predict what changes will happen and what will come to be. But, like the human body, nature has a drive to survive, no matter how much it is abused. So, when pushed, nature adapts, trying to maintain balance. When an existing balance is thrown off, a new balance will come about over time, as long as enough of the existing pieces remain. One thing is clear, if we don't work on reducing carbon emissions, we are in for some potentially significant changes in our natural environment that will knock the existing equilibrium into a cycle of change. It will be important to pay attention to these changes and follow the advice of scientists and other experts so that we do what we can to help the planet through these times and preserve biological diversity for our mutual benefit.

Taylor Vanderlip is an environmental consultant specializing in biological issues.

Alina Zebb, manager and co-owner of Therapy Salon (Aveda) in downtown Los Altos, with Ayaan and Aanya.

Poetry *on* WINDOWS

Ayaan Dhruv (7th grade) and Aanya Dhruv (10th grade) are siblings who attend The Nueva School in San Mateo. They both have varied interests and areas of passion outside of school. Recently, they found a way to combine their interests by bringing the community together and encouraging all students to take action on a global issue: climate change.

Meet the Students

Ayaan is very interested in poetry and humanities because he believes that poetry can serve as a tool for youth to express their emotions about a problem or issue that they are passionate about. Ayaan writes a blog where he has published over 50 poems (*kidscanbepoets.substack.com*) that portray views on life, mundane objects resurrected, and everyday events.

Aanya is enthusiastic about combating and raising awareness about the climate crisis among youth in the community. "Everyone keeps talking about climate change and its impact on youth, but not many youths fully understand how the crisis is engulfing them," said Aanya. To that end, she has led several projects in her school and community, including building a solar-powered charging station as well as hosting environmental justice workshops.

A Eureka Moment for Collaboration

Ayaan once wrote a poem centered around the environment on his poetry blog. When Aanya read this poem, she was immediately inspired: "Why should it just be one poem and why should it be just by you?" Ayaan and Aanya then saw the potential in using poetry to spread awareness about climate change, along with involving the community. They both liked the idea of having students express their view on the world through both a scientific and humanities lens. This sparked the creation of an ongoing initiative that they launched on December 17 — *Poetry On Windows.*

What is the Poetry on Windows Initiative?

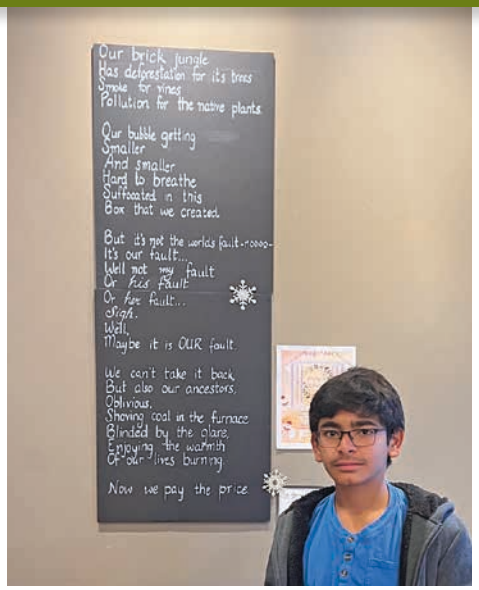
Poetry on Windows is an initiative where Ayaan and Aanya displayed poems on store windows of downtown Los Altos to welcome the holiday season with a cause — a raised environmental awareness. All of the poems were written by students of all grades in schools across the Bay Area, including Murdock Portal, California High School, and The Quarry Lane School. The overall span of planning the event to the implementation took about a month. Ayaan and Aanya received gracious help and support from Stewardship Educational Alliance (SEA), an organization across the country in Camden, Maine, with a mission of increasing community awareness of ways to improve their local watershed. SEA has been at the forefront of initiatives like these in Maine.

The Poetry on Windows initiative was a way to spark creativity in youth. It also makes them more involved with critical social issues.

Displaying the Poems

Ayaan and Aanya both thought that fliers were a useful way to spread the word about the initiative. They knew that kids interested in the humanities would be visiting the library and Linden Tree, a local bookstore, quite often; therefore, they decided to place a flier at those two places. They also reached out to a few of their prior school friends who were not in their county to submit poetry as well. Together, they approached local downtown stores such as Starbucks, Therapy Salon (Aveda), The Shade Store, and Le Boulanger to seek their support to display students' poetry on their windows. The owners and employees at the stores were very enthusiastic.

After a month of planning from ideation to execution, which included reaching the schools, talking to the stores, creating fliers, and filtering through submissions, the initiative came together perfectly. Students across the Bay Area submitted over forty poems. The most thought-provoking poems were chosen for public display. Ayaan and Aanya looked for different qualities in the poems. While Ayaan was looking for the flow, word choice, and overall structure of the poem, Aanya was focusing on the content and how it relates to the environment and climate change. The duo then agreed on the final selection of poems.



Ayaan standing beside a poem displayed at Los Altos Starbucks.

Impact of Poetry

A poem contributor, Dhyan (7th grade, Dublin), was thrilled to display his poetry: "I really care about the environment and am excited to take part in this [initiative]." Another contributor, Rahi (9th grade, San Ramon), was also enthusiastic about submitting environmental poetry: "Thanks so much for thinking about me with this initiative. I have never published anything before so this is pretty fun for me."

On the night before the display date, Aanya spent a couple of hours, on a rainy evening transcribing the poems in the window shops. "It was kind of a cool experience," said Aanya. "Sipping [hot chocolate] and scribing"

Sherwin Sand, the manager of the Starbucks in Los Altos downtown, enjoyed the poems on the store windows; he expressed his enthusiasm: "Very nice. I'm going to check how often they are going to change [the poems] because customers were inquiring." The initiative received praise from several visitors and shop owners.

Aanya after scribing a poem on the window of the the Shade Store.

Another store patron, Britney Marshall, the manager of Le Boulanger, was also intrigued and encouraging "I would be so supportive of this initiative. In fact, if you want I will write one too."

This community initiative was a way to spark creativity in youth. It also makes them more involved with critical social issues. And, last but not least, with all the stops and stares by visitors, it likely helped generate more business to the stores. Jennifer Escalante, a resident of Los Angeles who was visiting, was fascinated by the poems: "It was amazing to see poetry on the windows. I thought it was a really unique idea and I have never seen it before back home in LA."

"Sometimes small actions can lead to big changes," said Ayaan. "While COP 27 is a *world* stage for the climate crisis, downtown Los Altos is *our* stage." Ayaan and Aanya hope to garner a lot more interest and spread this initiative to the entire Bay Area over the next phases. Along with environmental poems, there are so many other topics that could be brought to awareness using the art of poetry over the course of the year. During a holiday weekend celebrating an event, poem topics could be based on those commemorations, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Independence Day, and many more. Unique community initiatives like these can foster a spirit of togetherness alongside tackling global changes from a grassroots level.

Ayaan and Aanya Dhruv have lived in Los Altos Hills since 2019.

The tech industry is probably the first thing that comes to mind when we think about what makes our region unique. But the San Francisco Bay Area has been unique for millennia. California is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots for plant life, and the Bay Area—including what is now Silicon Valley — is a hotspot within a hotspot. There are more than 5,000 plant species native to our state, many of which can't be found anywhere else on the planet. Right here in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains, we can walk from a redwood forest to an oak savannah to chaparral scrub during a single hike.

Many factors, such as climate and topography, shaped this natural diversity, but often overlooked is the relationship between humans and the land. For time immemorial, Indigenous People have lived in reciprocity with the land. The ecology of California evolved with Native Americans as they stewarded the land through collecting, gathering, and burning. In turn, the rich diversity sustained life for plant, animal, and human relatives alike.

Invasion of the Weeds

The relationship between humans and the land forever changed with colonization. While thousands of plants native to California still persist, habitat loss and degradation, climate change, and introduced species put pressure on the balance of our ecosystems.

Nowadays, species of all kinds move about the globe regularly, both intentionally and unintentionally. Most introduced species do not become invasive, but if the conditions are right, they can become problematic. When plant species are introduced to a new place, their natural predators most often do not come along with them, meaning these plants can grow unchecked and outcompete native species. This in turn reduces the native habitat that our local birds, mammals, and pollinators need to survive.

Invasive plant management is the practice of monitoring and removing problematic plant species. Eradication is often unrealistic, but reducing populations and stopping their spread can be achieved.

Truly effective management brings together technical strategy and community. Strategically, we have to ask questions such as: What species should be prioritized for management? What are the best techniques for removal? When should weed work take place? And where should work begin?

But beyond these technical questions, we have to work in the community to make it all worthwhile. Plants don't care about property lines. Your weeds are your neighbors' problem, and the converse is true as well. Public agencies and nonprofit partners coordinate bimonthly at "Weed Management Area" meetings to create regional strategies. We need residential property owners to be part of this effort too. Land stewardship may seem daunting; it is after all lifelong work. But when we all do our part, we can find comfort in knowing that each weed removed is part of a greater effort to protect the amazing natural assets of our region.

Wondering where to start? The Los Altos Hills Open Space Committee (OSC) has created an Invasive Plant Guide (facing page) that highlights problematic local species as well as maintenance tips. In town, stinkwort is very prevalent and should be targeted first. With the help of volunteers and community members, Grassroots Ecology (GE) has diligently removed stinkwort from the Town Open Spaces, and there are only a few individual plants each year at these preserves. But more residents need to help reduce stinkwort on their property to halt its spread altogether.

If you would like to learn more about native plants and invasive plant management, attend a volunteer event at Byrne Preserve. Members of GE and OSC will work together to take care of the preserve and answer any questions so that you can tackle the weeds back home as well.

To learn more about invasive plants and weed management visit cal-ipc.org. Email questions to: openspacecommittee@losaltoshills.ca.gov

Kristen Williams is the Habitat Restoration Director at Grassroots Ecology where she oversees community-based land stewardship projects in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties. Kit Gordon enjoys learning about local ecosystems and is a member of Stanford's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve community.

The OSC Invasive Plant Guide

Tree of Heaven
(Ailanthus altissima)

This highly invasive tree can grow three feet a year. It spreads by seeds and creeping roots. Roots are poisonous to neighboring trees.

In the fall, make cuts in bark and apply herbicide to cuts. Cutting without herbicide results in profuse root sprouting.

Italian Thistle
(Carduus pycnocephalus)

This weed spreads by seeds. It is highly flammable and creates a fuel ladder.

Pull by hand in winter and spring before it flowers. You can leave the weed in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If it has flowered, remove the entire weed and dispose in yard waste bin. Using a weed trimmer at the onset of flowering will greatly reduce but not eliminate this weed.

Purple Starthistle
(Centaurea calcitrapa)

This weed spreads by seeds.

Pull rosette by hand in winter and spring before flowering. Leave the weed in to decompose if no flowers have formed. If the weed has flowered, remove it entirely and dispose in yard waste bin.

Yellow Starthistle
(Centaurea solstitialis)

Proliferates in disturbed areas. Spreads by seeds that are short-lived.

Pull by hand in winter and spring before flowering. Leave weed in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If the weed has flowered, remove it entirely and dispose in yard waste bin. Using a weed trimmer at the onset of flowering will greatly reduce but not eliminate this weed.

Stinkwort
(Dittrichia graveolens)

Spreads by seeds. Proliferates in disturbed areas. The weed's resin can cause rash and is flammable.

Pull by hand in spring and summer (wear gloves) and dispose entire plant. Using a weed trimmer before flowering will greatly reduce but not eliminate this weed. Herbicide is effective but only before flowering (typically in August).

French Broom
(Genista monspessulana)

A single bush produces thousands of seeds each year, which remain viable for decades. This weed creates fire fuel ladders under trees.

Pull small weeds by hand in winter and spring when the ground is moist. Cut larger weeds and apply herbicide to cut. Leave the weed in place to decompose if no flowers have formed.

Bermuda Buttercup
(Oxalis pes-caprae)

Spreads by many persistent bulbs and rhizomes, emerging in winter and spring.

This weed is very difficult to control. Smother with cardboard. Herbicide is effective with multiple applications. Pulling by hand reduces weed but does not eradicate and can inadvertently spread bulbs to new locations. Dispose all parts of the weed in yard waste bin.

Milk Thistle
(Silybum marianum)

Spreads by seeds that can remain viable for up to 9 years. This weed can grow up to 6 feet, with large rosettes

Pull by hand in winter and spring before flowering. Leave in place to decompose if no flowers have formed. If the weed has flowered, remove it entirely and dispose in yard waste bin.

PROFILE OF A TOWN COMMITTEE MEMBER

Anand Ranganathan

ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES COMMITTEE

Tell us about what you do for a living and your role in the Environmental Initiatives Committee.

I am a full-time dad to our two children. I volunteer on the Environmental Initiatives Committee (EIC) and I'm on the board of the Purissima Hills Water District (PHWD). The EIC advises the town council on matters regarding the environment and actions we might take to help mitigate climate change and other environmental disasters staring us in the face. The water district ensures that our residents have access to the best drinking water in the country: Hetch-Hetchy water.

Both of these organizations meet once a month. They are not huge time commitments — a few hours a month depending on how much you take on. It might get really busy once or twice a year, but not much worse than that.

What is the set of beliefs or philosophies that guides the decision-making of the EIC? How does the committee build consensus?

The EIC believes that climate change is an existential threat to all life on this planet and it can only be prevented if the world transitions off of carbon-based fuels. As one of the richest towns in the richest country in the world, we have a moral obligation to lead the way in this transition. When you put it like that, it's easy to build consensus.

How many years have you served on the committee?

I have been on the EIC for two years.

What inspired you to join the EIC and What are some of the initiatives that you have worked on?

I joined the EIC because climate change is the existential challenge of our time and leaving a habitable planet for all living beings is a moral imperative. I was very impressed with the expertise and commitment of its members. It was clear that this was a committee that was having an impact on our town policy. Since joining the committee, I have worked on multiple projects.

- The EIC presented the GreenHouse Gas Inventory for our town for 2019
- The EIC wrote the Climate Action Plan that our town passed in 2020. It lays out a path for our town to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 52% by 2030 and end the use of natural gas in town by 2045.
- I have been working on transitioning our town government off fossil fuels to get us to a zero carbon-footprint government. In the last year, our town has switched from regular diesel to renewable diesel, electric cars have replaced aging gas cars, and our town now offers free EV charging to all employees to encourage them to switch to electric vehicles for their personal use as well. The town will soon switch its (space and water) heating to heat-pump heaters thus ending the use of natural gas in town hall.
- I was also instrumental in switching Santa Clara County Fire to renewable diesel for all its fire trucks. This means that the fire trucks that service our town are no longer contributing to the very global warming that is the cause of our perennial fire season.

Anand with his pet Goldendoodle, Elvis, 5 years old.

- Our town now offers a $1,000 incentive to any resident who replaces their fossil-fuel-powered water heater with an electric heat pump water heater.
- Our town also offers free electrification assessments to any resident who wishes to transition their home from natural gas to electricity-powered appliances.

On the PHWD board, I am predominantly involved in:

- Finding new sources of water supply for our district to augment our Hetch-Hetchy supply. As our town grows, our water needs will grow commensurately and we will need to find new sources of water.
- Maintaining fiscal discipline, we are a small well-managed district financially but it takes work to keep us that way so our district can deliver clean, safe water for decades to come.

The water district is also working on conservation. Our district has some of the highest per-capita water usage in the Bay Area, and it will not be possible for us to solely buy our way out of the state-wide water crisis. We have to cut our water usage; this needs to happen as a result of both voluntary changes in individual behavior as well as district and town policies that encourage conservation.

How did you shift from your expertise in computer science to pursue climate and energy issues? What inspired you to focus on these issues?

My background in computer science prepared me perfectly for a career of founding multiple startups since I moved to the Bay Area 25 years ago. When the pandemic arrived, I found myself in the fortunate position of being able to be a full-time dad, so that's what I did. This gave me some time to reflect on what I wanted to do to create an impact and the town committees offered me the opportunity. Both the EIC and the PHWD work on two sides of the same issue: climate change — and nothing else matters as much as that single issue. It wasn't a sudden shift, I have always been an activist. Back during the 2000

election I created a votexchange website, and was involved in anti-war efforts during the subsequent "wars on terror."

What brought you to California and Los Altos Hills, specifically?
I moved west to the Bay Area from Bengaluru, India where the rents were high, the food was great, and the dust was bad. Twenty-five years later, I am still here where the rents are high, the food is great and the air is now bad for many months of the year. Going west as a young man has worked perfectly, it feels like I never left! On a serious note, there are few better places to move to than California, and no better within California than the Bay Area. The people are welcoming, the climate is wonderful, and diversity is encouraged. San Francisco was a wonderful place to live when I first moved here, I was young and the dot-com boom was in full swing. Los Altos Hills is perfect for my family now — we have kids and animals that enjoy our large yard. Our family goes biking or walking on the pathways, and hiking in nearby open spaces.

Tell us about your family. What are some of their favorite activities?
My wife is an artist and also an art docent in the school district teaching the kids art. Our kids are budding artists in visual arts, music, and writing. They go to our local public schools: Gardner Bullis and Fletcher. They stay active: horseback riding, basketball, and biking. Our proximity to Arastradero Preserve has been a blessing both for us as well as our guests. Our dog and chickens are often found roaming our front and back yards while the cats hold down the fort.

Civic engagement is important to you. Please elaborate on that.
The main lesson of the last few years is that civic and democratic institutions are particularly fragile and it takes work and engagement to keep them alive and vibrant. In this respect, Alexis de Tocqueville's observations regarding local government and civic engagement are profound. They bring liberty within our reach and embody its spirit.

Anand with his wife, Yuki, and sons Mani (left) and Rishi (middle).

What is your favorite quotation that inspires you or reflects your life philosophy?
In both my roles on the PHWD as well as the EIC, I am frequently reminded of Gramsci's motto regarding the pessimism of the intellect but optimism of the will. Every passing year of drought and record emissions reminds us of the former, but the latter keeps us working and making incremental progress toward our goals. Coincidentally, it is a similar mindset that animates the numerous startup founders in our town of whom we are justly proud.

If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently or the same?
Where I am today is a product of various roads taken, some of them less traveled than others. Way has led on to way, and they have each made a difference to bring me to this spot. Why would I make any changes?

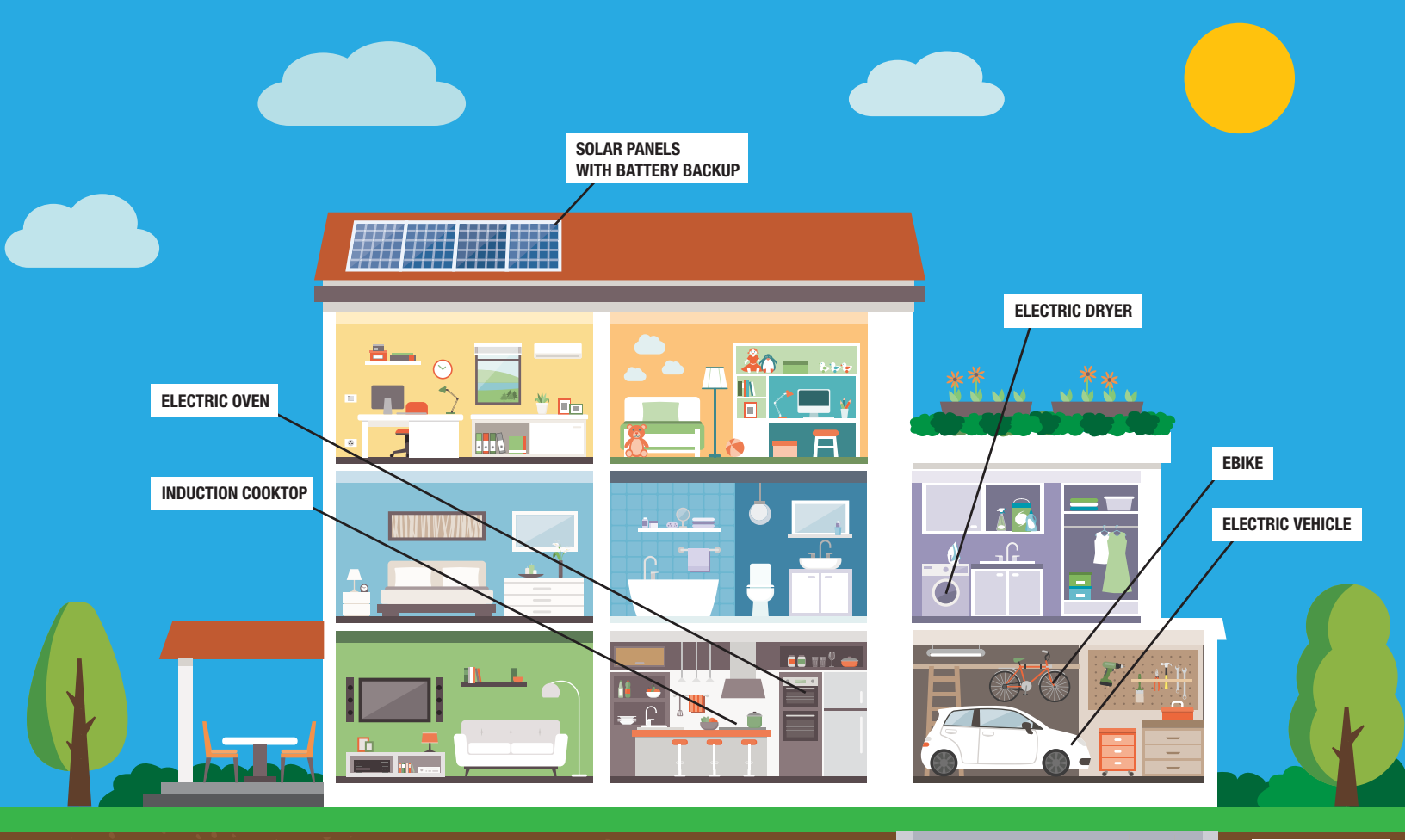
When you are not at work, what are your favorite hobbies or activities?
I spend half my day cooking or planning to cook or thinking about planning to cook. The rest of my time I spend reading or with family.

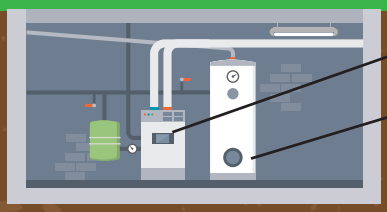
What are some of your favorite books and why? What are you reading now?
Here's an assortment of wonderful books I have read recently:
The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson
Autumn Light by Pico Iyer
The Legend of Pradeep Mathew by Shehan Karunatilake
They Called us Enemy by George Takei
A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles
The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson
Debt by David Graeber
Plenty by Yotam Ottolenghi
The Road by Cormac McCarthy
Electrify by Saul Griffith
We Were Eight Years in Power by Ta Nehisi Coates
I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou
Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds by Charles Mackay
The Thousand Autumns of Jacob De Zoet by David Mitchell

Are there ways to improve the EIC Committee?
Absolutely! There is always room for improvement. The EIC needs more members, we are currently short of our maximum strength by three. We would greatly benefit from the perspectives of the younger generation who will be the most affected by climate change. Some of our work is very quantitative and could easily be a side project for a high school student looking to work with data.

Both the EIC and the water district are currently working with the Environmental Design and Protection Committee on water conservation. The EIC is working with the Technology committee on the battery backup being installed in Town Hall.

What would you say to residents who might consider joining one of the Town's many committees?
I have found committee members to be extremely friendly and for the most part, they don't bite. If there are issues around our town that you think need more attention, the best way to get that attention is via a committee. This is especially true in a town like ours where community involvement is cherished and encouraged. Also, note that town committees have considerable leverage to affect policy outcomes. So it is really a no-brainer to get involved in issues that one cares about.





WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE?

The carbon footprint of the average Los Altos Hills family is larger than most houses. Given the town's layout, we drive more than average; given our affluence, we also fly a lot more. Because houses in town are large, residents need more energy to heat and cool them. Finally, although our water usage doesn't contribute to climate change, we need to conserve water so we can better deal with the effects of climate change.

We can all make small changes to help with each of these problems. The quickest way to make a difference is to take advantage of the electricity delivered to our homes, which has a very small carbon footprint and is rapidly getting greener. Almost two-thirds of PG&E electricity — and 100% of Silicon Valley Clean Energy's (SVCE) electricity — comes from renewable sources, so we can effectively reduce our carbon footprint by switching all our fossil-fuel energy sources to electricity. The technology is here for all of them. Let's consider each in turn:

1. Transportation

Los Altos Hills leads the state, and perhaps the country, in the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). Driving used to be our number one source of greenhouse gas emissions. When you are in the market for a car, strongly consider buying an EV, and when you are doing any electrical upgrades around your home, install a 220V outlet in your garage so that you are ready for an EV. Note that Los Altos School District schools offer free EV charging at night, so if you live near an LASD school you can drive for free.

Although the hilly nature of our town discourages many people from biking for their

We can all make small changes to help with each of these problems. The quickest way to make a difference is to take advantage of the electricity delivered to our homes, which has a very small carbon footprint and is rapidly getting greener.

commute or their errands, you can now ride an e-bike. You won't be challenged by those steep hills anymore. There are e-bikes with plenty of storage or child seating for that grocery trip or ride to the park. Best of all — e-bikes are fun to ride.

Finally, if your car or truck (or any other equipment) uses diesel, you can switch to renewable diesel now. It is chemically identical to diesel but comes from renewable sources. It is available at many filling stations and costs the same as conventional diesel. Since it is chemically identical to diesel, you can switch back and forth if you can't readily find renewable fuel for any reason, and you can use it without any changes to your equipment.

2. Water Heating

The water heater in your home is most likely fueled by natural gas or some other fossil fuel. Heating water in a home is the number one source of greenhouse gases. You can switch your water heater to an electric heater. An increasingly popular way to heat homes is to install heat pumps. Heat pumps extract heat from the surrounding air and use it to heat air or water. (Think of how a refrigerator extracts heat from its inside and sends it out). Since the heat comes from the surrounding air, there is no need to burn gas — electricity simply drives the pump. Heat pumps are extremely efficient at heating since the energy is being used to pump the refrigerant and the air, not to heat the water.

3. HVAC

Since we live in larger houses than most, space heating is a large source of greenhouse emissions. But just as with water, a homeowner can replace a furnace with a heat pump furnace that uses only electricity. If your furnace is 25+ years old, change it now, you'll save money on energy and help save the planet. If you're looking to install an air conditioner take the opportunity to install a heat pump HVAC for both cooling and heating.

4. Laundry

Your dryer might be driven by gas. If so, the next time you have to buy a new one, buy an electric dryer. There are a variety of electric dryers on the market or, better still, go retro and line-dry your clothes.

5. Cooking

If your kitchen stove uses gas, consider replacing it with an induction stove. The induction stove efficiently concentrates its heat on the pan. If you're not ready to switch out your entire stove, get a portable induction stove; it will take over most of your kitchen's consumption of fossil fuels. If your oven is gas-powered, replace it with an electric oven.

6. Outdoors

Your patio heaters can switch to electricity right away. You can get a heat pump heater for your pool/spa, but under some circumstances, it might take longer to warm up your pool/spa.

7. Solar Panels

By themselves, solar panels won't do much for your carbon footprint. If you're on SVCE, you've already committed to buying carbon-free electricity. However, if you do install solar panels, put in a battery backup. The battery will charge during the day when the sun is out so it can power your home at night, rather than draw on grid electricity when the grid is more likely to be fossil-fuel powered than not. Also, you now have a backup power source for those climate-change-driven PSPS events.

8. Air Travel

We're all lucky that we can afford to travel as much as we do. But do keep in mind when making those vacation plans that air travel is a major cause of CO_2 emissions. When a family of four flies to Hawaii and back, that's the equivalent of almost two years of driving your gas-powered car. While you can't drive to Hawaii, the next time you travel, try to drive an EV instead of flying, and if you must fly, opt to fly economy.

9. Water

Our water usage doesn't affect our greenhouse gas emissions, but our water sources are drying up due to climate change. We all need to use less water. Eighty percent of the water used in our town is to keep our backyards green. We can reduce that water consumption a great deal by switching to native gardens and getting rid of our thirsty lawns where possible.

But how much will all this electrification cost? And is it right for you? The good news on cost is that between the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), BayRen, SVCE, and our town, there are several rebates available that drive down the cost of electrification to par or below their gas-powered equivalents. The energy cost savings are a bonus. For instance, our town recently introduced a $1,000 rebate for water heaters when you replace your fossil-fuel-powered water heater with a heat pump model. Combined with the SVCE and the IRA rebates, you could get back more money on a heat pump water heater installation than you paid.

Our town also offers free home electrification assessments. Sign up on our town website for an independent contractor to (virtually or in-person) visit your house and lay out an electrification roadmap. They'll take into account the age of your existing appliances, their location, and the capacity of your panel to take on more electrical load. You will receive a comprehensive report telling you how much it will cost to electrify your home, in what order you should do it, and how much you will save on energy. And did I mention that it's free? So go to our town website and sign up now: www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/562/Home-Electrification.

Town resident Anand Ranganathan is a member of the Environmental Initiatives Committee and Purissima Hills Water District.

TOWN OF LOS ALTOS HILLS
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Town Newsletter Statement of Purpose
This newsletter is a community-centered quarterly publication for topics of particular interest to the residents of Los Altos Hills. Its purpose is to communicate and engage residents in stories that define, enhance, and help preserve the town's rural beauty and cultural heritage. **Deadline for the next issue: April 3, 2023.**

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www.losaltoshills.ca.gov

Our Town

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Los Altos Hills City Council
Linda Swan, Mayor
Stanley Q. Mok, Vice Mayor
Lisa Schmidt
Kavita Tankha
George Tyson

City Manager
Peter Pirnejad

CALENDAR

MAR

3
Friday, 5:30-8:00 pm
Seeing in Black & White
Fine art photography exhibit featuring the work of Tom & Marj Green, Los Altos Hills residents. Pacific Art League, 668 Ramona St, Palo Alto. To learn more visit: Pacificartleague.org or www.tomandmarj.com

5
Sunday, 1:00-3:00 pm
Newcomers Welcome Reception
Meet other families who have moved into town within the last four years. RSVP required: losaltoshills.ca.gov/newcomer.

18
Saturday, 8:00 –11:00 am
Drive-Thru Shred Event
Free drive-through service for Los Altos Hills residents. Bring a maximum of 5 standard-sized file boxes or 5 brown paper bags of confidential/personal

paper documents to shred at Town Hall.

APRIL

2
Sunday, 10:00 – Noon
Leadership Conference
The Leadership Conference is intended for Middle and High School students eager to affect change. Join the Youth Commission at Town Hall, RSVP today: losaltoshills.ca.gov/LeadershipConference

8
Saturday, 9:00-10:30 am
Hoppin' Hounds
Donate and join the on-leash hunt and raise money for the Pets in Need Shelter that serves Los Altos Hills. Registration required: losaltoshills.ca.gov/register.

MAY

13
Saturday, 9:00 am
Pathways Run/Walk
Sign up for a 5K/10K or 1 Mile. To learn more visit: lahpathwaysrun.org.

JUNE

5
Sunday, 12:30-4:00 pm
Town Picnic
This special event is for Los Altos Hills residents only. Lunch, entertainment, and more. RSVP required.

JULY

4
Tuesday, 9:30-11:00 am
4th of July Parade
Meet at Town Hall in your red, white, and blue attire to parade down to Gardner Bullis for refreshments, music, and more.

AUG

4
Friday, 6:30-10:00 pm
Dinner and a Movie at the Park
Enjoy tacos and Latin-inspired food fusions from Truly Food Truck. At sunset, Disney's Encanto will be displayed on a giant outdoor movie screen. RSVP required: losaltoshills.ca.gov/MovieNight

19
Saturday, 10:00-Noon
Adult Softball Game
Los Altos Hill will take on the Los Altos for the 5th time. Interested in playing? Visit Losaltoshills.ca.gov/softball for player application and additional information.

Calendar events are also posted on town's website: www.losaltoshills.ca.gov

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