

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for participating in this forum. We really appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions and engage with our community. Please answer the questions below, and return them to info@lovenorthaustin.com no later than September 1st. Please keep your answers to no more than 150 words. Again, we want to thank you for participating – and we look forward to seeing you at the Forum!

PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF

1. How long have you lived in District 7 and what neighborhood do you currently live in?

21 years, since my wife and I moved to Austin in 1993. We've lived in Allandale since 1995.

2. Are you a member of your neighborhood/homeowner's association? If so, for how long

Yes. While we have been members in the past, we renewed our membership this year.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT THE TOP THREE ISSUES THAT CONCERN YOU

3. What are the three most pressing issues facing the city of Austin?

Affordability, transportation, and water.

4. District 7 is divided by 183. What are the three most pressing issues for the neighborhoods and businesses above 183?

Affordability, transportation, and lack of city services. In particular the corridor between ACC Northridge, Kramer Lane Rail Station, the Domain, the Pickle Campus, and the Arboretum is in need of transit, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements to improve mobility throughout the corridor.

5. What are the three most pressing issues for the neighborhoods and businesses below 183?

Affordability, transportation, and redevelopment.

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Please Tell Us Where You Stand On District 7 Issues

6. Do you think CodeNext's re-write of our Land Development Code is addressing the needs of District 7 neighborhoods and businesses? Why or why not?

It is too soon to tell. The ten-point diagnosis provided by the consultants identified the top concerns with our existing land development code. The outline of the code to be delivered later this year will offer a better indication of the direction for CodeNext. The new Council and the public will have the opportunity to review the draft re-write, and that will provide the best opportunity to evaluate how the re-write may affect the needs of District 7 and what course corrections may need to be made.

7. Many city planners say communities need work, home, and third spaces (community centers, parks, etc). What do you see are the third space gaps for District 7 and how would you address them?

District 7 is in need of more parks and greenspaces. The City has not done a good job of preserving land for parks as it has grown, and we need to do what we can to build new parks. We also need to do more to ensure that new developments provide parks, plazas, and other public spaces for formal and informal gatherings.

8. Many Austinites are concerned about preserving livable neighborhoods, where families, children, and senior citizens are welcome. Do you see this as a priority for District 7, and if so, how would you address this?

This is a priority for District 7 and for Austin as a whole. We need to preserve the affordability of our neighborhoods and building new housing along transit corridors so that families may have a choice for how to make their daily trips and so that they might be able to get by with only one car, or even no car. We need to build housing to fill the missing middle – duplexes, four-plexes, townhomes, rowhouses, trihats, etc. – that can provide affordable housing while preserving the character of our neighborhoods. We also need to provide for housing so that seniors have options for remaining in their neighborhoods when they're ready to give up maintenance of a single-family home.

9. What do you see as the major public safety issues that need to be addressed in the district, and how would you address these?

The major public safety issues are property crimes that should be addressed through more vigorous community policing.

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10. What does 'affordability' mean to you? How would you work to achieve affordability as a City Council member?

Affordability means something different whether you are a young person looking for a place to rent, first-time homebuyers, homeowners who want to renovate, people looking to stay in their neighborhood when they downsize, or small businesses seeking to build-out their spaces. I would seek to improve affordability by creating a \$5,000 universal homestead exemption, reducing the cost and time for development through reform of the Land Development Code, and by seeking to provide for an abundant supply of housing in a variety of types. I would also institute a requirement for the disclosure of the sales price for commercial properties so that the Appraisal District will have solid, reliable information to work with. I would press the Legislature for broader appraisal reforms to provide for a more fair and equitable process, and I would press the City to be ready to file a suit next June regarding the appraisal of certain commercial properties.

11. What is the difference between affordability for renters, home owners, and small businesses? How would you address these differences?

I've discussed affordability for homeowners and small businesses in No. 10 above. Affordability for renters is a challenge that could best be addressed through increased supply. Our apartment occupancy rate is ~97%. We need to get the rate down closer to 90% if we are going to have rental affordability. Far too often, we've seen landlords but a fresh coat of paint and a new sign on aged apartments before raising rents. Increasing the supply of rental units will make it more difficult for landlords to raise rents.

12. One of the issues that has been raised in regards to affordability is the cost of utilities. What are three specific ways you would address this issue if you were on City Council?

I would seek to keep our water and energy rates low through prudent management of the utilities. I would seek to better balance Austin Energy's rates by reforming the governance structure to give the ratepayers outside of the City representation so that we could do away with the rate discount that they received as part of the 2013 rate case. For Austin Water, I would look to restructure the rates to both ensure that the rates support our conservation goals – so that the utility has a solid financial footing as people use less water – and to establish a more aggressive sliding scale so that large volume users are paying more while we are seeking to conserve.

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13. What do you see as the major transportation issues for District 7? Please include traffic congestion, public transit, and issues with the last gap.

The major transportation issues are travel from the District to Downtown and travel along Parmer Lane. The Project Connect North Corridor plan features numerous improvements for District 7, including extending MetroRapid 803 to Round Rock and the 801 to Pflugerville and establishing a new east-west MetroRapid route roughly along Parmer. Discussions are underway for improvements to 183 that may provide relief to Parmer. I've discussed the need for corridor improvements in No. 4 above. Sidewalk improvements are needed throughout the district, and particularly along Lamar north of Braker, to help close the gap for using transit. We need to continue to improve service and extend the hours for MetroRail. The recent grants from TxDOT and the federal government will provide some service improvements but more needs to be done. We need to develop a plan for relieving the congestion where MetroRail crosses North Lamar that we can take to the voters for approval in 2018, if we do not find funding before then.

14. Walkability and bicycle access are both challenges for District 7. What three specific ways would you address these challenges?

I discussed some of this in No. 4 above. In addition, bicycle improvements are underway as part of the Mopac project that will extend the Shoal Creek Bikeway north of 183 and improve connections across Mopac. Sidewalk improvements are badly needed along North Lamar. Some improvements were partially funded as part of the 2012 bonds, but more funding is needed. The City needs to work with Capital Metro to implement the MetroTrail improvements along the MetroRail line, particularly from Parmer to the Kramer Lane station.

15. Do you support the corridor plans that are being implemented for District 7? Please explain your answer.

Yes. Please see my responses to Nos 4 and 13 above. While I would prefer that the Mopac improvement project have HOV lanes instead of toll lanes, if it were HOV lanes, we'd still be looking for a way to fund it instead of building it today. Buses will also be able to use the new toll lanes along Mopac, and that should provide both service improvements for the buses and some relief for people who no longer have to sit behind the buses in traffic.

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16. In District 7, we have many infrastructure issues. What do you see as the major infrastructure issues for the district, and how would you address them?

Primarily, I am interested in hearing from the people of District 7 what they see are the major infrastructure issues. Transportation infrastructure is the largest challenge, roads, transit, bikeways, and sidewalk. I would seek to make short-term improvements that address the greatest needs while seeking long-term funding for further improvements. See also my answers above to Nos. 4 and 13-15.

17. If you were given 5 million dollars to spend on capital improvements in District 7, what specific capital improvement projects would you fund for District 7?

I would split the money between sidewalk and intersection improvements along North Lamar and improvements within the Burnet Gateway area as described in No. 4 above.

18. Many neighborhoods in District 7 are located on watershed and/or flood plains, and so face unique challenges. Please talk about these challenges, and how you would address them. Please make sure to include creek restoration, flood mitigation, and improvement of water quality.

District 7 is generally defined by the Shoal Creek and Walnut Creek watersheds. Many of our watersheds suffer from stormwater runoff from developments that have outdated stormwater controls, or even no controls. Reducing impervious cover and implementing modern stormwater controls and best practices will help reduce the volume of runoff and improve water quality. Creek bank stabilization and restoration can help to minimize further erosion.

19. There are some environmental issues that District 7 shares with the City of Austin, and there are some environmental issues that are unique to the district. Please discuss how you feel a City Council member from District 7 should address both sets of issues, and please tell us what are three specific ways you would address some of these environmental issues.

Water conservation and air quality are issues for Austin as a whole. As the Council Member for District 7, I will work with the rest of the Council to address environmental issues across the City and pay particular attention to how the City's environmental programs are carried out in District 7 and whether the District has any additional unaddressed environmental needs. I will stay engaged with the people of District 7 and look forward to hearing from them on unmet needs in North Austin.

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PLEASE TELL US WHERE YOU STAND ON SMALL BUSINESSES

20. Many candidates for District 7 have said they will be an advocate for our small businesses. Please discuss what issues you feel that small businesses in District 7 face, and three specific ways you would address these issues.

Small businesses face pressures from rising rents and difficulties with the City permitting and land development process. I support a policy in favor of giving local vendors preference in the City's contracts for goods and services. I would look at hiring a local business liaison so that local businesses would have a consistent voice in City Hall. In addition, as your Council Member, I plan to hold regular, weekly office hours at a location in North Austin, such as a library, so that business owners and other citizens will not have to go Downtown to meet with me.

PLEASE TELL US WHERE YOU STAND ON CITY-WIDE ISSUES

21. Austin has been in a drought for 7 years. How would you address the issue with our shrinking water supply?

We need to step up our conservation efforts, making the most advantage of the water that we have. I support the recent recommendations of the Water Resource Development Task Force. I also favor holding a discussion with all of our regional partners through the Capital Area Council of Governments on the best ways to manage our surface and groundwater resources.

22. We need a Council member who will work for all of Austin, not just our district. Please tell us about two specific neighborhood or local business issues in other districts that you would be committed to addressing.

- Improvements to the Y at Oak Hill have been hung up between TxDOT's insistence on an elevated freeway and the neighborhoods' preferred alternative of parkway-style improvements. We need to develop a consensus for moving forward, and we need to ensure that the final plan will not make flooding downstream along Williamson Creek any worse. I will be glad to work with the Council Member from District 8 and the Oak Hill neighborhoods to resolve this issue and hopefully to reach a solution similar to their parkway plan.
- Traffic congestion along 360 is severe. I will work with the Council Member from District 10, the neighborhoods along 360, and the City of Westlake to develop a plan for improving mobility and find funding to carry it out.

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23. Do you support the 1.38 billion dollar urban rail plan? Please explain your answer.

Yes. The proposed plan was developed under a plan with significant public involvement and has been designed to meet the criteria for federal funding. The Riverside portion of the proposed route scored the highest of all possible routes for ridership and in the public meetings. The northern portion of the route was one of the top three sub-corridors studied, and it will create a new north-south corridor through the east side of the Central City linking the convention center, Capitol, medical school, UT, County offices on Airport, and ACC Highland. It will also improve the operation of the existing MetroRail by allowing passengers to connect at a new station near 45th Street to take the urban rail directly to UT and the Capitol. It is our best option for adding high-capacity transit that can be increased and expanded to meet the demands of our growing city.

24. Do you support tax incentives to attract and retain businesses in Austin? Please explain your answer.

Tax incentives should only be used on a limited basis when the benefits of an incentive deal justify the foregone taxes and when the businesses agree to abide by Austin's policies for hiring local workers, working with MBEs and WBEs, living wages, domestic partner benefits, etc.

25. Do you support a land bank and/or rental registration to address the problems of Code compliance, public safety, and affordability in Austin? Please explain your answer.

I support a land bank as a way to provide for affordability by separating the cost of the land from the cost of housing. Rental registration would lead to higher rents, and we need to review further whether it might provide a means for providing for public safety and ensuring compliance with the City codes. In particular, I favor examining whether rental registration is appropriate for multifamily complexes so that we can avoid walkway collapses and other major threats to the safety and habitability of these complexes.

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