

Better Austin Today - May 2009 Election

CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

ENVIRONMENT

- 1. Postponing the construction of the \$500 million “Water Treatment Plant #4” for at least three years**
If elected to City Council, will you support the Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Clean Water Action, Save Our Springs Alliance and others by voting to postpone construction of the \$500 million “Water Treatment Plant #4” for at least three years while the City focuses efforts on water conservation and reuse and comprehensive planning? This would include expenditures for site preparation.
- 2. Protecting East Austin from the dumping of trash and toxic waste**
Many in the Austin community have championed environmental causes, yet the areas to the east have been and are continuing to be dumping grounds for trash and waste not only from Travis county but surrounding areas. If you are elected to the City Council, will you set as a priority ensuring a safe and healthy quality of life especially for those in East Austin by working with all citizens and city staff to learn about threats and to ensure better protection of all citizens.
- 3. Eliminating environmentally destructive and hazardous energy sources**
What measures would you take to help the City of Austin phase out coal as an energy option? Are you willing to commit to not only no further ownership investment in the South Texas Nuclear Project but not enter into future power purchase contracts from the STNP?
- 4. Protecting the Barton Creek Watershed**
If you are elected to the City Council, will you vote to oppose upzonings (increase in density and environmental impacts) in the Barton Springs water shed? Will you also oppose debt financing of toll roads in the city’s Drinking Water Protection Zone that would encourage sprawl in the Hill Country and Edwards Aquifer recharge zone?

GENERAL

- 1. Honoring maximum height limits established in the 1986 Waterfront Overlay District**
The Waterfront Overlay Task Force appointed by the City Council has recommended that the maximum height limits that were in the 1986 Waterfront Overlay ordinance, omitted in the 1999 “plain English” re-write of the land development code, be reinstated. Will you, if you are elected to the City Council, support reinstating these height limits in the Waterfront Overlay District and oppose any project now in the pipeline that would violate the intent of the 1986 ordinance?
- 2. Ensuring community involvement in the Comprehensive Planning process:**
The City is about to hire a consultant to help in the development of the new comprehensive plan. However, there has been almost no community involvement in establishing the process and extent of community input that the planning process will use. If elected to the City Council, would you support establishing a community advisory committee, much as was used in developing the 1979 Comprehensive Plan, that includes a full range of community interests including neighborhood, environmental, local and small business, and social equity advocates?

3. Alleviating the increasing economic burden of middle and low income community residents:

The cost of living continues to climb in our community and Austin is no longer seen as an affordable city for most people in the middle and lower income brackets. Property Taxes are a major factor in the escalating financial burden. While we are facing a financially difficult time, we need to address this problem now and therefore would you be willing to sponsor and actively support a homestead exemption for the City of Austin's portion of our property tax? If not what do you propose to do to reduce the growing economic burden on the middle and lower income residents of our community?

OPEN GOVERNMENT

1. Community participation in budget planning:

If you are elected to the City Council, will you support opening up the City budget process to allow for more community input into establishing budget priorities and support the ability of the City Council to set budget priorities and move funding between the various departments and programs to reflect the community's priorities?

2. Establishing clear lines of authority and accountability of COA staff and elected and appointed officials

It is the experience of many Austin stakeholders that COA staff, across all departments, too often make changes to ordinances, regulations, and procedures at administrative decision levels, thus circumventing due legal process and public oversight of those changes. Do you agree with this statement, and if elected to the City Council, will you make it a priority to establish clear and transparent roles for elected/appointed officials and especially COA staff, and work to eliminate the de facto policy-making habits of COA staff?

3. Involvement of Boards and Commissions with City Council decision-making:

The increase use of City Council sub-committees is viewed by many as an attempt to bypass the expertise of Board and Commission members. If elected to the City Council, will you make a commitment to reduce the number of Council subcommittees that duplicate Boards and Commissions, respond to the recommendations in the Austin Chronicle article that addresses Boards and Commissions efficiency, and re-integrate City Boards and Commissions in the decision-making process?

NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Honoring valid petitions:

Valid petitions are one of the most important means that neighborhoods have to prevent inappropriate and intrusive zoning changes. Would you support a neighborhood's valid petition on a zoning case in all cases (with the possible exception of where public safety is concerned)?

2. Honoring zoning established in neighborhood plans:

Neighborhood Planning was supposed to help alleviate conflicts between neighborhoods and developers by defining what was and was not acceptable development in the neighborhood, and as such was a balanced compromise between competing interests. However, too often after a Neighborhood Plan is adopted by City Council, and almost before the ink is dry, there are requests to approve zoning changes that are in conflict with the adopted plans. And often these requests are looked at by staff and the boards and commissions in isolation and not in the context of the overall compromises already reached during the planning process. As a

City Council member, would you pledge to oppose any change of zoning that is conflict with an adopted plan unless it is supported by the plan implementation or contact team?

3. Establishing growth capacity in the Comprehensive Planning process:

The City is embarking on developing a new Comprehensive Plan. Do you believe we should examine the issue of what is the capacity of our current public infrastructure and available resources, in particularly water resources, with regard to how we manage future growth of our city?

LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC HEALTH

1. Keeping our hard earned dollars from exiting the community by stimulating local business opportunities.

Billions of dollars leave the Austin economy each year to buy goods and services that could eventually be produced locally. If elected to the City Council, will you authorize a comprehensive study to detail these opportunities to grow our local businesses?

2. Committing to locally owned financial institutions for City of Austin banking relationships

The City of Austin's depository agreement (banking relationship), which includes deposits held, is with Bank of America. If elected to the City Council, will you direct the city manager to favor locally owned financial institutions like credit unions, small thrifts, and small commercial banks?

3. Directing the City of Austin Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office to focus on local businesses.

If elected to the City Council, will you direct the City Manager to instruct the Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office to concentrate its Business Retention and Expansion program to concentrate its efforts on locally owned businesses which, dollar for dollar, provide far greater economic and cultural impact for the city?

SOCIAL EQUITY

1. Ensuring that APD prioritizes and focuses on felony crimes over low-level misdemeanors.

The Austin Police Department spends significant resources on arrests and booking of misdemeanor crimes that could be dealt with through a citation process thus saving funds that either could be reallocated to more serious felony crimes or could result in having these funds available for other city priorities. If elected would you support a City Council resolution directing the City Manager and Chief of Police to vigorously implement the citation process for misdemeanor crimes and redirect those freed up funds to other city priorities?

2. Supporting equal distribution of locally undesirable land uses (LULUS) versus encouraging concentration of such uses in "cheap dirt" areas with already deteriorating "quality of life."

Often undesirable land uses, such as land fills, maintenance and industrial facilities are located in areas with lower land costs and these areas tend to be in lower income or in predominately minority neighborhoods, especially East Austin. If elected to the City Council will you support calling for the City Manager to direct City Staff to review the location of existing LULU's within our whole community and develop future LULU placement criteria that prioritizes the impact on the adjacent community instead of the relying solely on the cost of land to determine appropriate locations for LULU's?

3. Maintaining city services to low and moderate income Austin citizens during economic downturns and proposed across the board city budget cuts.

In anticipation of a \$25 million shortfall during the fiscal year (2008-09 budget), if elected to the City Council, would you assure that any proposals you consider and support for budget cuts would not result in the elimination or reduction in funding for the most needy, underserved and poor in our community?