



Better Austin Today  
Political Action Committee  
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City Council May 2008 Election, Candidate Questions

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The following premise statements highlight some of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY's issues and are followed by the specific questions for the candidates.

### General Questions

BETTER AUSTIN TODAY Political Action Committee is a broad based and community wide organization that has come together to further a shared vision for Austin's future. BETTER AUSTIN TODAY recognizes the connectivity of the many important issues facing our community and is committed to working to improve the lives of everyone in our community.

**1. Do you want the endorsement of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY and if so why?**

Ans 1: Yes, a lot of the reasons that I am running are the same reasons that BATPAC was formed. I believe that the issues BATPAC is concerned (responsible growth, transparency in government, environmental responsibility) about are the same issues that concern me, and therefore we are a good fit for each other.

To lead you must have a direction. To achieve you must have cooperation.

**2. What is your vision for Austin's future, what do you think is unique about Austin and how do you propose to preserve and enhance what is special about Austin and how will you work with the other City Council members to get this accomplished?**

Ans 2: My vision for Austin's future is to remain a culturally diverse city with a strong independent character. Austin has many unique characteristics which include a vibrant music scene, a strong environmental community, culturally diverse population, etc. In order to preserve the feel of the city we all love we need to make sure all these are protected. The rapid growth of our city has caused many conflicting interests that have threatened our unique culture. We need someone on the city council who has a vested interest in all these areas to

fight to protect them. If we don't protect these areas and instead worry only about the short term goal of growing rapidly to increase the tax base there will come a time in the future where Austin will no longer be a desirable city to live and visit. Our short sighted policy will result in long term economic detriment to the city.

In many neighborhood zoning cases, the community does not know of the proposed project until very late in the process. Often developers have met with not only city staff but also City Council members to advance their position when the community has not even had a chance to know that the City Council is being lobbied on a zoning case.

**3. Would you as a City Council member be willing to post your calendar online so that the community knows when and whom you are meeting with and the purpose of the meeting?**

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Ans 3: Of course. Open and transparent government is a large part of my campaign. I don't believe that council members who are being paid by the people of Austin should have anything to hide from them. The people need to know who their elected officials are meeting with so they can see who is getting the most of their time. No one constituent—be it a developer or local homeowner-- counts more than any other citizen of Austin to me.

Our City Council may have over 100 items to consider at each City Council Meeting. Over the course of a year, the Council can act on the community's behalf on thousands of issues.

**4. What actions of the current City Council within the last year would you consider to be major positive accomplishments and what actions would you consider to be the worst actions taken by the City Council?**

Ans 4: Positive: Zero Waste plan, All-in-one recycling, expanding the green choice program  
Negatives: Las Manitas debacle, City Manager hiring process, WTP#4 decision process

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Our city council has done some positive things in the last few years, such as starting us on the way towards a zero-waste program and putting us on track to be a leader in sustainable energy usage. We need to make sure we put leaders on the council that will keep these major priorities. They have also had many issues over the past couple of years where things could have been handled better. Most of the problems stem from a lack of public input in decision making processes. The city council represents the people of Austin, so the people of

Austin should know how those decisions are being made. The people should also know who is getting the ear of the council members so that they find out if special interests are working against the wishes of the people. If this had occurred, many of the negatives decisions by the council would have been stopped by the people.

Often the City Council takes actions as recommended by the City Manager and supported by the City Legal department. At times, this legal advice limits the options that the City Council considers in a situation. While that legal advice may be supportive of the City Manager's position, it may not be reflective of all the options available to the City and as such prevents the City Council from acting in the community's best interest.

**5. Would you pledge to support changing the city charter to allow the City Council to hire either the City Attorney directly accountable to the council, or give the City Council the ability to hire an outside attorney for recommendations independent of the City Manager?**

Ans 5:

I am in favor of a City Attorney directly accountable to the council. This would allow the council to obtain advice independent of the City Management department.

Title 18 requires all public elected officials to act in their capacity as an elected official to initiate an investigation of any violation of the law that is reported to them. Recently there have been many allegations of misconduct of City staff such as with the Convention Center, City Hall Store, Housing Bonds, and the delay in the Big Box retail ordinance

**6. As a City Council member, if information is presented to you concerning a potentially unlawful action by City Staff or the City Administration, what specific actions will you take to execute your sworn obligations under Title 18?**

Ans 6: Unlawful activity taking place by City Staff, regardless of Title 18, should be immediately investigated. Not doing so erodes the trust that the citizens have in their elected officials. The fact that Title 18 had to be written in the first place shows that there exists some doubt that the elected officials are truly acting in the best interest of the people. The first action I would undertake is report the action to the district attorney's office to allow them to determine how to proceed. After an initial report, I will then determine if follow-up action by the council is necessary.

Our current City Charter dictates a City Council and City Manager form of government with the City Manager reporting to the full Council and with each City Council member elected at large. Our City Council is the only jurisdictional body

in Travis County that elects its officials with a total at large system. Nationally most peer cities of Austin's size elect their City Council with some form of geographical districts.

7. ***Do you believe that Austin's current City Council representational system is appropriate for a city of over 700,000 and please explain your reasons for this position?***

Ans 7: Historically some areas of Austin have been under represented on the City Council, and consequently the people living in these areas feel their needs are placed behind other locations within the city. I am in favor of a hybrid system of government that utilizes both geographically elected and at large members of city council. Our federal system of government employs a geographic system of government, and one of the biggest complaints against it is that pork barrel spending is out of control. Another issue with geographic systems is that people tend to focus only on their region and not on the issues facing the city at large, especially with regard to the environment. By including members who are at large, and thus must answer to the whole city we can balance the members who are looking to get as much as they can for their constituents with the city wide needs.

Currently, the City of Austin uses the turnkey services of the Travis County Elections Department for conducting its elections which uses electronic voting machines that many concerned citizens have likened to officials taking a ballot box into a back room to count the votes with no public oversight. Several states (CA, OH, and CO) have had computer experts study the same machines that Travis County uses and have discovered that they "...contain serious design flaws that have led directly to specific vulnerabilities, which attackers could exploit to affect election outcomes," so, as a result, they were decertified in these three states.

8. ***Do you think that the citizens of Austin have the right to observe the counting of their votes and have oversight in every step of the election process? Would you be willing to go on the record in support of a return to hand-counted paper ballot elections with enhanced security protocols and with precinct totals posted at the precinct level immediately after the counting?***

Ans 8: Of course. Without trust in the government and the methods for electing that government we can't expect the people to ever be fully confident that their vote counts. Participation in city elections is already ridiculously low due to voter apathy and the belief that their vote is of no importance. I believe that we can integrate technology in our voting methods without adding distrust to the methods. One way to do this is to print out paper ballots at the voting machines that the voter can verify, and then place with the precinct staff in case there is

any question that the election results are not accurate. The paper ballots and electronic ballots should be handled by completely separate entities to reduce any potential improprieties.

The following questions are grouped by BETTER AUSTIN TODAY's interest area.

### **Neighborhoods**

We often hear that Austin will double in population every 10 to 20 years and that we have to accept that premise and plan accordingly. This assumption influences many decisions of our City Council from transit planning to zoning changes to accommodate increased density. However, others suggest that we need to take a broader approach and assess what is a reasonable growth management strategy for our city.

9. ***Would you as a City Council member support developing an inclusive community-based process to create a comprehensive growth management policy for our community? How would you organize this process, what staffing and funding would you support for the process and what is your estimate of how long such a process would take?***

Ans 9: I believe that Austin is growing at a considerable rate currently because of inflated home prices/cost of living on the coasts, and a strong local economy that is out performing most of the rest of the countries. The question is how long will this last? In 20 years will all the condos built during our current boom still be occupied? We clearly need a growth management policy for our community, and we need to allow neighborhoods to have an active role in determining the best way to meet those growth goals. I would organize this process by first talking with the neighborhood associations and determining what goals they want to be included in the growth management plan. Once that was completed I would use the results to determine the scope of the change necessary to the plan, thus giving an accurate representation of the staffing and funding needs. This process must begin as soon as possible and take as little time as possible because our community is changing daily. We need to make sure the plan is implemented before the city is over developed.

Neighborhood planning was intended to provide our neighborhoods with a means to create a shared vision for their future within the context of an overall comprehensive plan and the actions needed to accomplish that vision. However, there is much debate as to whether neighborhood planning has met this goal.

10. ***What do you believe has worked and not worked in neighborhood planning with regards to the following issues and what actions you would take as a city Council member to address any shortcomings in this process?***

- A) Notification of all impacted parties to ensure an inclusive process.**
- B) Providing pertinent demographic, economic and infrastructure information needed to make informed planning decisions.**
- C) Educating the community of the implications of land use decisions with regard to the impact to the density, character and quality of life of the neighborhood.**
- D) Providing adequate city resources devoted to support and staffing of the planning process.**
- E) Decision-making within the planning process that reflects the community will.**
- F) Council respecting the adopted neighborhood plans in subsequent zoning cases.**

Ans 10: A) Notification of stakeholders in neighborhood planning is imperative to creating a plan that all parties can agree on. Obviously the people in the neighborhood are the ones who have the greatest vested interest in making a plan that they feel is equitable and fits in with the character of the neighborhood as well as the goals of the city. Unfortunately there have been many times in the past where city staff have not taken heed of the neighborhood concerns thus leaving the neighborhoods feeling neglected.

B) All of these are necessary information needed to make sound decisions in neighborhood planning. Economic information about neighborhoods is essential to see how any planned development will affect an area. There have been many examples of high end developments that have gone up in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and thus driven property taxes so high that the long term residents can no longer afford to live in the neighborhoods they grew up in. Infrastructure needs are also very important to fully understand before developing begins or else new developments could simply exacerbate the congestion issues this city already faces.

C) I hope that my candidacy and the platform I have laid out on my website is already beginning to educate the people to the long term implications of our current land use decisions. In my opinion, if we don't show these long term consequences (such as decreased public park lands, the affect on the culture and character of the city, congestion) then we are not going to see how these short term decisions will cause long term negative impacts. Years from now when the things that make Austin such a great place are no longer around due to short term land use policies, people will move to other parts of the country and we will be left with an over developed, under populated, economically struggling city.

D) One of the biggest complaints I have heard from the people is that the city staff tends to ignore public input when it comes to neighborhood planning and development cases. We need to make sure that the city staff is not working at odds with the citizens, and the number one way to do that is to provide enough resources for the people so that they don't feel ignored.

E) The community will should be the decision making process, that is what democracy is about. I believe that the people of Austin want to see this city grow and prosper. The current city council and city staff tend to see the neighborhoods as road blocks towards growth, which is not true, and is leading to serious friction between the two groups. If the city council truly listens to the neighborhoods they will realize that they both have common goals. The thing that is lacking is trust, and if that trust is restored, then the community will feel like they are an equal partner in the planning of Austin's future.

F) The council needs to listen to the neighborhoods. Like I have mentioned above the differences between the council and neighborhoods can be resolved, and a win/win situation can be arrived at, we just need leadership on the council who respects everyones opinion equally, and weighs the concerns of every affected party.

One of the major problems of neighborhoods is the imposition of intrusive developments that are not compatible with maintaining the neighborhood's character. The use of a valid petition to prevent inappropriate zoning changes is an important tool in neighborhood efforts to protect their quality of life.

**11. Will you pledge to support a neighborhood's valid petition on zoning cases and if not, why not? Do you consider the City Council adoption of Vertical Mixed Use a zoning change and if not do you support City Staff's position that it requires a super majority of the Council to override a single property owner's valid petition against being opted out of VMU?**

Ans 11: I support a neighborhoods valid petition on zoning cases. I do support the City Staff's position that it requires a super majority of the Council to override a single property owner's valid petition against being opted out the VMU. Taken to an extreme- all neighborhoods could opt out of the VMU. This will leave the city with few options. The valid petition process is important and vital to the neighborhoods and should not be reversed unless last resort.

One of the biggest problems in many of our lower and middle-income neighborhoods is the rising cost of living and the resultant gentrification that is pushing many long time residents out of our neighborhoods.

**12. What do you see as the causes of this problem and what specifically will you do as a City Council member to address this problem?**

Ans 12: The two main factors that cause this problem are the rapid population growth of the Austin area and poor transportation system. As the city has grown, the metro area has likewise grown. The transportation system has not kept up with this and the result is gridlock. As a result, people are looking to live closer to downtown- where they work and play. Traditionally, the areas to the East and

South of downtown Austin were low and middle income neighborhoods. The desire to live close in has led the property values to soar in these areas.

One the main things I would do as a council member is to slow the rise in taxes paid by the long-term residents. If you have lived at a property for over 20 years, then I would link the growth in taxes to inflation. I believe that people should live close to where they work and play and would support localized “city” centers. Finally, I will address the transportation issues with a variety of means- more light rail, more bike lanes and infrastructure and increasing the usage of existing public transportation.

The basic regulations that define what can and can not be built in our community are in our Land Development and Building Codes. These regulations are essential for an orderly and community supported development process.

**13. With regards to the following code issues what do you believe needs to be changed to ensure a positive successful development process?**

- A) Code enforcement**
- B) Consistent interpretation of the codes**
- C) Updating our codes to reflect best practices**

Ans 13: Updating the code to reflect best practices and consistent interpretation of the codes are linked. One of the big issues with code interpretation is complexity and constantly changing codes. If best practices are reflected in the codes, then the spirit of the law or code is easier to identify. This will reduce the potential interpretations.

Code enforcement is tricky because it typically starts with a complaint; if the city had more resources to spend this would be a non-issue. Steeper fines would be a start. After a number of fines, a developer should lose his license.

## **Environment**

The “un-adopted” city policy appears to capture more development within the existing city footprint as a means to reduce sprawl. However, quite often it seems that at the same time we are both encouraging and facilitating sprawl development and also approving redevelopment that needlessly impinges on central city neighborhoods, affordability and other community values.

**14. How will you address this contradiction in the City’s actions and provide a consistent growth management policy?**

Ans 14: The city needs a long-term consistent plan, one that reaches 10-20-30-50 years out. The plan should self-consistent and updated every 4-5 years. Zoning requirements and developmental overlays should be updated to be

consistent with the plan. Once the city laws and codes are self-consistent with the plan, reducing sprawl will be an easier battle.

Austin has long recognized that Barton Springs Pool and the springs that feed it as major community assets. However, increased development over the Barton Springs zone of the Edwards aquifer continues to threaten this precious water resource.

**15. Do you believe that the city should continue to purchase more acreage in the drinking Water Protection Zone, especially in the aquifer recharge zone by establishing a long range funding strategy focused on buying the most important environmentally significant properties? If so, how much do you estimate it will cost to buy sufficient land to protect the Barton Springs Zone?**

Ans 15: Yes- we need to protect Barton Springs and the associated springs. I do advocate purchasing land and setting up a development fund. This is one of the most environmentally sensitive portions of greater Austin. The number of closings of the pool this past year due to high rains and thus high runoff shows how much of a problem this is, and that we are losing the battle. Land prices are soaring and the longer we wait the more it will cost.

While Austin prides itself in being a leader in Green Building practices and has indicated support of a climate change initiative, we often, however, do not take the lead on our own city projects to be environmental advocates.

**16. As a City Council member, what is your position on the following issues and what specific innovative programs will you support to ensure that Austin is a leader in environmental stewardship in these areas?**

**A) Reducing our water usage by emphasizing water conservation and reducing wastewater usage by effective gray water reuse rather than the construction of a new water treatment plant.**

I support conservation and gray water initiatives. However, with Austin expected to double in the next 20 years, we will need a new treatment plant. I would love for conservation initiatives alone to work, but it's not pragmatic.

**B) Do you recognize the problem with Peak Oil projections and its impact on our ability to reduce our "Carbon Footprint" by energy conservation strategies and the related need to develop safe and sustainable energy resources?**

It doesn't matter about the projects- we are going to run out of oil. Development of safe and sustainable energy resources is vital. Despite the varied Peak Oil projections, we should move forward to reduce our carbon footprint. Less energy usage is important to the environment and a sustainable future, no matter where that energy is derived.

**C) Requiring comprehensive project impact analysis that includes water, energy, air, social and economic factors as part of development review process.**

I am completely in favor of this. When thinking about the long term, we need to consider water energy and clean air as top priorities. This will allow the land and surrounding areas to be reused for generations to come. The social and economic factors especially with regard to local communities, needs to be considered and addressed in the development review process.

**D) Coordinating our water, wastewater and electric utility service areas with an annexation strategy as part of our comprehensive planning.**

Annexation strategy should include a review process such that when we take over the utilities, it is environmentally advantageous to the area. It may make more sense for the local community to maintain control over their utilities, but the City needs to make sure that they follow Austin Energy regulations and guidelines. In other situations, it makes more sense for the City to directly control the utilities. This review process should be case by case.

As Austin grows, if we do not reduce our demand for energy through conservation and switch to renewable energy supplies, it is suggested that we will need to build a new power plant based on either nuclear or coal technologies.

**17. Will you commit to voting against any proposal that would result in Austin constructing or participating in the construction of a new nuclear or coal fired power plant, yes or no?**

Ans 17: Yes, we need to invest our money in long term solutions that involve renewable energy sources so that we can solve our energy needs now, and not just push it off on future generations. Both coal and nuclear plants would take money away from investments in these renewable sources, and thus simply postpone the time when we are forced to utilize alternative energy sources such as wind, solar and natural gas.

The current development approval process is structured in favor of developer interests rather than community interests. This is reflected in the compartmentalization of the city review process and the lack of community input into the process at critical decision points. Often projects are approved without any evaluation on a whole range of concerns from the impact on local traffic to the regional impact of additional drainage requirements. The current system encourages conflict, not collaboration, and favors piecemeal approvals that do not serve larger community needs.

**18. What will you do to change the current development review process to encourage collaboration and greater respect for neighborhood and other community and regional stakeholder interests?**

Ans 18: The process needs an overhaul. Instead of treating neighborhoods as an afterthought and bringing them to the table at the end of the process, developers should be required to contact the affected neighborhood associations. Often the neighborhood groups will be concerned with issues not covered by the current review process. Neighborhoods groups should be notified earlier with enough time to respond and participate if desired. A comprehensive review process needs to be done at the beginning of the cycle. This will allow the neighborhoods and other interested parties to voice concerns about issues that may not have been covered by the development plan. Finally, a review should occur again at the end. This will allow all parties to review the process and determine the outcome of each stage and determine how concerns were addressed or not addressed and why. This will lead directly to a 'lessons learned' type outcome that will help continually improve the process.

Over and over, City decisions appear to be made behind closed doors, with little or no public input, with public involvement only coming in after-the-fact. The result is that the ideas, wisdom and intelligence of the community is relegated to a purely cosmetic or backseat role. Recent examples of this include City Council approval of a 100-year water deal with the LCRA; the hiring of the new city manager; the proposed move of the animal shelter; the authorization of \$6.2 million in Barton Springs pool improvements, the proposed privatization of Seaholm and Green and the redevelopment amendment to the SOS ordinance.

**19. As a City Council member what steps would you take to ensure meaningful community participation in important City decisions?**

Ans 19: Transparency in local government is one of the cornerstones of my campaign. We should know who our council members are meeting and what they discussed at all times. If they are truly working for the city, there should be no objection to this type visibility. It should raise red flags with the council members if the interested party wants to meet 'off the record' or behind closed doors. Many times it may be logistically difficult to hold all meetings open to the public. Every major decision or meeting should be placed on the city council docket prior to the meeting occurring. This will notify the public of upcoming meetings, important decisions, etc.

**Social Equity**

The City budget contains cost drivers, such as the Police contract, that take an ever increasing share of our tax revenue leaving less and less funds to address other community needs.

**20. What will you do as a City Council Member to pull back the demand on our city budget of the Public Service contracts to allow other priorities of the City to be met?**

Ans 20: Currently, the public safety portion of the city budget is 65%; the city's revenue from taxes is barely 59%. As a comparison, Portland budgets only 22% for public safety. Both cities are currently ranked in the top 10 safest cities in the country. I believe we can review our Police, Fire and EMS services and review other cities of comparable size to determine cost cutting measures and efficiency improvements. This is going to be a critical issue as Austin continues to grow.

Currently in Austin, African-American and Latino's mean income for a family of four is approximately half of that of Whites and Asian-Americans. This disparity has led to a diminished quality of life in the areas of Health, Education, Affordable housing, Public Safety and environment for a large segment of our community.

**21. What specific actions will you take as a City Council member to address this disparity and what effect do you believe your actions will have in addressing this problem?**

Ans 21: We as a city (and a country) need to make it a goal of ours to get to a point where median income is equal among all races. America is no longer a place where everyone has an equal opportunity. In fact, we may never have been. Race and social status play large role to this day. Schools where the student population is predominantly made up of minorities and low income families tend to have worse facilities, fewer teaching resources and little if any after school programs. We can look to example like Johnston HS to see how we are failing our children. These are the schools that need the most help, and we need to make sure that we are allocating funding appropriately so they get it.

Another major issue is a lack of visible role models in certain areas of the city. A child growing up in an affluent neighborhood, such as Tarrytown, see lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc. and understand that those are careers that they can aspire to. Children in disadvantaged neighborhoods tend to not get exposure to those types of professionals. This makes it harder for them to see the importance of getting an education. I'm not saying that people from these neighborhoods don't become lawyer and doctors, but in general, once they do they move to other neighborhoods where the people who need role models the most aren't exposed to them. We need to have programs at schools which bring minority professionals in the community back to the schools to show that hard work and education can provide long term benefits. If the students see people who grew up in their neighborhoods and are now working fulfilling jobs and making very good salaries it will give them a tangible goal.

The newly created Health Care District cannot provide adequate care for our community at the current funding levels and will need significant more resources as the economic disparity continues to grow in our community, forcing even more people to depend on public assistance.

**22. What role do you see the City of Austin playing in assuring that the**

***Health Care District is adequately funded while recognizing the difficulty of increasing the tax burden on the lower and middle-income members of our community?***

Ans 22: In the next few years, there is going to be an interesting tug-of-war for dollars between the HCD and the Emergency services. In order to meet the growing needs for the HCD, given the rising health care costs and limited Medicare payouts, the City will need to increase its funding. Finding this money in the limited budget will be difficult without raising taxes or reducing the budget of another area. Given the size of the budget consumed by Emergency Services, this is a good place to start. I think this problem can be solved without raising costs to the low-income families who can least afford it. Furthermore, keeping more clinics open will reduce the number of emergency room visits and unnecessary ambulance trips.

The lack of affordable housing in Austin is a crisis for many residents. The community has recognized this growing problem and has approved a \$55 million bond package for affordable housing. However, serious questions have arisen about the accountability of this bond program and its impact on affordability. It is also recognized that even with appropriate use of these funds, this level of funding will not provide much relief to the affordable housing crisis.

***23. How many additional housing units or rehabilitated existing units do you expect the affordable housing bond program to provide? What percent of the \$55 million should go to modest and low-income housing? How do you define modest and low-income housing? What can you do as a City Council member to ensure that the \$55 million in bond funding will actually go to providing more affordable housing and what other specific actions can the City Council take to place more affordable housing in our community?***

Ans 23: Affordable housing is becoming more and more important as Austin develops. Increasing numbers of people are moving here and it is making the housing market rise even as the national housing market is falling. Rising prices of houses results in rising prices for rent. We need to do something quickly before the cost of living is too great for our lower and middle class citizens that make this town so diverse. And I believe that the \$55 million dollar fund is a good start at accomplishing that, but more needs to happen. First of all there are two separate groups concerned with affordable housing, renters and home-owners, and we need help both groups. For home-owners the major concern is that housing values are rising so high that they cannot afford to pay the property taxes and must move out of the neighborhood they live in. When expensive houses start going up in lower income neighborhoods, it makes the perceived value of everyone's home go up. There needs to be a mechanism to keep property taxes for long term residents of these neighborhoods from rising more than the rate of inflation. This can be paid for from the increased revenue the city collects from the new residents who are putting expensive homes up, and thus

paying more in property taxes. As for renters, we need to make sure the city enforces the codes that require a certain percentage of developments be affordable housing. We also have to define "affordable" based on some percentage of the mean household income in Austin. We also have to make sure that the city is appropriately using the bond money allocated, and that all of it is going towards affordable housing.

We are told by the City Administration that the City can no longer afford to purchase land for community facilities downtown, yet land the city already owns downtown is being proposed for sale for private development. Moreover, we are told that we must relocate essential city services away from the populations they serve without adequate transportation services. Basic living expenses for our teachers, nurses, police officers and many other working class residents have not kept pace with the cost of living and so many can no longer afford to live in our city. However, we continue to subsidize big corporations and developers.

**24. What city policy changes would you enact to address the following Concerns?**

- A) Promotion of living wage scale for all of Austin's employers**
- B) Putting Health and Human services at the same budget priority as Public Safety**
- C) An economic development strategy that focuses on providing jobs first for current residents that are either unemployed or underemployed.**

Ans 24: A) Promoting a living wage scale to me is common sense. If you look at the big picture of what it costs the city to support citizens that are not getting paid enough from their employers you will see that financially the city needs to make sure all its people are compensated adequately. If a person is not making enough money to provide for their family, then they end up using many city services. If their employer pays them a living wage they will not be forced to take advantage of as many services, thus freeing those services up for other and saving the city.

B) Investing in Health and Human services is immensely important. In terms of MHMR facilities we need to fund them because helping people early prevents possible public safety issues that may arise later. The police force spends a lot of time dealing with the homeless, and mentally unstable people whose only problem is that they could not get the help they needed from MHMR facilities. If we have the services to treat these people before they become public safety risks we will make our police officers more efficient by allowing them to focus their time on violent crimes. Funding public health facilities is also financially important because treating people early and keeping them healthy cuts down on the number of emergency response trips that have to be made, again saving money for the city.

C) Making sure that our unemployed and underemployed populations can find gainful employment is important for our community for many reasons. For one,

by earning a living wage they are less dependent on city services, which allows us to reinvest that money in other programs. Secondly, they will be able to spend their money on goods and services in the city, thus helping businesses to profit. In order to do this we need to educate the people with skills that are in demand today. We need to provide grants and workshops for people to get secondary or vocational educations.

## **Business**

Small locally owned businesses often outperform their “Big Box” competition, both in outright profitability and the value they bring to consumers, workers, and the community.

**25. *What specifically can you do as a City Council member to encourage the city administration to better support locally owned businesses? Please describe any programs or initiatives that you would lead in this effort.***

Ans 25: We can move the money that the council spends on incentives for large retail to help local business. Local business is a cornerstone of our economy. It is clear that money spent in local businesses benefits us more than that money spent in a chain store. In order to better encourage and support locally owned business, I will start up workshops aimed at the new business owners, and the documents produced will be available online. This will provide a guide that will help the owners work with the City on how to file the proper paperwork for a new storefront (for example) and City contacts for the various departments. I would like the city to be an open place for the local and small business owner. The size of the business and type of business should be irrelevant to the City and staff.

I would also like to start a mentor program where local businessmen who have successfully started a business mentor the operators of new businesses. This is similar to volunteer programs in schools. It would bring the local business community into the fold. They could determine what does and doesn't work and report back to the Council and help drive change in our laws and ordinances that would directly help the new and local business.

Austin's economic development activities are mainly focused on bringing new big business to our community and often provide subsidies even outside of our City limits. Hundreds of millions of tax payer dollars are either directly spent to subsidize this type of development or tax abatements used that reduce the revenue to the City that is needed to support all the other city functions. Locally owned businesses have been severely impacted and even bankrupted by this practice.

**26. *Do you support the halting of subsidies for retail development as proposed by the Stop Domain Subsidies initiative? If not, why not?***

Ans 26: Yes, subsidies to large retail developments disadvantage the small local businesses that are a major part of Austin. We need to be giving tax breaks to these local businesses for them to thrive and to invite more local businesses. Local businesses reinvest their profits in our local economy, as opposed to sending those profits off to another city. Furthermore, encouraging local business helps protect the fabric and culture of this city. Corporate stores and big box retail will turn Austin into another Round Rock.

While the unemployment rate for the most disadvantaged in our community continues to grow, our job recruitment efforts seem to be focused on mainly higher end businesses with promises that an expanded tax base benefits us all. The current strategy of our economic development relies on the concept of “trickle down economics” to be successful.

**27. *Why hasn't a larger tax base solved our economic problems and the supposed benefit of recruiting high end businesses "trickle down" to the rest of us?***

Ans 27: I have never been a believer in trickle down economics. The people and businesses at the top need the least amount of help. It is the bottom level that needs the most help, and thus direct investment in that level would provide the most benefit to society. We need to improve our community investment in leveling the playing field by helping the lower classes to raise themselves up. We do this with programs that focus on education and job training. By investing in these areas we can provide the biggest benefit to the community at large.

The city has spent millions on economic development; City Council members have traveled to far off countries to promote Austin. The City has a whole department in City Hall focused on Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services whose main focus is on large, corporate non-local business recruitment. Austin is already recognized as a great city for business with a highly educated and skilled labor pool making us a favored destination city for business development. However, the majority of job growth in Austin is coming from small businesses.

**28. *What specific changes in our economic development strategies would you make to focus on maintaining our current businesses and establishing clear performance measures that ensure that our business retention and recruitment will be a positive benefit to the community?***

Ans 28: We need to focus on supporting our local businesses instead of giving incentives to non-local corporate businesses. The money earned by non-local businesses gets distributed among all the corporate locations the business operates. Local businesses, however, reinvest the money they earn in the local economy. Thus the money earned is worth more to the city than if it was earned by a non-local business. We need to work with the Austin Chamber of Commerce

to study programs and initiatives that have worked in the past and grow these initiatives so that we can continue to make them work in the future.

Austin has developed a reputation as the Music Capital of the World and the music business has grown to be a major economic engine for our city. However, Austin's growth is creating problems for the music industry. Downtown new residential units are being built adjacent to longstanding music venues, while the development of many new live music venues outside of the central business district has begun to negatively impact many of our residential neighborhoods.

**29. As a City Council member what would you do to resolve this conflict in such a way so as to support both live music and maintaining the quality of life in our neighborhoods?**

Ans 29: This is a central issue to my campaign. I love live music, I see the condos going up on Red River and other areas downtown and I worry that the places I love to frequent will be slowly pushed out because the people who moved into these condos will not want to live with live music at night. I also see music venues sprouting up in areas on S 1<sup>st</sup> and the East Side in neighborhoods and I worry these places will push out the residents that have lived there for so long and make this city so diverse. In my opinion there is a simple way to solve the problem, look at who was there first. If a condo goes up next to a club downtown, the people living in that condo need to realize that there will be loud music playing late into the night. They cannot move in and then decide they want to change the way things have been done for so long. On the same token, if a music venue goes up in an area with residential living, that establishment must realize that the people who live there will need their peace at a reasonable hour. This could mean updating construction, be it at the clubs or the condos, to provide increased sound dampening technologies. The first come policy will not always work, but it's a good start at good faith policy to address these issues. I would hate to see downtown Austin become a ghost town at night because developer dollars drive out the nightlife. However, I fear this could become a reality.

### **Closing Question**

Austin will face many opportunities and challenges over the next few years. It is critical that our community has effective leadership on the City Council and that leadership reflects the will of the whole community, not just special interests. Nevertheless, any successful candidate needs to have broad support of the community to be elected and to be effective.

**30. Why do you think you deserve the endorsement of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY? And if elected will you commit to meeting with representatives of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY on a regular basis to discuss our organization's perspective on important city issues?**

Ans 30: I believe that I am the candidate that most closely shares the overall goals of BAT. I chose to run this campaign because I see the city leading us in a direction that the citizens don't want us to go. A direction where the core of Austin, the culture and character that we love, is being threatened. We need someone on the city council that is beholden to no one. I am not a politician. I am a concerned citizen who wants to help, and I feel I can do that on the city council. I pledge to work with all the people of Austin to make sure we grow together, and one way to do that is to regularly meet with the citizen organizations in the city, of which BAT is one. I pledge to regularly meet with representatives of Better Austin Today, and work with them to truly make the name of this group a reality.

End of questionnaire

Note to incumbent candidates:

If in your capacity as City Council member you have asked city staff to provide any research or assistance in answering any of these questions, please so note in your responses. We would also appreciate being provided with any information provided by the city staff to you so that we may share that information with the other candidates to ensure an equitable questionnaire process.

Thank you for your time in addressing the many important topics of this questionnaire.