



**"Where the Landlord is King" - Interview with [Emily Beach](#), [Burlingame](#) City Councilmember by [Willi Paul](#) & [Planetshifter.com](#)**

This is my second installment of a series of posts on Burlingame, CA. The first one is: "[An Artisan Market for Burlingame Avenue?](#)". My interview with Stanley Lo, [Green Banker](#), is coming next!

*I hate to burst anyone's bubble here, but this is not a socialist society. Business owners get to decide what to do with their property. If you want the city to purchase parcels of land to create community spaces near Burlingame Avenue you might start by questioning the enormous Community Center about to be built at Washington Park. The city would have a difficult time with eminent domain captures around downtown, so purchase from the city coffers offers the only solution. Whoever owns the old post office location must work within city parameters and get design approval, but the city or any of us telling them what to do with it goes against our capitalistic roots. - One comment from the Nextdoor discussion on the "Artisan Market" post.*

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**Interview with Emily by Willi -**

*"Thanks for the opportunity to share my ideas with you, Willi. These are my personal viewpoints, not those of my colleagues -- nor am I speaking on behalf of the entire Burlingame City Council. Thanks for sharing your thoughtful blog post. I agree that (the future of Burlingame Avenue) is of concern - and it's on our team's radar." - EB*

**Who is on "your team?"**

The entire Burlingame community.

**Who or what is Burlingame Avenue competing with? Can you offer examples?**

I think Burlingame Avenue strives to be the best version of itself. Each downtown along the Peninsula has its own unique vibe and strengths. In my opinion, Burlingame Avenue offers one of the Peninsula's best pedestrian experiences. As our regional economy trends towards local services and online retail, we are very lucky to have a solid mix of retail and services in a beautiful environment.

**Are landlords calling the shots on the Ave? Examples?**

The market drives economics on the Avenue and throughout our City. I'm saddened when successful local businesses (and residents who rent their homes) experience extraordinary and unsustainable rent increases.

**What is the unifying theme of Burlingame Avenue?**

A great local experience for residents and visitors.

**Burlingame Avenue seems to have a provincial vibe. No rhyme or reason. Do you agree that there are too many coffee and juice shops, nail spaces and corporate work-out clothes?**

The market drives what storefronts and services exist in our business districts. Personally, the venues I enjoy the most are local specialty shops and services that fill a unique niche.

**What is your vision for Burlingame Avenue in 5 years?**

A thriving, walkable, sustainable, pedestrian-friendly district with a local feel and regional draw. A place where people can walk from where they live to all the goods and services they need on Burlingame Avenue or its adjacent neighboring streets. A place where it is safer, easier, and more convenient to choose transit, walking, or biking over driving single-occupancy cars. I envision a beautiful town square adjacent to the former post office site that serves as a community gathering space. I am hopeful as transportation modes shift away from single-occupancy car trips downtown and parking needs change with technology, perhaps some of our surface parking lots could be converted to higher uses -- including green space.

**Influence of Hillsborough wealth on the real estate market and the political backrooms in Burlingame?**

I'm certainly not aware of any political backroom dealings or conspiracies pulling the strings. The City Council serves--and responds to--Burlingame residents. Market forces drive real estate decisions and create opportunities for businesses that are most likely to succeed here. We are fortunate that Burlingame Avenue is among the Peninsula's most thriving downtowns and we're grateful that it attracts visitors from Hillsborough, San Mateo, Millbrae, and other neighboring communities.

**What is the City response to date on the rising sea level challenge?**

Thanks for asking about this since it is a critically important issue. Our Bayfront is an economic engine for our City and it is vulnerable to climate change. I've attended at least 4 workshops during this past year alone to learn as much as I can on this topic, so we can make smart policy decisions here in Burlingame. Water knows no city borders, and the cities of San Mateo County fully recognize we must work regionally on this issue -- rather than operating in individual silos. Decisions we make in Burlingame impact our neighbors in Millbrae, San Mateo, and further along the Bay. San Mateo County Supervisor Dave Pine (a Burlingame resident) is leading the County's Sea Level Rise efforts.

A significant amount of work has been done over the past few years, culminating in a county-wide Sea Level Rise Risk Assessment which just completed this spring. I encourage all residents to learn more about [Sea Change in San Mateo County](#), the proposed work-plan ahead of us, and how you can get involved. Here in Burlingame, thoughtful land use decisions and long-term planning with our County partners are of primary importance. We're also working with a team from Stanford to interpret the County's study and other modeling efforts so we can better understand potential mitigation strategies here in Burlingame. I also anticipate cities with shoreline exposure will need to consider creative ways to fund built and green/natural infrastructure to increase our resilience with a combination of local, regional, state and federal funds.

**How is the City doing with Inter-governmental cooperation, resource sharing and sustainable planning on the Peninsula?**

Burlingame does a great job at this -- in fact, regional collaboration is a hallmark of San Mateo County. The City belongs to numerous JPA (joint powers associations with representatives from each City Council) and other agencies which help us serve residents more effectively and pool resources (i.e. garbage/recycling collection, emergency services, fire services, regional water systems, etc.) Many of the biggest issues our communities require a regional approach.

**Is pedestrian safety an issue here? Do you see a need for more signaled intersections, on the Ave and elsewhere?**

Pedestrian safety is always a priority for me. Fewer cars and slower speeds make roads safer for everyone. I've learned there is no silver bullet solution for every intersection. Each must be carefully studied by transportation professionals who customize thoughtful improvements.

**Given the recent census data shows that the City is overly white, do you see lack of diversity as an issue here?**

I believe diversity makes communities stronger. In fact, our City affirmed its commitment to diversity and inclusion last year in an official resolution. I value that my children attend Burlingame's ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse public schools. I think the biggest threat to diversity in Burlingame is the affordability crisis throughout the Bay Area. We are actively working on ways to address this issue. Cities that maintain socioeconomic diversity also reap other benefits -- including workforce availability for our businesses, reduced traffic on the roads and highways when people can afford to live closer to their jobs, and ethnic diversity which enriches the social fabric of our community.

**How do you define community planning? What is the City's track record involving the public in decisions for their town?**

Burlingame is celebrated as a model in this region for community engagement. Most recently, examples include our General Plan update and "Burlingame Talks Together About Housing" Community Meetings, and citizen engagement regarding our new Community Center. Our [General Plan Community Advisory Committee](#) held 18 public meetings, along with numerous other community open houses and surveys. Residents can learn more about the many different ways to engage with the City via our website, e-Newsletter, and social media.

**What are the challenges and visions for the Howard and [Broadway](#) corridors?**

Just like Burlingame Avenue, Howard Avenue and Broadway strive to be the best versions of themselves. Howard Avenue benefits from a thriving Burlingame Avenue, and I hope our City will realize its vision for a beautiful town square adjacent to the former post office site, which will deepen the connection between these areas. I spend a lot of time on Broadway because I live nearby, and I love its rootsy, local feel. The City has invested a significant amount of funding and staff resources in Broadway this past year for near-term and ongoing maintenance. Broadway's location as the primary gateway to Burlingame from Highway 101 and our Bayfront presents unique benefits and challenges for this business district. Caltrain's weekday service will return to Broadway in 2022 once the fleet is electrified and I am optimistic this will benefit Broadway in many ways.

The City is in the home stretch (third and final year) of our General Plan update which will provide vision for all areas of our City over the next 25 years, including Howard Ave, Broadway, and key change-areas like north Burlingame near Millbrae Station. I encourage our community members to continue to participate in these important discussions as we finalize our General Plan this fall.

**Tech is King?! Why not a City-Private partnership for a small businesses incubator?**

We are exploring ways (and policy tools) that small cities like ours can provide incentives for the kinds of businesses our community wants. Both Vice Mayor Donna Colson and I serve on the Economic Development subcommittee of our City Council, and our meetings are open to the public. Vice Mayor Colson is a business owner in Burlingame and I anticipate these issues will be an important focus for her while serving as Mayor next year. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to reach out to her and our current Mayor, Michael Brownrigg.

**As is often repeated, one dominant perception on the street is that City has tons of extra money - does it?**

Thanks to prudent fiscal management, our City is financially strong -- but not without its challenges. Two of our major revenue streams (#1 hotel taxes and #3 sales tax) are cyclical and dependent on economic forces we cannot control. We have millions of dollars' worth of capital needs that we are aggressively saving and planning for. Add a major infrastructure project like Broadway Grade Separation (train/traffic crossing) to the mix and other financial obligations, and you quickly realize there will always be more needs than available funds. We are thoughtfully prioritizing projects and making important progress. I am very proud of our staff and Council for the responsible way we manage our City finances. We take this duty very seriously.

**Another perception illuminated in [Nextdoor](#) threads is that Burlingame is an Old Boy Network? Your thoughts?**

I am a 44-year-old woman (not so old) who was decisively elected to City Council in 2015 along with Donna Colson. Our two top staff members appointed by City Council (City Manager and City Attorney) are both women. A majority of our Councilmembers are women (3 of 5) and each of us rotate through as Mayor.

Councilmember Ricardo Ortiz grew up in Columbia and just last year served as Burlingame's first Latino mayor. Both Ricardo and our current Mayor Michael Brownrigg are fantastic male peers, and all five members of our City Council treat one another with mutual respect. I've never felt that Burlingame is an "old-boys" network.

**What is the role of the [Chamber of Commerce](#) today? Can you talk about their recent track record?**

I encourage you to reach out to Georgette Naylor, their CEO who can tell you more about their work. The Chamber is the voice of

our business community and an important partner to our City.

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## **PUBLIC NOTICE**

**The first public hearing and discussion to review the General Plan's DRAFT Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)** will take place by the Burlingame Planning Commission on Wednesday, 7/11. The General Plan serves as the roadmap for how Burlingame will grow over the next 25 years. During this meeting, our Planning Commission will discuss the environmental impact of allowing additional housing growth primarily in the northern part of our City near Millbrae BART/Caltrain station, and additional commercial growth primarily on our Bayfront. Staff will summarize input from the public and Planning Commission for City Council to consider before adopting the final General Plan later this fall. Learn more about the three-year process to update our City's [General Plan](#).

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### **Bios -**

**Emily Beach**, Burlingame City Councilmember  
Ebeach at burlingame.org

Emily was elected to Burlingame City Council on November 3, 2015. Please enjoy her current [Councilmember Biography](#) on the City of Burlingame's website.

Emily is a community leader who helped grow [Burlingame Community for Education Foundation's](#) (BCE) fundraising grant to [Burlingame School District](#) from \$1.3 to \$1.795 million (38%) while president. She is mom to Kate and Matthew and wife to Duff. She is a former Army captain who served in Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Texas. She is a former Silicon Valley business executive with private-sector sales experience, increasing division profits by nearly 150% during an economic downturn. She is an active community volunteer. She is a proud Fighting Irish graduate from the University of Notre Dame. She also is an accomplished singer-songwriter.

Emily's broad life experiences give her the skills to successfully collaborate with people from all walks of life. This is what makes her a responsive, thoughtful, pragmatic, and sensitive leader. She values hard work, transparency, and getting things done. She is forward-thinking and embraces positive change. She solves problems thoughtfully and with the utmost integrity.

**Willi Paul**, Principal, Planetshifter.com  
willipaul1 at gmail.com

Willi worked for several City Planning Departments including the City of Minneapolis, the City of St. Paul and the City of St. Louis Park, MN. As a Graduate Student at the Urban and Regional Studies Institute at University of MN - Mankato, he helped invent what we now know as online community with his [Electronic Charrette](#) process. He volunteered on multiple community design charrettes with [Minnesota Design Team](#). He holds a M.A. from the [Urban and Regional Studies Institute](#) and several multiple planning projects as a employee and PhD student at Virginia Tech.

Currently, Willi draws deeply on the emerging values in the permaculture and transition town movements. He is creating sound myths based now after an eight-year exploration of myth, alchemy, compost soil and sound archetypes for [Planetshifter.com](#) and his experimental sound project, [the chaos era](#). Please discover him at [Regenerative Mythology](#), a new Community of Practice, on LinkedIn. His first album and eBook are available at iTunes.

Willi is a Project Manager with [FacilitiesConsultant.com](#), a Bay Area office design and relocation firm.