



2020 Austin City Council Questionnaire - Candidates' Answers

District 2 Candidates

We only received responses from David Chincanchan and Vanessa Fuentes.

David Chincanchan

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

District 2 is a vibrant and resilient community, but has long been underserved and under-resourced. As a Council Member, I will push hard to correct longstanding disparities and provide improved services and access for our communities -- access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing, to frequent, reliable, and affordable public transit, and to quality education and economic opportunity.

My parents immigrated from Mexico to seek a better life for our family and laid down roots in Dove Springs, a working-class neighborhood in the heart of Southeast Austin. This is the community I have known and loved my entire life - long before it was called District 2 - and it is where I still live today. This is where I learned what is possible when folks take care of each other, feel a true sense of community, and are empowered.

Despite being historically underserved and underrepresented, this community has given me so much. Thanks to the sacrifices my parents made and the invaluable support of bilingual educators, library and rec center staff, and so many leaders in our community, I was able to realize my dream of attending the University of Texas at Austin and became the first person in my family to earn a college degree. Now, through my work in public service, I have the ability to give back and always strive to create more opportunities for the children and families in our community who continue to face enormous challenges.

Our community has faced decades of institutional neglect and though we've been incredibly fortunate to have leaders like Mayor Pro Tem Delia Garza fighting for us in recent years, we still have such a long way to go to make sure families in our community are afforded the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their potential. As a lifelong resident of District 2 myself, I know we deserve to have an effective representative who cares about our community and will fight to make sure we receive the investments that we deserve.

Throughout my life in public service and my work on campaigns, I have been most inspired by the individuals who are in it to do rather than to be. I admire leaders who recognize the meaning of public service and the enormous responsibility that comes with it, who put their heart into their work, and put the needs of others above their own. That is the example I strive to follow. If our goal is to empower this community and improve the lives of families who live here, then my deep and personal connection to the district, my extensive experience successfully moving forward progressive policy at City Hall and the ballot box, and the coalitions I have helped build over the years make me the person in this race best equipped to advocate for our community on day one and to do for the families in District 2.

The pandemic has laid bare some of the worst disparities in our community, including lack of access to quality healthcare in Southeast Austin. Pre-existing conditions like housing instability, food insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity allowed the pandemic to wreak havoc in our community, especially in our District 2 neighborhoods where so many of our neighbors serve as frontline workers and risk exposure to the virus with little choice, protection, or compensation. We must address these injustices and build real community resilience. In addition to addressing the most immediate public health challenges and the already very present threat of climate change - three of my top priority issues are:

Access to Safe, Healthy, and Affordable Housing. As our City continues to grow and the cost of living rises, our focus is on preserving and creating more affordable housing opportunities.

Access to Frequent, Reliable, and Affordable Public Transit. After housing and childcare, transportation is the next highest expense for families. Access to reliable public transportation that provides access to schools, employment centers, grocery stores, and health and childcare services is a matter of social justice.

Access to Quality Education and Economic Opportunity. As we take on the housing and transportation crisis, we must also work to provide more support and opportunities for working families in our community including access to higher education, quality childcare, career training programs, and job opportunities with living wages, good benefits, and worker protections.

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?

As we take on a comprehensive revision of our Land Development Code to address and mitigate the impacts of displacement, gentrification, sprawl, and flooding and to create more opportunities for the creation of transit-supportive, affordable housing, we should not exclude from consideration the review of zoning tools like Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs), Transit Oriented Development (TOD) areas, or other regulating plans. We should review all of these tools to measure the extent to which they support our ability to meet our housing needs and center equity - and not carry forward those that create more barriers into a new code.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI, and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

I fully support the Strategic Housing Blueprint and am committed to taking bold action to meet our housing goals and to create more missing middle and affordable housing opportunities for our communities.

The central focus of our campaign is building an Austin for All - a community where every family has the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential. As I discussed earlier, this involves access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing, to frequent, reliable, and affordable public transit, and to quality education and economic opportunity.

To make this a reality, I believe we must follow through on the Council's direction to prioritize all types of homes for all kinds of people, in all parts of town through complementary strategies of increased housing and housing types, especially along our corridors and in our activity centers, and bold public investments.

This includes implementing the Strategic Housing Blueprint's recommendations related to meeting housing supply and addressing rising housing costs, including implementing a citywide density bonus program, allowing more opportunities for missing middle housing and smaller homes on smaller lots, streamlining the permitting process to preserve and create affordable housing, aligning our Land Development Code with the city's Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, collaborating with employers on a housing fund to create workforce housing, incentivizing the production of living wage jobs, and constructing affordable housing on city-owned land.

4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?

Yes, I support Project Connect and if voters approve it, I am committed to fully funding and implementing it efficiently and effectively, prioritizing service to those who need it most. Transit and public transportation are matters of social justice and opportunity. After housing and childcare, transportation is one of the biggest expenses for families in our community. Affordable and reliable transit helps families access jobs, grocery stores, schools, and healthcare facilities, among many other amenities and services. That is why I have advocated and fought so hard for public transportation and transit infrastructure improvements throughout my life, especially in East and Southeast Austin where many of our families are transit dependent.

Project Connect will help move us in this direction, and will include significant funding for anti-displacement strategies along our key transit routes.

It is an ambitious plan, but one we badly need -- and that is why I support the proposed 8.75 cent tax increase. I understand that there are concerns regarding the funding mechanism and

the project's size, but I also know how imperative a successful Project Connect is for our community. Simply put, we cannot wait to make the bold investments needed to provide real mobility options for our residents, to truly address traffic, to foster climate change resilience, and to connect our city's communities. The longer we wait to make meaningful transit investments in Austin, the more costly they will become.

I will continue to campaign this year to pass a bond package that will provide historic transit investments and will continue to advocate for more transit resources and services for our Southeast Austin community.

5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?

Yes, I have a strong record of pushing for investments in active mobility and multi-modal public transportation improvements, including funding to implement each one of these plans. And I committed to continue working to build out a robust network of sidewalks, safe routes to school, protected bike lanes, urban trails, and other pedestrian and bike-friendly infrastructure. I believe in the principles of Vision Zero and will continue working to implement strategies that have been proven to improve safety.

Through my work at Council and on campaigns, I have consistently supported moving Austin forward in this direction. In 2016, I took a leave of absence from my job at City Hall to serve as the Deputy Campaign Manager and Political Director of the successful \$720 million mobility bond which helped secure \$37.5 million for sidewalks, \$27.5 million for Safe Routes to School, \$26 million for urban trails, \$20 million for bikeways, and \$15 million for Vision Zero - in addition to the \$482 million to make improvements to many of our city's major corridors.

I look forward to leading on mobility issues in Austin and pushing the city to make historic investments in our sidewalk, bike lane, and urban trails networks - as well as in a frequent, reliable, and accessible transit network that serves our communities.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

Our community in Southeast Austin has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. That's because, as a result of decades of institutional neglect, we have preexisting conditions like housing instability, food insecurity, and lack of access to healthcare that have exacerbated the worst effects of the pandemic. Many of our neighbors and family members are essential frontline workers who do not have essential protections on the frontline. Yet, they are being asked to risk their lives and health with little choice, compensation, or protection.

I'm running to do all I can to better the lives of working families in our community. And protecting our friends, families, and neighbors from the most immediate threats to our lives, health, and livelihood is our top priority.

Recently, I served as a Community Liaison in Travis County Constable George Morales' Precinct 4 Office, focusing on 2020 Census Outreach in hard-to-count communities and on providing and distributing food, protective equipment, and other resources to the families in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. This experience emphasized the severe and enormous impact COVID-19 has had on our communities, especially our communities of color.

I have called for adopting robust protections for working families, including:

- Guaranteeing emergency paid sick leave for part-time, temporary, tipped, and self-employed workers who are typically excluded from existing programs;
- Stabilizing our childcare centers, which are a critical resource for working families;
- Adopting stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure employers are adhering to public health rules; and
- Educating workers on the city's rules and on their rights under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and any future legislation that expands protections for households affected by COVID-19.

Furthermore, I strongly support and would work to expand the many relief initiatives Council has taken on, including:

- Establishing the RISE program which, through Mayor Pro Tem Garza's leadership, has served many families in District 2 that may not have qualified for other assistance;
- Adopting robust tenant protections like eviction moratoriums, utility assistance, and housing assistance;
- Crafting, with Council Member Casar's leadership, a comprehensive strategy to protect high-risk workers through telework options, increased unemployment insurance access, assistance funds for individuals denied access to existing social services, and a high-risk worker navigation center;
- Providing direct assistance for medical and household expenses; and
- Funding caregiver meals through Del Valle ISD.

Our working families deserve better than being put in a position to choose between financial stability and loved ones' health. We can, and must, allow working families to choose what is best for them and their family's health by adopting strong policies that expand our assistance programs, provide critical services, and educate and equip the public to take action to combat this threat.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

When designed well, planning processes can create opportunities for inclusive and robust engagement that provides an opportunity for all members of our community to participate in shaping our goals. I support inclusive participatory planning and value forums and mechanisms by which all residents - both renters and homeowners - can articulate their vision for our community. However, I recognize that many past planning processes in Austin, though well-intentioned, have failed to include all of our community's voices and overlooked many of our housing and equity needs.

In order to address this, Council needs to provide clear guidance regarding the outcomes we are seeking from these planning processes as well as establishing a clear expectation that the city actively seek out and include diverse voices to contribute to the process. We need to reduce barriers to participation so that residents who are most impacted by our housing and affordability crises are able to participate.. And the Council needs to implement processes that ensure our plans serve as living documents that grow and evolve with our city and with subsequent policy changes, rather than as static documents that do not account for our present realities or anticipate our future needs.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

Yes

Vanessa Fuentes

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

District 2 has one of the lowest socio-economic populations in the City of Austin. As this city gets more and more expensive, working-class Austinites are struggling to afford to stay in Austin. The Eastern part of District 2 is a food desert, with very few healthy food options, compounded by limited access to health services and limited access to high-speed internet. My community is nearly 30% uninsured and categorized as park deficient.

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified, or preserved as is, and why?

I support the creation of NCCDs or some form of historic preservation district in order to preserve Austin's historical black and brown neighborhoods. I'm open to a community conversation on what types of uses that entails. My community is vulnerable to displacement so we must be vigilant in holding these conversations.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

First of all, we need affordable housing and we need it all over Austin. People in District 2 are unhappy that so much affordable housing gets planned for our district. It is not because they don't want it next to their house. They are unhappy because these projects are often put in places that are not convenient for public transportation, and don't offer the services that more centralized locations would include.

We need to do a better job of ensuring projects that are built involve affordable housing. We need to look at all city, county, and school district land for possible construction of affordable housing. Adding a few units of somewhat more affordable housing to a development for only a certain amount of years, will not be good enough.

- 4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?**

I am supportive of Project Connect, though I wish there were more in it that will benefit the District 2 community. Austin is one of the largest cities in the nation with such an underbuilt mass transit system. We have to do something now to plan for the projected level of growth proactively.

I'd like a bus yard stationed south of the river, and will be actively advocating for it as it will help us ensure reliable and consistent bus service for South Austinites.

- 5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?**

Yes

- 6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?**

My budget priorities during COVID is to ensure more direct financial assistance to working families, regardless of status. Additionally, we need to invest more in public health. Nearly 30% of my community is uninsured so we need to do more to help families access critical health services. I'd also like to see more investment in mental health services.

- 7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?**

I like the idea of Small Area Neighborhood planning. The idea that neighborhoods have a say in the city's process is good and especially needed for neighborhoods vulnerable to displacement. I support planning processes that incorporate a focus on mitigating displacement, with on-going input and oversight by impacted residents. It is absolutely essential that we center the voices of residents who are at risk of displacement.

- 8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?**

Yes

District 4 Candidates

We only received responses from Councilmember Greg Casar and Louis C. Herrin, III.

Councilmember Greg Casar

- 1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?**

District 4 is home to the working people of Austin. It is the city's lowest income district, the most immigrant district, amongst the hardest hit by COVID-19, and it's the district with the most young children in the city. I believe that the success and the future of Austin should be judged

on the success and well-being of people in places like District 4. Our community is facing enormous pressures from rising costs while facing years of neglect and underinvestment. I've successfully advocated for millions of dollars in new parks, rail and rapid bus, sidewalks, affordable housing, free COVID testing, and better paying jobs for our residents. I'm committed to ending the years of neglect in North Central and North East Austin. I'm committed to raising the voices of people who are left out of the political process. I think we have begun to make important, but incremental, change in that direction-- but for us to be a truly inclusive and progressive city, we must make more transformational change.

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?

Our current land development code is exacerbating housing prices, is reducing housing options and making us more segregated, is worsening flooding, and is making us a more congested and polluted city. We need a new code, in addition to other major policy changes, to make our city better for our people. I have worked hard to build a consensus amongst a majority of Council members on how to get to a new code. This means working across Council districts and communities to 1) get everyone on board with major needed change 2) reach compromises as well that do not hinder the bigger picture. On NCCDs, I support the thoughtful solution Council passed on 2nd reading-- all areas, whether they have an NCCD or not, should allow for missing middle housing, accessory units and interior units, preservation bonuses, Affordability Unlocked and other affordable housing programs, parking and watershed protection reforms, etc. that are the critical reforms of the new Code for affordability and the environment.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

I've been fighting to make transformational change in housing policy in our city-- otherwise, primarily working class communities of color and immigrant communities like those in District 4 will eventually cease to exist. The City must reprioritize its investments to focus more on affordable housing. The City must change our rules to address our housing crisis, rather than exacerbating it.

I led the effort to get \$250M in affordable housing on the 2018 ballot, the largest low cost housing bond in Texas history and I helped get \$300M in anti-displacement dollars packaged into the Project Connect referendum this year, to ensure there is housing for people of all incomes along the transit lines. Combined, these two efforts will be transformative. It was only a few years ago that less than \$80M in affordable housing failed at the polls. Our organizing and advocacy in Austin has changed the political landscape in favor of affordable housing, and we must pass Prop A in November to keep up the momentum.

I sponsored and passed two of the 10-1 Council's most significant Code amendments: a) Granny flat reform (worked heavily on this with AURA) which got rid of lots of the rules that were

incentivizing the creation of a large new home as opposed to a granny flat behind an existing house and b) Affordability Unlocked, which will help create thousands of additional low-income homes, along with middle class homes, in our city that otherwise would never be built under current rules.

I support a new land development Code that allows for us to reach our housing goals-- and therefore stop exacerbating displacement, sprawl, long single-occupancy vehicle drives in traffic, and flooding. We need to create smaller and more affordable housing options, while including protections like the equity overlay and recently passed protections for mobile home residents in order to make sure any new Code recognizes historic inequity and helps slow gentrification.

We need to all work hard to pass Prop A and Prop B. Public transit and active transportation infrastructure will support housing and residents inside the City. Continued over-investment in highways that cut through our cities will create incentives to build more and more sprawl, which will push our residents further and further out of the city.

4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?

I support Prop A and Prop B, and I am dedicating a significant portion of my time and energy to getting these propositions passed. I believe that the construction of the transit lines can be an important jobs program for our community.

5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?

Yes, over my years on Council I have always supported adding active transportation investments to any voter-approved mobility bonds-- I was an advocate for these issues in the 2016 and 2018 elections. In the past month I co-sponsored the resolution to increase funding for active transportation and vision zero projects from the staff recommended \$250 million to \$460 million. This would keep us on track to fully implement the All Ages and Ability Bike Network.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

First we must prioritize saving lives. Many of the areas that were hit the hardest by COVID are in District 4. I'm focused on implementing our high-risk worker plan to keep essential workers safe. We have opened up free COVID testing in the district, and I'm committed to expanding testing opportunities further. I also will continue to champion the ban on evictions and to grow financial assistance for families and small businesses. I've led on the creation of the RENT program and the RISE program to provide immediate and significant relief to tens of thousands of Austin families most at risk of financial devastation this year.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

We must first pass a comprehensive revision of the land development code. After that, we should continue doing planning in our city, and such planning should ensure that

residents/businesses in specific areas are directly involved while not excluding anyone from the process. All planning should prioritize the common good of all Austinites, especially those who are marginalized or in most need.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

Yes

Louis C. Herrin III

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

Public safety - The crime rate is raising in Austin faster than the population, but this district current councilmember take pride that he help defunded the police. We need for more police, we need them to be more interactive with the communities they patrol. We need get the all the communities to trust and support our police force and not run away the police -

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?

My definition of a neighborhood conservation district (NCD) is a zoning tool used to preserve, revitalize, protect, and enhance significant older areas within a community beyond what is specified in the standard code. My understanding of the new land development code (LDC) main purpose is to get more living units in a define space and hell with what the neighborhood. I would support preserving NOD over the proposed LDC.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

I agree that we need to build more affordable houses unit within the city of Austin, my concern is what are these units going to look like in the next ten years and are they going to be livable. Some developers of these units will be cutting corner to save cost which in the long run going to cost the owners of these properties a lot in o/m cost. Also, what is the definition of affordable 20%, 30% of your monthly take home income.

4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?

I do not believe they will start any construction on any of highways or rail lines in the next to 5 to 10 years. Because they have not been design, they have not required the land, do not have any federal funds and have not done any environmental or economical studies on the proposed routes. Plus based on Austin history no major project have cost what they said it was going to cost. Based on what little information I know, I am willing to bet the projects are going to cost in the neighborhood 25 billion dollars and tax rate about 45+ cents per \$100, and we will have to supplement the rail line system about 100 million per year to cover their operational losses.

5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?

Yes, I believe the city should be funding the sidewalk, bike, and urban trail plans as long as we have extra money in the budget. The city need to make sure they have the funds to funds all of the essential programs like: police, fire, EMS, roads, utilities, heath care, parks, and housing. Vision Zero plan is not a plan but a goal, how do you stop someone from running across a Interstate Highway. Driving at home at night I see people crossing the interstate over by 183 and climbing over the new higher barricade instead of walking about two blocks to the underpass.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

Covid-19 is here to stay, it is not going away ever, I am not sure if we will a vaccine for it, because we are hearing reports of some getting it for a second time. That said it is a new world and we will have learn what are the best strategies to stop it from spreading. Any thing I say now would be like a Monday morning quarterback and it maybe total wrongs, we need to following the best information we have at any given time.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

If you ask about a small area plan that contains a set of specific strategies that aim to preserve and improve neighborhoods I am for it as long as is what the citizens of that neighborhood wants.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

No

District 6 Candidates

We are waiting on some responses from District 6 candidates, and will update this document when those have been received.

District 7 Candidates

We did not receive a questionnaire response from Councilmember Leslie Pool.

Morgan Witt

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

Affordability: One of my top priorities for addressing affordability in Austin is to overhaul the land use code - we must end apartment bans and allow for diverse and multi-unit housing development in Austin's central neighborhoods and beyond. We must further incentivize the

construction of higher density housing. We must invest more in Affordable Housing for low-income residents and permanent supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness.

Mobility: My top priority for mobility is extending our public transportation network across the city, especially in north and northeast Austin. We must also bolster the active transportation network at the same time - the two networks will complement each other. Above all, we must prioritize accessibility for people with disabilities. The goal with expanding our transit and active transportation networks is to create a comprehensive city-wide system that is easy, affordable and accessible to use in order to incentivize people, who are not already users, to actually use it - and make sure that those who rely on public transportation most (often our most vulnerable populations) have ample access.

Equity: This refers to the specific prioritization of investment in essential community services (healthcare and mental health services, education and enrichment programs, social work, libraries and parks, etc.), transforming the role of law enforcement in the community, and revising government systems, processes, and policies to eliminate systemic disparity/inequity.

But it also means creating equitable access to affordability and mobility, as well as other issues of importance to me, like environmental sustainability and civic engagement. It means being inclusive both in the development, decision-making, and implementation phases. It means being inclusive of all communities - especially those historically underrepresented - in all these processes.

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?

They should be dissolved. NCCDs are inherently inequitable, exclusionary, and even racist. A majority of the NCCDs cover neighborhoods that are predominantly white and affluent, and only cover a small portion of the city. Neighborhoods like Hyde Park, North Hyde Park, and North University as they exist today would be illegal. NCCDs make it difficult for desperately needed multi-unit housing to be built in close-in neighborhoods that have NCCDs. NCCDs make it difficult for more people to live in these beloved neighborhoods and prevents them from taking on their fair share of housing within Austin - housing is a benefit, not a burden. Additionally, NCCDs were created before Imagine Austin was adopted in 2012 - all of our policies and plans should be updated to align with Imagine Austin. Finally, NCCDs actually make staff's jobs harder since they have to keep track of two different rules of development in these neighborhoods.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint has specific housing goals for each district - District 7 has a housing goal of 6,651 affordable housing units. I'd like to improve incentives for developers to not just build Affordable Housing, but build more of it, and build it near public transportation

(this might include tax credits, subsidized city land in certain areas, faster permitting process). We could also partner with local non-profits and other community organizations to revitalize our neighborhoods. I know there are numerous strategies for meeting this goal, and look forward to learning about more possible, specific solutions.

In addition, we can address the blueprint's general goals by overhauling the land development code to rezone Austin's central neighborhoods, allow the building of multi-dwelling units, end the ban on apartments and allow them to be built in neighborhoods as well as on high traffic corridors, and streamline and simplify processes, so we can have more market-rate housing units. We can't focus on one, we have to focus on both Affordable and market-rate housing to fight our housing crisis.

4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?

I support Project Connect and the proposed tax increase. Austin desperately needs a comprehensive and efficient public transportation system to reduce the amount of traffic on our roadways, reduce our impact on air quality and the environment, and significantly lower transportation costs for many residents. The Project Connect Plan seems like a high quality plan that will serve our current and future population well - I appreciate that buses and anti-displacement measures are an integral component of the plan. I want to see a connection to Tech Ridge and investment in bus shelters, benches, trash cans, lighting, street trees, and accessible sidewalks to complement the light rail and bus systems. Public transportation is an essential public good that we need to invest in. I would do everything in my power, if elected, to ensure that construction and implementation of Project Connect rolls out quickly and efficiently, with the least amount of impact on citizens' lives and environmental quality.

5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?

100% yes. We should fully fund the Austin Bike Plan, Sidewalk Master Plan, and Urban Trails Master Plan. Accessibility is a priority. Any high quality-public transportation system will need accessible and complete sidewalks; protected cycling lanes; transit shelters; benches; and street trees to complement the entire system (network). Making it as comfortable, accessible, and comprehensive as possible for riders will incentivize residents to utilize public and active transportation systems. I would also like to look into other ways we can support people without cars - for example, greater rebates for electric bikes. Cap Metro has free transit for students, which has been an incredibly successful program. I'd love to see this expanded for low income residents. I'm eager to see what else we can do to support the project's success.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

If elected, I'll continue to provide substantial financial investment in rental and utility (including Internet) relief assistance, food access, and daycare to vulnerable communities so that if people have to miss work, they can still make ends meet. I'll also partner with community organizations

and leaders to ensure equitable distribution of funding to communities of color and other residents disproportionately impacted. I'd support continued investment in the RISE and RENT assistance programs to provide support to Austinites impacted by the pandemic. I would build and expand on existing partnerships with community organizations and leaders to promote community education and increased awareness about the pandemic and how to prevent the spread of disease. I would extend the eviction moratorium to protect renters from losing their homes for as long as needed. I would continue to provide access to self-quarantine locations for those who live in a household with multiple residents or those who are experiencing homelessness. I would also continue to equitably set up COVID-19 testing facilities, offer free testing, and distribute PPE specifically for essential workers and in communities of color to ensure easier access. I would continue to extend rental protections to local small businesses and music venues. Finally, I would also continue to support equity initiatives like the Black Live Fund, a proposal to divert 50% of the hotel occupancy tax specifically to Black musicians and Universal paid sick leave.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

Small Area/Neighborhood Plans provide some community benefits, but the entire process currently serves to perpetuate systemic inequities and exacerbate lack of affordable housing, and severely needs to be reformed. The City Auditor's Office did a report on the Neighborhood Planning program in 2016; the summary of that report indicated numerous problems with the process. It reports that while residents can engage in local planning efforts, most don't live in areas with a neighborhood plan and those that did had plans not aligned with the City's plan. On top of that, even fewer residents were involved in the public input process in part because contact teams weren't accessible. The result was a neighborhood planning process that is inequitable, lacks transparency, and may constitute a risk to fair housing choice. (2016 Audit of Neighborhood Planning)

If the City is to continue the neighborhood planning process, it needs to be more equitable. First, renters, which comprise the majority of the city, are woefully underrepresented in the neighborhood planning process and are given too little of a voice while homeowners are given too great of a voice. And of course renters tend to be communities of color and lower income residents than homeowners. Any future outreach needs to make a greater effort to involve renters, including going to apartment complexes and doing outreach there; and renters must make up at least half of all neighborhood contact teams.

I think it's also really important to point out here that this isn't a renters vs homeowners issue. We've been pitted against each other in this battle, given the impression that if one camp wins, the other loses. The reality is that exclusive land zoning and housing shortages impact everyone, and there are solutions that benefit everyone. We should be working together to develop and implement these solutions.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

Yes

District 10 Candidates

We only received responses from Councilmember Alison Alter and Pooja Sethi.

Councilmember Alison Alter

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

My district faces among the highest risk of wildfire, making wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts a key priority. Another key challenge is how to manage growth responsibly, given a variety of environmental challenges, infrastructure that was not built to sustain extensive growth, and some unique land use agreements governing development.

2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?

I don't support whole scale dissolution of NCCDs; we have multiple and they are all different from one another. I'm happy to examine each one and determine in a thoughtful manner what, if any, modifications need to be made to meet the goals of Imagine Austin.

3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?

I support making it easier to construct modest duplexes and ADUs that can create more affordable housing units. I support allowing residential uses in all commercial zones. I support increasing development rights on transit corridors and within Imagine Austin Growth Centers. I support creating missing middle zoning categories that we can then allow for new developments, zoning cases, or planning processes. I also believe the city should partner with the University of Texas at Austin and other area universities to provide dorm facilities for their students. UT, in particular, has failed to invest in living quarters for their students for a long time, contributing to our affordable housing crisis. Such investments could free up thousands of existing affordable units that then could be available to families.

4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?

The first step is to stand up the Austin Transit Partnership and appoint a stellar board. From there, I think CapMetro has laid out a clear investment sequence plan. The proposal balances the need to move forward on the more capital and construction intensive light rail lines with quicker changes related, for instance, to Metrorapid, customer tech systems, and transit supportive investments. Yes, I voted to put the tax revenue election (TRE) before the voters because I believe Project Connect represents an important investment in the future of our city.

5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?

Yes. I support full implementation of these plans.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

I've supported actions to prevent evictions of vulnerable renters as well as the RENT and RISE programs. This budget cycle I sponsored a budget rider that would expand our Austin Water discount programs to benefit far more multifamily renters who had previously been excluded from discounts due to metering infrastructure. I've championed investments in quality job training programs that train low-wage working adults for living wage jobs with a career path. In many instances these programs can help working Austinites earning poverty wage jobs transition into a job with a living wage with benefits. In our FY21 budget I sponsored increased investments in ambulances, medics, and EMS support staff to improve our medical response during COVID-19 and beyond. On my initiative, we increased community access to physician services by adding clinical capacity to the Office of the Medical Director and transitioning to a Chief Medical Officer model. I will continue to advocate for improved testing, data driven decisions, and tailored responses and supports for our most vulnerable populations.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

I believe inclusive and innovative planning processes are vital and important tools. We have not always done planning well, nor have we provided the necessary vision, resources or attention to bring our plans to fruition. Small Area Plans should continue to be part of our toolkit in creating a community-based process for planning for growth, new opportunities, and stability.

I answered no on the question below because I'm being asked whether I support reducing or eliminating parking but was given only the choice of yes or no when those two concepts are very different. While I do not support eliminating parking minimums in all new developments, under certain conditions, such as in a transit oriented development, I support reducing parking minimums.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

No

Pooja Sethi

1. What do you see as the top challenges and priorities unique to your district?

Street infrastructure to create safer streets. There have been a great deal of accidents on our roads in District 10, and we need to have sidewalks, speed bumps, and street lights to make our streets safer. This is a challenge in our district as well as one of my priorities.

- 2. What is your position on the Neighborhood Combining Conservation Districts (NCCDs) in the new Land Development Code? Should they be dissolved, modified or preserved as is, and why?**

The NCCDs are in districts with a higher amount of undeveloped land than in others. The NCCDs need to be modified to allow for more housing in those districts, as they are pushing out potential growth in other areas and forcing districts without NCCDs to pick up the density burden.

- 3. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for the creation of 60,000 units affordable to households making under 80% MFI and 75,000 units affordable to households making over 80% MFI over the next 10 years. What steps will you take to make that a reality?**

Making Austin more affordable is a priority for me. On City Council, I would support increasing housing density in collaboration with existing communities to make the city more affordable. Without an increase in housing options and housing overall, Austin won't be able to sustain its growth. A recent study by Move.org found that Austin is the least livable U.S. city for minimum-wage workers. I support the creation of an Anti-Displacement Office to ensure our city remains affordable and families are not getting pushed out of our city.

With this in mind, I would also support development options that provide affordability without displacing Austin families. I would push even further for units that are affordable to households making under 60% MFI. We need more multi-family and mixed-use housing with access to transportation to support our low and middle-income households. We need to move toward providing resources equitably across the city and make changes to the LDC that finally desegregate Austin and make our city affordable and accessible for everyone. As we reimagine transportation in Austin, we need to increase housing with the transportation plan in mind. A housing plan that aligns with transit helps address mobility barriers in many of our communities across Austin. Our housing plan should address and help reduce these barriers and utilizes our city's resources most efficiently.

- 4. As Project Connect rolls out, what is your vision to roll out the construction over the next few years? Are you in support of the 8.75 cent tax increase proposed to pay for it?**

I am supportive of us having an active transportation plan that we can all depend on and plan around. I support Project Connect because we need a public transportation system. As we reimagine transportation in Austin, we also need to support adding affordable housing around project connect transportation stops in Austin.

- 5. Do you believe we should fully fund and implement the Sidewalk Plan, Bike Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and Vision Zero plan?**

Yes, I am a strong advocate for safer streets in Austin. District 10 has a lot of streets that are unsafe, without any sidewalks or safe routes to our schools and parks. I support initiatives to make our streets safer. I also support initiatives that increase tree canopies on our streets and other methods to make our streets safer and more walkable.

6. With the Covid-19 Pandemic likely to continue spreading for the next year what is your strategy to help essential workers, renters, and vulnerable populations in Austin?

As a member of City Council, I would implement the following:

1. More testing sites across the city, especially in low-income neighborhoods
2. A plan to provide masks to all Austinites, as we enforce mask ordinances that are essential to flattening the curve
3. I support businesses that take measures towards providing emergency paid sick time, regardless of the employer size or type of work. Emergency paid sick time is important for the safety and health of our workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the gaps in our systems and inequities that our communities encounter due to inadequate protections
4. I would partner with local health providers to support and grow programs like MAP. I would look into creating a medical trust for communities affected by Covid 19 that helps them stay home and recover from their injuries. This support system allows for families to alleviate fear around food insecurity, medical costs for healthcare resulting from COVID-19, and also measures to keep other family members safe from infection
5. Our small businesses in Austin are closing at a high rate during this pandemic. We need to ensure that the health of our small businesses are also strong. The City of Austin grants for minority-owned businesses have a cap, while in other cities in Texas, there is no cap. This cap restricts our local business owners from receiving the money they need to stay open. I would advocate to remove small business grant caps to minority and women owned businesses. We need to develop long-term solutions to support businesses in our local communities.

7. What is your stance on Small Area/Neighborhood Plans?

I support community engagement in the land development process and hearing from people across Austin, before evaluating and coming up with a plan. Thus, as a vision for Austin, I would propose incorporating small area/ neighborhood plans into a land development code.

8. Do you support reducing or eliminating parking minimums in new developments?

No