



Better Austin Today
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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?

I ask BETTER AUSTIN TODAY to endorse my candidacy for Austin City Council. In the answers that follow, I hope you'll see reasons why I am the right candidate to back for Place 1. Moreover, I seek the endorsement due to the civic activism I have participated in since November 2006 related to the Northcross Wal-Mart controversy. I feel that I have proven to be a reliable fighter when the cause is just, and even when the battle is daunting. While I have been an effective advocate for my neighborhoods, I have always been ready and willing to negotiate.

Next, I cheered the creation of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY, and applaud its participation in this election. (In fact, I helped name the organization, when I proposed the name as BAT-PAC for Bettering Austin Today. And I hooked you up with the designer of your logo.) Lastly, I seek the endorsement of BETTER AUSTIN TODAY because I am not a city hall insider. I would bring new energy, leadership and vision to our city government, which is sorely needed, to solve problems and neutralize unnecessary conflicts, which cause rancor among the people that elect us.

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?

My vision for Austin is a bold one. It is one where we continue to build a city that is attractive to some of the most innovative and forward-thinking businesses. But it is also one where we take steps to attract alternative energy businesses and more blue collar jobs.

It is also one that calls upon Austin to place neighborhood preservation at the same level of importance as economic development. I envision a city where the citizens are proudly engaged in civic activity that is beyond a clash of ideas or powerful interests. Instead, more Austinites will come together to help our city face and overcome the challenges of growth, alternative energy use and conservation, transportation and more.

Austin has been a leader in so many areas over the years. We need to be the leader in making sure our ambitions don't turn Austin into an unaffordable city for most and an unlivable city for many who currently call it home. I look forward to working with other city council members who are interested in solving our social challenges and urban transportation problems, which our constituents demand we do. I will contribute boundless energy and a quest for ideas that will find the right answers for Austin, which is not always the quickest path, but a surer one.

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?

If I am fortunate enough to hold the office of Place 1, I owe it to my constituents to allow them to know whom I am meeting with each day when I am doing the public's business.

My plan to create a Department of Neighborhoods, which is addressed later in this questionnaire, would help to prevent these developer-citizen conflicts before they occur.

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?

Let me point out the actions that I feel were the worst ones first:

1. Not standing up for the citizens around Northcross and working to address the underlying issues of traffic and crime.
2. Not taking advantage of an opportunity to build more affordable housing in East Austin, but instead putting a new animal shelter in a location where people could have lived.
3. Choosing a new city manager virtually in secret.
4. Choosing the new site for Water Treatment Plant 4 without public involvement.
5. Not placing the authority to hire the City Attorney under the responsibility of the City Council.

As for major accomplishments, passage of the Big Box is a big win, but it came too late for Northcross and is still a weak ordinance. The current ordinance does not address the potential impact of a development in terms of traffic, crime, or pollution. It only looks at the square footage of a building.

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?

Yes to both. The City Council should hire the City Attorney, not the City Manager. The City Council should also be able to hire an outside counsel.

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?

There is no reason to tolerate unlawful activity. If information is provided to me concerning any potentially unlawful action, I would immediately call upon the City Manager and/or the City Attorney to assist my office in verifying the information.

Much like when the police department places officers on administrative leave when an investigation is underway, I would seek to have the person(s) involved in the action also placed on leave until an investigation is complete.

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?

I think the at-large system has various strengths and weaknesses today, just as it always has. There are some changes that can be made to improve our local government and its responsiveness. One is to add more council members. I believe the council could be enlarged to reflect population increases we've experienced.

I also propose the creation of a new office called the Office of Public Advocate. This would not be exactly like the Office of Public Advocate in New York City. That officeholder is second-in-line to the mayor. In our instance, the City of Austin's Office of Public Advocate would be an elected position. The officeholder would be an ombudsman, or go-between for the citizens and the city government. The council members would still answer to citizens, of course, and respond to their requests. In addition to council members, the Public Advocate would answer complaints about problems with city government, investigate ineffective agencies and programs, and propose solutions that would make government more efficient, and help communities gain better access to government.

In many ways, the Office of Public Advocate would be a "council monitor" like the Office of Police Monitor.

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?**

The citizens of Austin should have every assurance that each and every vote is accurately counted. “Citizen Observers” are certainly OK if that helps the perception that our elections are accurate, but does that increase the accuracy? But this is one case where the perception should be the reality. Accuracy is paramount.

Electronic systems have been implemented to speed-up vote counting. They were also supposed to have been more accurate. That does not seem to have happened. If electronic voting machines have cost us accuracy as well as the perception that our votes are not properly recorded, they are the wrong solution to one of the most important rights we all cherish.

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?**

Cities like Portland, Seattle, and Louisville have taken a great leap toward preserving neighborhoods. In some ways, they see preserving neighborhoods as essential as economic development. Just look at the mission for Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods, but in this case, I’ve replaced the word ‘Seattle’ with ‘Austin.’

The Department of Neighborhoods works to bring government closer to the residents of Austin by engaging them in civic participation; helping them become empowered to make positive contributions to their communities; and by involving more of Austin's underrepresented residents, including communities of color and immigrants, in civic discourse, processes, and opportunities.

Wouldn't that be a great way to tackle many of the problems we've recently faced? As for budget and cost, this is doable. Consider that the Northcross Wal-Mart mismanagement has cost the City at least \$784,000 (so far). Then factor in the legal expenses for the other legal battles that took place in 2007 and in previous years. It can be argued that the cost savings incurred by preventing court battles alone could fund a new Austin Department of Neighborhoods.

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.**

My previous answer about creating an Austin Department of Neighborhoods would help address many of these failings.

A new Department of Neighborhoods would make sure to notify all impacted parties to ensure an inclusive, respectful process. The Department of Neighborhoods would be tasked to place neighbors preservation at the same level of importance as economic development. If you don't have vibrant, safe neighborhoods, our city suffers.

I would work as a council member to make sure citizens really understand the land use decisions that have been made. For example, does the average citizen really grasp what is meant by density. Is the jargon getting in the way? I think so. I think many people do not understand that the way Austin is developing is due to policy decisions made by the city. That education/communication is a two-way street, and ensures that the community will be reflected in planning decisions.

Again, I assert that a Department of Neighborhoods would be a step in the right direction to ensure that development (or redevelopment) and neighborhoods don't clash as often in the future as they have in the past.

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?

My initiative to create a Department of Neighborhoods would help address this problem.

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?

This is an issue that is affecting so many parts of Austin. Part of the problem stems from the increases in property taxes that have occurred over the past decade. Many businesses and homeowners simply cannot afford the rise. A solution may be to create districts or safeguards to ensure that redevelopment does not push out residents or cherished businesses. Our senior citizen residents get breaks on their property taxes after a certain age. Could long-term residents or businesses be eligible for such protection on an applied-for basis? Possibly. Again, the Department of Neighborhoods would assist in addressing this problem, which will only get worse if not properly addressed now.

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**

Codes need to be updated. With regard to the Northcross experience, the zoning was assigned in the late 60s or early 70s. Clearly, that zoning designation did not envision a Wal-Mart Supercenter, nor the kind of traffic impact that would result. Zoning needs to be updated to reflect the state of our city now, since things seem to have changed a bit here and there since Nixon was president.

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?

There are two immediate ways to address this contradiction. One is to require more public input and involvement as it relates to developments that may severely/negatively impact neighborhoods. (My initiative to create a Department of Neighborhoods is part of the solution.) One thing that may help reduce the impact of such developments is to create buffer zones, where redevelopment cannot take place. There has to be a greater effort to balance our growth in favor of preserving our neighborhoods.

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?

Austin should continue to purchase more acreage in the Drinking Water Protection Zone and continue to restrict development in environmentally sensitive areas. I don't know how much it may cost to buy sufficient land to protect the Barton Springs Zone, but I do know this: The land isn't getting any cheaper. And the cost to replace the aquifer is unimaginable. I will appoint people to the appropriate boards and commissions who will recognize and act on the importance of protecting our environment and especially our drinking water.

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.**
- 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?**
- C) Requiring comprehensive project impact analysis that includes water, energy, air, social and economic factors as part of development review process.**
- D) Coordinating our water, wastewater and electric utility service areas with an annexation strategy as part of our comprehensive planning.**

It's easy to say you're an environmentalist, but being one -- and pushing environmental policies -- is an entirely different matter. All of our natural resources and sources of energy are limited and precious. If Austin is going to be a greener city, it must take action to educate the public about the benefits that can be realized by implementing more green initiatives. We must do all we can as a city to reduce water usage. I am not convinced that a massive, new water treatment plant is the answer, when more can be done to conserve use. I also think water issues should be addressed in concert with our fellow cities. Aren't we all essentially drawing from the same wells? What good are we doing if we have strict controls but Rollingwood and Round Rock don't? There is work to do here.

The Peak Oil projections should force everyone to change. Just today in the *Austin American-Statesman*, there's a story about what Google is doing to capture solar energy and implement more alternative energy and conservation strategies. If an Internet search

engine company can make changes to lessen its carbon footprint, Austin can certainly do more.

A comprehensive project impact analysis is an appropriate step, but I cannot see private developers stepping in and funding such studies by themselves. However, the city can proactively acquire such data, rather than react when a development is proposed.

As I stated earlier, with regard to water usage and coordinating with other municipalities, a case can be made for coordinating other city services. Annexation may not be the only answer, but inter-city coordination is a valid issue that can't wait.

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?

There was a story in this past Sunday's New York Times which says that: "The waste from more than 100 nuclear reactors that the federal government was supposed to start accepting for burial 10 years ago is still at the reactor sites, at least 20 years behind schedule." The federal government is paying billions of dollars in fines and payments to utilities.

I cannot support adding to this problem.

A coal-fired plant is also a poor answer due to the environmental impacts, such as toxic emissions in the environment.

For the same investment in either one of these plants, our city could make amazing strides to conserve energy and implement serious alternative energy initiatives.

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?

My proposals to create a Department of Neighborhoods and an Office of Public Advocate will help facilitate these processes and lessen the conflict.

Regarding neighborhoods, the Department of Neighborhood will at least put neighborhoods on a more solid footing against developers, who seem to currently hold all the cards.

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?

I am appalled by the lack of public input in these recent decisions. Moreover, I am shocked by the lack of an attempt to solicit public input.

But the city is currently gathering input citywide regarding how to improve its website... Amazing, isn't it?

One step I propose is creation of a new office called the Office of Public Advocate. This would be an elected position. The officeholder would be an ombudsman, or go-between for the citizens and the city government. The council members would still answer to citizens, of course, and respond to their requests. In addition to council members, the Public Advocate would answer complaints about problems with city government, investigate ineffective agencies and programs, and propose solutions that would make government more efficient, and help communities gain better access to government. This would help facilitate communication and lessen conflict.

But that's not enough.

I would personally work to find new, proactive ways to solicit citizen input. It must be gained in more ways than just personal office appointments with council members or the "citizen communication" portion of city council meetings.

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?*

It's hard for public officials to say no to the police, fire or EMS. But I would if our "needs" are met and the budget requests are only for "wants" that we do not need.

Let me explain what I mean. The new police chief wants to repaint all the police cars. Is this necessary? At a time when the economy is shaky, is this the best use of our limited budgets? I am not convinced that it is.

We have wants and needs. The needs come first.

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?*

I would like to look into creating a new policy of allowing city employees to be paid while volunteering in certain areas of our society. It would be interesting to see how the public would react to such a plan.

I would also encourage a pledge for volunteer hours in exchange for the tax breaks and incentives our city gives away.

There are also answers in education and job creation. Our city has done a lot to attract high-tech businesses to Austin, which creates many high-paying jobs. But many times, those holding advanced degrees can only win such jobs.

Austin can do more to attract blue-collar businesses and to help better educate all of our people. I certainly would love to spend my term focusing on this issue, rather than help Richard Suttle build something.

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?

Health care is a huge issue. I don't think Austin can solve it alone. Recently, there was an announcement about finally creating a medical school here in Austin. While that may help add the capacity to care for people in the long run, it does not address our current crisis.

One way Austin can help alleviate this problem is to get creative. We have entities like GSD&M's Idea City. Could they help our city galvanize around the idea of preventative care and healthier lifestyles? Of course, they could.

A large portion of the cost of health care that is paid for by all of us is incurred from ER care that is necessitated when patients get critically ill. Austin could save money in the long run by pushing preventative care.

There are additional factors related to income levels, mental health issues, immigration status, etc. These problems are not getting any cheaper. They must be addressed now.

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?

Someday, someone will have to explain to me why we're so proud to be building more \$800,000 condos than we need, yet have such an overwhelming need for affordable housing.

I also have to again complain about the opportunity lost when the Town Lake Animal Shelter was voted to move to East Austin in a location that the neighborhood wanted used for affordable housing.

We can get creative here too. Recently, the actor Brad Pitt commissioned 13 architecture firms to help rebuild New Orleans's impoverished Lower Ninth Ward. Each firm was to create a new model of affordable house. In doing so, new solutions were found to an old problem: how to help people house themselves in homes that are modest and respectable.

We must learn from lessons learned in other cities now and in the past to find affordable housing solutions for families and older persons. The city council can do a lot to address this problem, and we, as a city, must do so in order to retain low-income (and even middle-income) families. I fully support Austin doing so. Vertical, mixed-use development isn't just for pricey condos and latte bars.

A public-private partnership should be sought to build (or remodel!) modest, affordable homes wherever possibly for people who would be very willing to pay for them.

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.**

It seems there is no end to what we will spend on public safety. (Such as cameras everywhere.) If elected, I would concentrate on making sure Austinites support a city government that values its employees and prioritizes other essential city services.

While some subsidies and incentives may pay off in the long run in terms of economic growth, we have a city to run here, and we need good people to do it.

Yes, current residents could be given a priority, but the best-qualified person for the job should be the person hired.

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.

A great way to help locally owned businesses is to limit growth of Big Box stores, which harm local economies in greater ways than people realize. There truly is a high cost for low prices.

The city can also help encourage the development of independent business districts, and support them with the city infrastructure they need to flourish. That means everything from proper lighting and landscaping to police patrols and parking solutions.

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?

I can almost understand the city trying to “seed” an area for growth, but the price is way out of bounds. And where is the same investment for local businesses? (Or business districts?) The Domain development clearly had some great lobbyists. My ears will not listen to their siren song.

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?

Simple: Because such a trickle down theory was, is and always will be Voodoo Economics.

If benefits do trickle down, that's all you get. A trickle.

There are so many people who need help with retraining. There is more we can do to attract and grow blue-collar industries.

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?*

While we work to attract the jobs of the 21st Century, we must not forget that the vast majority of our economic base is rooted in jobs from the 20th Century.

There is no shortage of economists and scorecards available to measure economic growth and performance.

I think one way to help foster this growth is to post a grade for what we, as a city, are doing.

We give scores to restaurants based on cleanliness and health. If we can publicly score our efforts that affect our economic health, then we should.

It could be a boon to the city, to employers, and to prospective employers to know that we are doing A+ level work to ensure business retention and recruitment that positively benefits our city. And if we're earning a D, then we know we have to work harder.

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?

This is a very complicated issue that must be solved, since we have gained so much as a city in embracing its musical heritage. We're unique in this regard. Much can be done with acoustical engineering to contain sound and to direct it. And I don't mean just in the clubs. I also mean in the buildings near clubs, or currently under construction.

The cost of requiring such soundproofing is tiny, compared to what it would cost our city economically and culturally if downtown redevelopment were to kill our live music scene.

On a related note, it's disappointing to have to quiet down clubs playing live music, which enhance the culture and character of our city, yet we tolerate automobiles rolling around on city streets and through neighborhoods with incredible decibels of bass thumping for blocks.

I would work with groups like Troy Dillinger's Year of Austin Music to address this issue. I am also a guitarist, so I can appreciate what it takes to master an instrument and earn a living playing one.

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?

I absolutely agree to meet with representatives of Better Austin Today, and other groups, on a regular basis. Getting input and feedback is essential to making the right decisions and to tear down the cocoon.

I hope I have earned the endorsement of Better Austin Today due to my past and current civic leadership. I hope my answers here have also helped in your decision. Lastly, I hope to earn the endorsement as an investment from your group to my new and more promising voice for better leadership on the council, and for our city. I welcome the challenges I will face if I am entrusted with the opportunity to serve.

P.S. I answered this whole enchilada on my own.

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.