



Better Austin Today
Political Action Committee
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Laura Morrison

Please see below for my answers to the questionnaire (in italics). Thanks for the opportunity to complete it.

Laura Morrison

Candidate for Austin City Council Place 4

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?*

Yes, I would be honored to have the BATPAC endorsement, as it represents a broad spectrum of community interests, and I am running to give the community a voice on the Council.

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 candidacy is about making Austin a city that works for everyone. My vision is of a 'healthy' Austin, a place where all residents have equal opportunity; where everyone has shelter, employment with livable wages, good health and a sense of security; where the environment is respected and treasured; and where we can all enjoy the unique character, open space and vibrancy of our community. My vision also includes a civically engaged public who are embraced by the government as a fundamental element of decision making.

Austin's uniqueness is our community, including the local flavor of our neighborhoods, diverse cultures, local businesses, our cultural energy and our natural environment.

Preserving and enhancing our uniqueness requires open, informed and inclusive decision making that reflects our community's values.

I am known for my ability to work with people on all sides of an issue, and I intend to bring that to City Hall in working with my colleagues on the Council.

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?*

Yes.

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?*

Positives: Taking a step in protecting our environment with the Climate Protection Plan; protecting Lady Bird Lake with positions of saying no to Waterfront Overlay Variances; hiring of a Chief of Police who appears to have the ability to be an effective leader for Police Department with an understanding of the needs of the community.

Negatives: A lack of openness and public participation in the City Manager selection process; a lack of timely and bold action on affordable housing; circumventing the neighborhood planning amendment process and lack of openness in relocating the Town Lake Animal Shelter.

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?**

Our history shows that the Council and the City need changes in the structure we have for legal support for the City Council. The suggestions here present two real possibilities for effective change. A final decision should include a further exploration of alternatives and community dialogue to arrive at the best solution.

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?**

I am not clear on which specific obligation under Title 18 is being referenced here (and assume this is US Code, Title 18, Criminal Acts and Procedures). However, as an ethical matter, I will ensure that potentially unlawful actions by City Staff or Administration are addressed by the necessary parties and I would monitor an issue to ensure that appropriate actions are carried forward.

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?**

No, I don't believe that the current system is appropriate, and we should look toward a change such as a single member district/hybrid system which would bring the Council closer to the community and result in more effective governing of the city. Such a change would bring the following benefits: increased accountability of Council Members; better understanding by the Council of the

issues facing citizens; lower cost of running a campaign with a follow-on benefit of encouraging a broader range of candidates; enhanced access to Council Members by the citizens; and potentially increased voter turnout.

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?**

Yes, I think the citizens of Austin have the right to observe counting of their votes and oversight of the process. I believe that at least a paper trail of votes is necessary with our current system, and would like to explore whether a computer-aided, open source voting system with a vote trail can be sufficient to achieve true accountability and credibility in our election process. I will consider, with further investigation, supporting a return to hand-counted paper ballot system as a necessity.

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?**

Yes, I would support developing an inclusive, community-based process to create a comprehensive growth management policy, and as President of the Austin Neighborhoods Council, I worked with the community to develop a statement calling for this action.

I think we can determine a best practice process with dialogue in the community and by examining other cities that have achieved success in this realm. The key phases in the process would be to identify and come to consensus on a clear community vision, to set the goals and policies that will achieve the vision, and then develop individual policies and plans to manage the elements of growth that are integral to the goals. There will be some iteration in the planning phase, to mitigate any conflicts that could result from the different plans. The effort must also address implementation of the plans and ongoing monitoring and review to ensure success of the policies.

Another element of the process must include collaboration with other governmental jurisdictions in the region for example, Travis County and Austin Independent School District. There is enormous untapped potential in such collaborations and the City's record has much room for improvement.

Experience in other cities suggests that it can take some years to complete this process, and that the funding can be on the order of \$1,000,000. However we do have some pieces of planning in Austin that we should be respectful of and leverage to minimize the necessary time and resources. I would support the necessary resources to develop a growth management policy.

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.**

None of A through F has worked optimally. The Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department had several staff added to the 2006-2007 budget to assist in the effectiveness of neighborhood planning, and our most recent budget added 4 "Neighborhood Ombudsman" positions, with a promise of a community dialogue to determine their scope of work that has not occurred. We need to leverage these resources to be responsive to the problem areas identified in A through E. My hosting that dialogue with each of these issues as discussion items will be a positive first step in improving neighborhood planning.

I have supported my own and other neighborhoods in advocating for respect of adopted neighborhood plans and adherence to the neighborhood plan amendment process. I will continue to do so as a Council member and will work with my colleagues on Council to help them understand the importance of this.

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?**

Yes, I pledge to support a neighborhood's valid petition on zoning cases because I believe the concept was instituted out of respect for the local community.

Delving into the legal technicalities of whether or not adoption of VMU is a zoning change would require additional legal discussion with both sides of the argument represented, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet occurred. I support having that discussion.

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?**

The causes of the gentrification are many and extremely difficult to address. Tax policy, increasing transportation problems, a national move back to city centers, higher home prices pushing new residents into older communities, and ongoing lack of support for poorer neighborhoods by the city are just a few of the reasons.

Addressing the problem will require many approaches and I will work to ensure: effective use of the tools provided by the Homestead Preservation Zone and consideration of expansion of the boundaries; collaboration with our state delegation to develop more tools, e.g., special exemptions for long-term residents in traditionally low-income; examination of the potential for inclusionary housing in the Homestead Preservation Zone; meeting the goals of affordable housing in TODs; and strong application of CURE zoning requirements for affordable housing in the gentrified areas.

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**

We need to keep in mind that in our city government's organizational structure. The City Manager reports to the City Council and the Council in turn reports to the citizens of Austin. Some of the code enforcement and interpretation problems we have stem from the neglect of this concept, and the citizens of Austin should not have to sue the City (as is happening more and more frequently), to make the City do the right thing. In these cases, the Council should be involved and accountable to the citizens to assist in finding the reasonable solution.

We need a culture that supports our staff to reduce turnover, to provide adequate training, and to allow them to make judgments that are free of internal political pressures.

We must put procedures and internal controls in place where they are currently missing and adjust them in areas where they are problematic. We also have a need to update some of our criteria manuals to reflect modern standards.

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?

We need a growth management policy with plans that are coordinated so that the contradictions do not arise. I support the development of such a policy and adherence to it. While the policy is being developed, the individual decisions I make as a Council Member will reflect our need to reduce sprawl and preserve our central city neighborhoods, because I believe we can find balanced solutions that achieve both these goals.

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?

Yes, an ongoing funding mechanism is needed to purchase more acreage in the Drinking Water Protection Zone to ensure adequate protection of the aquifer. I am not sure of the total price tag to buy sufficient land in the Drinking Water Protection Zone and would appreciate any additional information to help develop future policy alternatives.

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.**

A. The Water Treatment Plan #4 debate has raised serious questions as to what is driving the City policy in this area. We need to fully explore those questions to ensure that our future actions match our goals for this city. I fully support additional conservation measures and incentives to move our region toward sustainability, and believe that increasing treated wastewater utilization through effective gray water reuse is a key element of that. As we go forward with the plans for gray water towers around the city, we must be mindful of the need for compatibility with the surrounding neighborhoods and ensure open and productive community input as part of the planning.

B. I am certainly aware of the problem with peak oil projections and the need to reduce our carbon footprint. We cannot replace our reliance on oil with energy sources that increase our carbon footprint. The confluence of these events coupled with our unmanaged growth raises serious questions as to the sustainability of the Central Texas region.

Regarding both A and B: There is in fact a relationship between energy usage and water usage, since the Austin Water and Wastewater Utility is Austin Energy's largest user. Minimizing water usage reduces our power needs from AE. This must be considered as we measure the benefits of proposals for water conservation measures.

C. I fully support the concept of requiring a comprehensive analysis of impacts for a development, and I support creating a broader set of requirements for impact analysis so that the Council's and the community's evaluation is fully informed. For example, we should be evaluating the impact large developments have on our public schools. This would be one step toward improved collaboration between the School District and the City which is definitely in order.

D. Coordinating our annexation strategy with plans for future water, wastewater and electric service would be a major goal of a comprehensive growth management strategy which I fully support. The current lack of coordination is a glaring example of the fragmented state of planning in Austin today, and the City can and should move forward now with coordination.

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?

Yes, I oppose any further participation in the South Texas Nuclear Project, and nuclear power plants in the future. I do not support any additional coal-fired plants for Austin, as they are designed today. If future designs can be developed and proved that mitigate all negative environmental and other impacts, I would consider supporting them although I seriously doubt that could happen in the next 6 years. We need to buy from existing power plants and put energy conservation plans in place until such time as we figure out how to create a fully renewable future. I disagree with the recent Council action which allows Austin Energy to move forward on a new coal plant without voter approval. I am fully in support of a renewable future and I am looking forward to studies by Austin Energy, Solar Austin and others on how to achieve this goal.

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?

Experience has shown that we achieve the best results when neighborhood and other community stakeholders are involved early on in the development process. I will ensure that the new Neighborhood Ombudsman staff has the responsibility for facilitating early notice and good faith dialogue with all stakeholders.

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 running for Council to bring a community voice to the table, to find solutions that work best for all of Austin. I know that our community is an incredible resource for both expertise and passion for important values. In my role as a community leader I have relied on the community as a resource, and I will continue to rely on the community with a fundamental expectation that all perspectives need to participate in these important decisions.

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?*

The City cannot afford the continued budget escalation in the area of Public Safety. I will support a rigorous review of funding strategies in the upcoming contract negotiations and work to rebalance priorities, as they exist in the budget.

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 believe we need to address these disparities as a priority in our budget process. As a member of the Community Action Network (CAN) Community Council, I have learned a great deal about the disparities in our community. The organization is a tremendous resource for identifying critical issues that must be addressed if we are to get to the root causes of the disparities which disproportionately affect Austinites who are African-American and Latino. We need funds to address many of these root causes, and I will look to CAN for recommendations in our budgeting process.

The limit of funding is of course a barrier to success with this approach. I have begun study of the finances of the City over the past months, and intend to continue that study as a Council Member, because I believe that I as a Council Member must ensure that addressing these disparities and other community priorities are properly aligned with our expenditures.

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?

The City's official role in the Health Care District (HCD) is limited to appointing 4 board members (and making a joint appointment with the County to a 5th board position). The County appoints the other half and approves its budget and tax rate. Therefore, officially, the City is limited to ensuring we appoint Board members that recognize the struggle and are committed to careful oversight and appropriate spending of the HCD budget.

Beyond its official role, as leaders in the community, the Council should work to ensure that the HCD is taking advantage of all possible property tax exemptions, partner with the Tax Assessors Office to promote full use of the exemptions in our low and middle income neighborhoods, and work on the tools to abate the problem of gentrification (see answer to question 12).

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?

The number of new units generated by the bonds will vary depending on a number of factors including leveraging, land costs, market conditions, and land availability. Another important variable is whether the bonds will be used to rehabilitate existing units or will be used to build new units. Because of these it is very difficult to estimate the number of total units which will be built.

I support the allocation of the bonds to a range of affordable housing levels as outlined and presented to the voters who approved the bonds. This will result in

the bonds being used to develop housing units in a range of income levels: 30% MFI (50% of the bond funds), 31% MFI – 50% MFI (30% of the bond funds), and 51% MFI - 80% MFI (20% of the bond funds).

The City Council should support and monitor the Bond Oversight Committee in its charge to ensure appropriate use of the funds. To place more affordable housing in our community, the City Council should require firm financial analyses and comparative studies when re-reviewing fees-in-lieu amounts in the “Interim” affordable housing incentives, it should encourage stronger use of federal tax credits and better support from CoA departments for developers working on tax credit housing projects, and it should develop a timely plan for targeting existing housing for preservation.

The city also has several opportunities to provide affordable housing now that it must not squander, for example timely implementation of the Homestead Preservation act and achieving the goals for affordable housing as set for TODs.

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

Living wages are a key to making Austin a sustainable community. The State of Texas has banned city-level minimum wage laws so we must work with the community to find ways to promote a living wage scale. Specific policy changes to pursue include making a living wage scale a criterion in considering Conditional Use Permits, the City’s procurement process and in any incentives packages.

B) Putting Health and Human services at the same budget priority as Public Safety

I believe that the budget is a key to making the City succeed in fulfilling its goals, and as a Council Member I intend to focus attention on the budget to ensure that our allocation is aligned with our goals and to ask for necessary resources to achieve that alignment. And certainly through my involvement with the CAN Community Council as well as my training in public health, I am clear that that public health is a part of our security as a community along with public safety.

C) An economic development strategy that focuses on providing jobs first for current residents that are either unemployed or underemployed.

I support developing an analysis of previous economic development projects to understand the number of jobs that have been created and where the workers filling the jobs came from. I believe we must review our economic development strategies to ensure that they reflect the value the community places on addressing historical underemployed and unemployed communities.

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.

Austin independent businesses, collectively, are one of the top 5 employers in our city so it makes sound economic sense, in addition to promoting the vibrancy of Austin and improving peoples’ lives, for the City to support small, locally owned businesses.

Assistance in Operations: I would propose a small business ombudsman position, to provide assistance in complying with city regulations and to be a voice back to the City in identifying obstacles of a general nature.

Assistance w/Health Insurance: With passage of enabling legislation during the last session, development of a “Regional Health Coverage Program” is currently underway with plans to offer lower cost health insurance as a nonprofit to small businesses in the area. The City should continue its participation in the coalition that is working on this (the ICC). In addition, the City should examine options for expanded City support of this effort.

As a Council Member I intend to engage in dialogue with the local business community to develop additional ideas for support that the city administration can provide.

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 agree in principal that subsidies to retail projects do not make economic sense because we have seen that they result in moving economic activity from one part of an area to another instead of expanding the whole base. I do support the halting of subsidies for retail development as proposed in the initiative, with the understanding that either the Mueller project does not fall under the restrictions in the initiative or there is an action that the City Council can take that would exempt it from the restrictions in the initiative.

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?

The addition of high end companies can theoretically have a multiplier effect to create jobs in service and other sectors in Austin. However, the increase in tax base must cover the increased cost to the City in terms of infrastructure and City services for the company itself as well as the new people that come to the City as a result of the recruitment, so the equation can tip off balance.

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?

We need to ensure that our economic development strategies match our community's values, with emphasis on local recruitment for new hires, increased number of minority and women hired, and living or higher wage scales. We also need to analyze the impact of the recruitment efforts on our local businesses and labor force. These types of value-based measures should be reported with public presentation and discussion of the effectiveness of the development strategies on a regular basis.

In addition, our economic development strategies should be coordinated with the broader community vision for example to encourage development of renewable energy technology or eco-industry to support a zero waste program.

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?

The ongoing problems related to live entertainment and impacts of sound are in part a symptom of the redevelopment of the city. It is critical to resolve how we protect these two important facets of our community. My ideas include improving building standards, creating a fund to help retrofit the venues, study noise contours to limit future problems through building placement and design, fair enforcement, and improved dialogue between interested parties across the community.

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?

I believe I deserve the endorsement of Better Austin Today because my record in the community demonstrates that my values are aligned with the organization, that I have the leadership skills and capabilities necessary to bring positive results to the City, and that I am above all, committed to an inclusive, fair process to find solutions that reflect our community's values.

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 do commit to meeting regularly and consider it a necessary part of being a successful council member.

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.