

District 8 Candidate - Rich DePalma

1. What ideas do you envision to reach significant progress with the goals identified in the Blueprint?

The process, engagement and expertise that went into the development of the Strategic Housing Blueprint is impressive and includes sound recommendations. The subsequent City Council Housing and Planning Committee Implementation Plan expands on that work to provide a valuable roadmap in accomplishing the goals of the Blueprint. In order to accomplish the goals of the Blueprint, the implementation plan should be further expanded to include the yearly goals that are tied to anticipated funding and expenditures. A public dashboard must be included that tracks the City's performance in meeting those metrics.

To accomplish the goal of the Blueprint, here are some priorities:

- Land Development Code - needs to be updated to provide the flexibility to leverage funding and partnerships. Our code should be agile, sustainable, and evolve to meet the needs of the community at present and for the future. It must provide for diversity in housing stock. This is a priority.
- Permitting - no surprise to anyone that our permitting process is expensive, cumbersome and inefficient. Upgrades to the AMANDA permitting system and temporary employees will only go so far but the process needs to be streamlined to reduce costs. I'm supportive of refreshing S.M.A.R.T. Housing to allow for rapid and efficient permitting.
- Public Land - the city owns properties where housing is needed (as evidence with the McKalla tract) but it had no known strategic plan on how to best leverage those properties to maximize affordable housing at different MFI goals. An RFI for all appropriate properties should be released to identify potential opportunities and considerations. After the RFI process, an RFP should be released taking all the information in mind. When possible, the city should coordinate with other public entities to identify opportunities for a larger vision or to help leverage the development for other municipal opportunities such as activating transit solutions.
- Leverage Affordable Housing for Holistic Solutions - final support transit oriented development and increased density along the corridors and near cultural and job centers. District 8 has the lowest amount of affordable housing in the city, and I would like to see this change to benefit our neighbors on fixed incomes or facing life changes such as divorce or death of a spouse. I also believe that we must update our land development code to solve the challenges of our present day and future, versus adhering to a code drafted when our population and sprawl were not facing the growth we see now. More types of housing will allow for varying incomes and affordability and I intend to do everything I can to create as many homes as possible

to invite more people to the beauty that is Southwest Austin while also being stewards of the environment and preserving the land that surrounds us.

- Funding - These developments can not be contingent on housing bonds, and must progress regardless if Proposition A (which I support) is passed this fall. In order to meet the financing challenges to develop so many units, we will need to leverage public private partnerships, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, HUD grants (202 for Senior housing) as well as any other tools that present themselves.

2. how do you suggest we enable the market to build more attainable housing for families and individuals currently priced out of our market, but earning more than 80% MFI?

The solution includes many of the suggestions above relating to a clear land development code, diversifying housing options, reducing costs for development and leveraging funding for affordable housing.

Other solutions include:

- i. Expanding the ability to use Tax Increment Financing for affordable housing to a possible 20% affordable housing TIF policy like San Antonio or Dallas.
- ii. Implement public-private partnerships leveraging combinations of municipal loans, public land, HUD CDBG funding, TIF and payment in-lieu fees, nonprofit funding, and other tax incentives relating to materials and workforce. The city should determine best value through a public RFP process and not through a first in, first out grant funding process.
- iii. Assessing tax abatement options through the Neighborhood Empowerment Zones.

Why 80% MFI is important - In SW Austin we have tremendous need for diverse housing types, and we are severely restricted as to where and how we can develop land. We need to encourage mixed-use redevelopment around the Oak Hill Y, 290, and Brodie Lane especially multi-family housing options for single parent families and seniors. A focus on seniors will meet the goals set forth in the 2016 Age Friendly Plan, which set forth strategies for Austin to become age-friendly with resources to support Austin's senior population.

With increasing life expectancy and changes of life such as divorce or passing of a spouse, we must ensure the ability for residents to age or remain in place to maintain qualities of life. It is important to allow our community to have their support network, access to their doctors and to stay in the community know.

3. How would you encourage large employers and private sector partners in Austin to contribute to the provision of affordable housing for their workers and the industries serving them?

Cost of living is rising faster than incomes for most people living in Austin. With a low unemployment rate, employers know that recruiting and retaining workers is a challenge. An increase in affordable housing and subsidies protects the majority of our population with housing security, increased labor needs and in turn economic development as a result of jobs and additional housing and residents gained.

The article above references the opportunity to “identify partners for the strategic acquisition and development of affordable properties, including underwriting, asset management, long-term preservation, and partnership management” of properties. These are legitimate resources that can be leveraged.

In my experience, there are four areas that need to be identified which can be used for workforce housing:

- i. What the employer is looking to accomplish (rezoning, additional height, transit, parking, etc...)?
- ii. What unanticipated needs will they have?
- iii. What additional benefits can they receive (smaller commute, fast response by employees, less absenteeism)?
- iv. How it can that be leveraged?
- v. Who will be their party operator?
- vi. What existing framework can be used to provide confidence that benefits will be achievable (this is what the city provides)? I think Austin’s Oracle is an okay example of this even though it does not meet the needs of its support staff and the amount of units are less than 300 for a 5,000 employee campus.

4. What city policies and roles can the city play to prevent formal and informal evictions among low income tenants?

Policies, roles, and programs that can be implemented to assist the challenges tenants experience are:

- i. Expand renters assistance program to meet the need of the market.
- ii. Focus on job training programs to job security
- iii. Address household costs such as affordable childcare
- iv. Enforce anti-discrimination laws
- v. Work with Texas Municipal League to address Texas laws that currently limit rent control policies.
- vi. Promote policies that increase housing stock and decrease construction and permitting costs in order to create an environment where tenants are coveted and not expendable.

These challenges are never ending and require constant data collection, review, collaboration and commitment to solutions for our challenges. We need to work

together with the community and health, non-profit, or social service organizations to solve the issues behind the systemic issues behind our affordability problems and housing insecurity in Austin that may not be housing related. The City Council's formation of advisory task forces on utility affordability and anti-displacement are great steps, but do not address all systemic issues. We should incentivize other public agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations to provide more wraparound services to address specific and systemic challenges of poverty such as healthcare lack of transportation, workforce training and employment.

5. When considering affordable housing to be supported by the City, whether financial or other support, what are the top 4 or 5 criteria you would use to rank order a project to deem it worthy of support?

- a) Affordable and Fiscally Responsible - Are we receiving the most for our money? Have we leveraged the investment to also assist with transit, public school enrollment or any other community need?
- b) Inclusive - Is it oriented to the current and future needs of our citizens or based on a historic, exclusionary plans and practices
- c) Equitable - Is there fair geographic distribution of housing that meets the needs of all Districts
- d) Accountability/Preservation/Maintenance/Efficiency - What is the cost to operate? Who will manage the property? How will tenants be protected?
- e) Environmental Stewardship - Is the building providing a healthy environment to the tenants inside the envelope and does the building protect the environment, specifically our water quality and urban canopy?