

Place 2 Race
Candidate Questionnaire Response

Mike Martinez

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Responses from Mike Martinez

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.

I cannot unequivocally say yes or no to this question, and will remain open to further discussion and dialogue. I agree that water conservation is working and we must do more. I don't believe, at this time, that stopping the construction of Water Treatment Plant is the right course of action. Future water supply demands are going to put us in a position where we have to bring on additional supply sources. While we may never hit our peak capacity in the near future from general usage, one main break can easily put us over our capacity. I believe it is our responsibility to not only be able to meet current and future demands, but to also be prepared for unexpected problems and aging infrastructure. Water Treatment Plant 4 is needed along with water conservation efforts to meet our current and future needs, and to properly prepare for unexpected problems.

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.

Yes, preserving East Austin and fighting for environmental justice have been priorities for me in my first term, and will continue to be as long as I am in office. The Hispanic Quality of Life report will bring this issue to the forefront of all decisions we make as a council. I stand strong against the proposed landfill in the Webberville neighborhood, and in December of 2006 I sponsored a resolution that saved historic Oak Springs in East Austin from development, which otherwise would have become a strip mall. I have fielded complaints from my neighbors in East Austin about numerous cases of illegal dumping grounds, and ensured that Code Enforcement and Solid Waste followed up with our citizens to address their issues and concerns. Many of the City's fleet garages are located in East Austin, and these facilities cause additional heavy vehicle traffic to these neighborhoods more so than any other part of Austin. I have asked our Fleet Service to take a no tolerance approach with our drivers when going through some of our most vulnerable neighborhoods.

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?

There are so many technologies advancing at a rapid pace related to alternative fuel sources, and I am excited for Austin's future in that regard. My staff and I will invite stakeholders (this summer) to join us in exploring one of the newest opportunities on the market, which is a fuel cell created through traditional waste in landfills. Advancements like this will help us maintain our goal of being the greenest city in America. Regarding the STNP, I stand firmly against entering into further ownership with STNP, but I cannot commit to ruling out all future power agreements. Purchase power agreements are a vital tool for Austin Energy that allows us to remain a healthy, municipally owned power utility. I don't want Austin to further invest in PPA's with STNP, and will do all I can to ensure that we are focusing on using alternative sources such as wind and solar. However, we must remember that wind and solar can only be used for peak load supply, where coal, natural gas, and nuclear energy are used for base load supply. If we commit to eliminating coal as a fuel source, we can't eliminate the option of nuclear energy because we would find ourselves in a very untenable and fiscally unhealthy situation.

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?

While I remain committed to our environmental principles, and will continue to protect environmentally sensitive areas like the Edwards Aquifer, Barton Springs, and water quality overall, I simply can’t make blanket commitments on projects I haven’t seen. There is potential for some future projects to be beneficial for the environment and surrounding community, and we should evaluate these on a case-by-case basis. I will continue to oppose tolls on existing roads for all parts of Austin. Increasing the gas tax to finance toll roads via debt service has proven to be a failed policy position (i.e. revenue bonds for STNP). I will, however, be supporting local option legislation that would allow the citizens to decide what roads are financed and how. This would truly be a great thing for Austin and I am hopeful and optimistic that Senator Watson and our House delegation will be successful in enacting this legislation. I urge everyone to help us this session by getting behind this bill.

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?

Yes, I was the first council member to commit to protecting the original intent of the Waterfront Overlay and to publicly state my opposition to the controversial CWS upzoning case. I also worked to create the Waterfront Overlay Task Force, which will aid in reinstating the 1986 height restrictions. I am a strong supporter of reinstating these height limits, and will continue to play an active role in ensuring these standards are upheld.

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?

Absolutely. After meeting with many community members already about this issue, I believe there is a huge flaw in our current system that hinders our ability to get adequate public input and definitive community values in place before moving forward with major policy decisions. The citizens should drive our policy choices, and I will work with my fellow council members to amend the current process to meet our vision and values.

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?

Yes, my position as (arguably) the strongest leader on the council for a homestead exemption for the last 3 years should speak to this issue. It is critical that the City be able to offer a homestead exemption to protect low-income families from losing their homes due to skyrocketing property taxes, which I actually proposed in my very first budget cycle two months after being elected. Even though City Manager Futrell was attempting to make this policy look like it would bankrupt the City, I stood strong as the lone council member continuing to ask my colleagues to consider this as a viable option. I stand firm in my belief that our budget process must continue to improve with regards to transparency and avenues for dialogue, for the sake of citizens and council alike. This will truly be the only way to enact costly but valued items such as homestead exemptions.

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?

Yes, please refer to the previous question.

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?

Yes. I cosponsored and supported a charter amendment that would make the city attorney appointed by council rather appointed by the city manager. I also supported the charter amendment regarding the city auditor. I could write a book about my experience with certain staff, but since they are no longer with us, I will simply say that I could not agree with you more and will continue my role of promoting accountability at all levels. Including our (in my opinion) wonderful police chief. You may be aware of his position regarding the collection and storing of DNA samples via legislation without citizen input and/or council approval. There must be accountability for all.

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?

Critical issues like Audit & Finance and Health & Human services are important enough that they warrant having a subcommittee in addition to the standing Boards and Commissions system. These subcommittees are not intended to bypass the Board and Commission members, but rather work with them to find the best possible solutions for Austin. But as I have done with the Public Safety Task Force, I will continue to remain open to creating a citizen-only board or commission for all of the issues we face on a day to day basis.

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)?

Each case is unique, and must be decided based on its own merits. Therefore, I cannot unequivocally state that I would support all valid petitions. As you know, a valid petition can also be initiated by the actual property owner, and I also don't believe it is appropriate to state that I will support all valid petitions by property owners either.

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?

The work of neighborhood contact teams and neighborhood planning is a vital tool, and I support and appreciate all of the citizens who dedicate so much time and energy to our neighborhood planning process. But I cannot make a commitment to oppose changes in zoning for cases that have yet to be presented. Any candidate that would make such a commitment could be very compromised by doing so. I will continue to have an open door policy in my next term so that citizens concerned with the future of their neighborhoods can discuss upcoming cases before the council takes any vote.

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?

Yes, we should know what resources are available and apply that knowledge to decisions related to growth. If the infrastructure is not available to support growth, we should improve our infrastructure or alter our plans to be reflect existing infrastructure capacity.

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?

Yes. But it must be said that this issue encompasses all of Austin, including our environmentally sensitive areas in the southwest portion of town. We must understand this issue comprehensively and how it relates to each individual area and neighborhood. It is my belief that some of our short term views have led to what you see now in neighboring small cities such as Bee Caves and Sunset Valley. While I stand strong in support of SOS and limiting development over the aquifer, we need to understand the impact those decisions have on the whole community and the

environment. How many trips per day occur today over the Edwards Aquifer due to our strict impervious cover limitations that have created massive development just outside of the recharge zone? What is the true impact to the community and the Aquifer?

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?

I can't commit to directing the City Manager to favor one financial institution over another. In cases where a financial institution that is not based in Austin offers us a substantially better rate, we have to remain open to considering their offer. Utilizing local financial institutions is a good goal to work towards, and I will commit to a resolution that would ask the City manager to do business with local financial institutions in every possible instance. However, ultimately we have a fiduciary responsibility to all taxpayers and I remain committed to upholding the best possible position for all ratepayers which may mean a non-local financial institution in our portfolio.

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?

The Business Retention and Enhancement Program is something that I was proud to sponsor, and is explicitly directed at assisting local businesses. While there may be a local franchise that is aided by this program, the main goal of the BRE is to recruit, incent and maintain retail and restaurant businesses along Congress Avenue and 6th Street. As you remember, this program was initially adopted when Las Manitas was facing closing their doors on Congress Avenue. I did everything I could to support and maintain this Austin institution on Congress Ave. Since the inception of the BRE, there have been 2 retailers who have applied and received assistance to relocate to

Congress Avenue and East 6th Street. Las Manitas ultimately declined the loan, but will reopen and continue to thrive on the same block in downtown.

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?

I've been supportive of the cite and release program from the beginning, and specifically asked Chief Acevedo to support and implement the policy. However, I don't agree that using directives is the best way to handle this issue. I absolutely support this policy, and am glad to see it finally implemented into action. I will closely monitor results and offer amendments if necessary.

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?

This is an issue that is critically important to me. I have already asked staff and the City Manager to identify where LULU's may exist, and I believe this is critical to decisions that the Council faces. I will remain in strong support of this position, and

believe we can and will make better decisions in the future. I have also asked staff to compile a list of all properties owned by the City of Austin in order to determine where in the urban core some of these undeveloped parcels of land can be used to create single family affordable housing throughout Austin. I will remain committed to making all of Austin welcoming and affordable for all, including families.

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?

I have a strong record of supporting the most needy and vulnerable members of our community. We must keep the cost of core services low, especially during tough economic times. Though we will have to tighten our belts because of the budget shortfall, we must ensure that any budget cuts don't negatively impact low income families and individuals already struggling to make ends meet. The wage freeze for all City employees is something that I DO NOT support. For example, a City employee making above \$75,000 a year is not equally impacted by a wage freeze as a city employee who is earning \$30,000 per year. We must not use one-size-fits-all policies when dealing with vital City issues. Our directives must be strategic and precise in order to maintain our core services while balancing our budget, and considering those that are affected the most in difficult times should always be at the forefront of our decisions.