

Protesters marched to the 800 block of Oak Street, the site of Mario Gonzalez's death in police custody. They demanded not only justice for Gonzalez's death but that Alamedans stop calling the police about members of the Black and Latinx communities who are not committing crimes. One 911 caller told the dispatcher that Gonzalez was in their front yard, when, in fact, Gonzalez was standing in a public park.

Townhall Discusses Gonzalez's Death

Ekene Ikeme

Members of the Youth Activists of Alameda (YAOA) discussed police reform with Alameda Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft and other Alameda officials at the mayor's virtual town hall meeting Friday, April 30.

The special youth-centered town hall was sparked by the death of 26-year-old Mario Gonzalez, of Oakland, while in Alameda police custody Monday, April 19. Ashcraft said members of the YAOA requested a forum to speak about police policies and accountability in Alameda. Ashcraft began the meeting by saying the city is "heartsick" over the death of Gonzalez.

The meeting was moderated by YAOA member and Alameda High School (AHS) senior Raquel Williams. Williams peppered the four-member panel comprising of Ashcraft, City Manager Eric Levitt, Alameda Police Department (APD) Capt. Matt McMullen and YAOA member Vinny Camarillo with questions about policing and the Gonzalez situation.

Williams began the Q-and-A session by asking Levitt "Is the city working on any police alternatives to prevent similar circumstances to Mario Gonzalez?"

"The council is talking about an alternative mental health approach

and we are actively working on it as a staff, not only as a long-term plan, but an interim plan," Levitt replied.

Williams later asked McMullen how the community can trust APD after Gonzalez's death and the Mali Watkins incident less than a year ago.

"Trust is the cornerstone of police," McMullen answered. "I think trust is built through relationship building and relationship building is primarily built through time. We need to create more space for dialogue and situations that are nonenforcement interactions not traffic stops, but times like this when we can listen and hear each other and talk about the things that are concerning each other."

Williams responded by asking McMullen if Gonzalez's death questions overall police culture and leadership and how do we change the culture of Alameda police department.

"We acknowledge and accept that we need to change," McMullen replied. "The Alameda Police Department stands ready and willing to suggestions and new ideas. We need to look deep into our souls to find out what we can do to better serve the community."

Williams asked the panel if the actions of the three officers who confronted Gonzalez went against

APD protocol, but Levitt declined to answer due to the criminal investigations underway by the Alameda County Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office ("Gonzalez Investigations," April 27).

Lastly, Williams asked Camarillo about steps community members can take to support Gonzalez's family. Camarillo said he supports all the demands expressed by the Gonzalez family including charging and prosecuting the three officers involved in Gonzalez's death. He also said community members can donate to his family's gofundme at gofundme.com/f/justice-mario-gonzalez-family.

The panel also answered questions submitted from the public.

McMullen was asked what steps can APD use to avoid unnecessary use of lethal force. McMullen said teaching police officers proportionality as it relates to uses of force is key.

"We do training with an emphasis on de-escalation and an emphasis on crisis intervention coupled with time and distance and getting the right resources to the scene," he said.

The 40-minute town hall took place during the AHS lunch time break. YAOA is composed of high school students from across the Island. The group took part in a peaceful protest Monday at the APD headquarters.



Maurice Ramirez



Dennis Evanosky

(Above) On Monday, Youth Activists for Alameda and the Oakland Technical High School Latinx Student Union organized a peaceful protest against the death of Mario Gonzalez who died in police custody April 19 in Alameda. The protesters gathered at the mural that memorializes Oscar Grant at the Fruitvale BART Station in Oakland and marched to the Alameda Police Department headquarters.

(Left) An Aztec dancer performs a limpia cleansing ritual, burning sage around Gonzalez's partner Andrea Cortez and their son Mario Jr., 4, during a rally for Gonzalez outside Alameda police headquarters.

Trial by Data

Irene Dieter

The verdict is in. Alameda's current voting system falls short on a number of counts.

On April 27, the Alameda League of Women Voters hosted a forum that compared various election methods: Alameda's current plurality-at-large system, plurality by districts, ranked-choice voting by district, and ranked-choice voting at large. The findings were telling.

Alameda's current "winner-take-all" elections allow candidates to win with less than 50 percent of the votes cast. Data from the last two decades show that most mayors and city councilmembers were elected without a majority mandate. This can leave much of the electorate frustrated or disappointed because they voted for someone other than the winner(s). This

would also be true if a plurality-by-district system is used.

A majority mandate is achievable when using ranked-choice voting, also known as instant runoff voting. Voters rank their top three choices in order of preference, and a runoff election is held immediately if no candidate gets over 50 percent of the vote. Because voters have their second and third choices instantly tabulated, their true preferences are better represented. Holding separate runoff elections to surpass a 50 percent threshold is expensive and usually fewer voters turn out.

Some say a wasted vote is one not cast. But "political scientists say if you voted but end up with no political representation, it is a wasted vote," said Preston Jordan,

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Putting AB 1322 in its Proper Context

Zac Bowling

Part two in a series

News Analysis

In January 2023, Alameda must submit a plan that shows how it intends to comply with the state-mandated allocation.

Last week, as part of this series of putting Assembly Bill (AB) 1322 into context, I laid out how the state Housing Element process ensures that much-needed housing is built in the state, how there can be conflicts between local voter initiatives and state law around forming a Housing Element, and how Article 26 of Alameda's City Charter (added in 1973 via Measure A) creates one of those conflicts. This week I'll dive more into that conflict.

In January 2023, Alameda must submit a Housing Element plan to the state that shows how it intends to comply with the state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA).

For the 2023-2031 cycle, the proposed number from the state is 5,406 new units of housing. This number must be planned and allowed for in Alameda before 2031. Some of those units will have to be high-density, multi-family housing under the rules.

Just like several other cities in the state, however, Alameda has a locally passed voter initiative, Article 26, in the City Charter. Article 26 gets in the way of complying with state law. Simply put, state law requires some areas to be zoned for new multi-family housing, while

Article 26 explicitly requires that only single-family homes be built. State law also requires that some land be zoned for 30 units per acre, but the Charter explicitly only allows up to 21 units per acre.

This conflict isn't new. In 2012 the City Council finally certified a Housing Element for the first time since 1990. They used something called a multi-family (MF) district overlay, which allows for multi-family housing and the densities required by law in specific parts of Alameda.

This overlay violates the charter. The city chose this route weighing the legal risks of violating state law versus upholding the charter and risking the city not having a certified Housing Element. This kept the city out of the cross-hairs of the state's Department

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Suspect Arrested for Two Local Shootings

Sun Staff Reports

Alameda police officers arrested an individual in connection with two Alameda shootings earlier this year.

The suspect, a male juvenile, was arrested last week after an extensive investigation by Alameda Police Department (APD), US Marshalls and other agencies, according to APD. The suspect was apprehended in the City of Berkeley.

The juvenile, whose name was withheld, is alleged to be responsible for the Jan. 13 shooting on the 500 block of Santa Clara Avenue and the Jan. 24 shooting on the 1400 block of Park Street, which

resulted in a teenage girl being struck ("Police Investigates Park Street Shooting," Jan. 25).

The victim was walking along Park Street with two other individuals when the suspect fired multiple rounds, according to the APD daily activity log. It is unknown if the victim was the intended target or the two unidentified individuals accompanying her. The other two juveniles were not injured during the ordeal.

The victim's injuries were non-life threatening. The case has been turned over to the Alameda County District Attorney's Office.

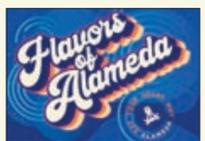
Contact Sun staff at editor@alamedasun.com.

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