

2018 Austin City Council Candidates from District 1: Responses to Affordable Housing Questionnaire

1. The Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint calls for “new funding, new regulations, new programs, new and deeper partnerships and collaborations with non-profit organizations, legislative changes, land development code changes, and participation from the private sector” in order to meet the growing need. What ideas do you envision to reach significant progress with the goals identified in the Blueprint?

Natasha Harper Madison Passing the Affordable Housing bond would be a good start. We need to work with the affordable housing community to find the best ways to get the most deeply affordable units with the \$250 million allotted in the bond. Lots of ways to use that money to collaborate with nonprofits and the private sector with low income housing tax credits support or other mechanisms -- work with housing community to identify the best ones. Expanded and recalibrated affordable housing bonus programs (i.e. density bonuses) must be revised in such a way so as to better take advantage of all of the demand for housing at all MFI levels. What’s more, Council must revisit S.M.A.R.T. as it is not functioning as well as it once did.

Lewis Conway Jr —With the approval of the \$250 million housing bond by the Austin City Council, we have an opportunity to - create truly permanent, independent, and affordable housing but we must guarantee that people at the forefront of gentrification are taken care of. We can work together to create an Austin that people who work here can afford to live here.
 —I am calling for an equitable allocation of these bond funds. I am proposing that we institute a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust through the Housing Authority of the City of Austin in order to create permanent equitable, affordable housing in Austin. Federal housing rules have historically separated families of color by not allowing single males to be on federally subsidized housing projects. With very few single males qualifying for public housing, these policies have perpetuated systemic racism. Through the City of Austin we can write the rules to right these wrongs.
 —\$100 million of the housing bond was set aside for land purchasing and that bond money should be allocated into a land trust so people can have the ability to own not just their homes, but have ownership in their land. We must give the communities that have been historically displaced the right of first refusal. We should look at Colony Park to be converted to a Community Land Trust. With 208 acres, zoned as PUD, we have an opportunity to create something that no other city has been able to accomplish--Permanent, independent, and affordable housing.

Mariana Salazar	<p>To reach significant progress with the goals identified in the Blueprint I envision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting the \$250 million Affordable Housing Bond to go to the ballot in November. I support its four different components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Rental Housing Development Assistance (RHDA) Program, - The Acquisition & Development (A&D) Homeownership Program, - Land Acquisition for affordable housing development, and - Home Repair Program (allows people to stay in their homes and addresses their rising cost of housing). - Implementing the highest impact interventions highlighted in the Blueprint (e.g. expanding the use of community land trusts, developing a strike fund, undertaking strategic land banking, providing additional local appropriations to affordable housing, and streamlining City codes and permit processes). - Knowing that the bulk of new housing developments have been happening in East Austin, and East Austin already has more than its fair share of subsidized housing, we need to more equitably distribute multifamily development and affordable housing throughout all parts of the city - especially west of I-35.
Vincent Harding	<p>The market's goal is to make money. Thus, the market is not going to voluntarily build housing that is for 30% MFI or below because the return on investment is less. Thus, in order to provide the units at this price point, the City is going to have to help provide it.</p> <p>As an Officer in the Travis County Democratic Party, I helped pass the largest affordable housing bond in Austin's history. I support this year's affordable housing bond. The last bond received a 7 to 1 ratio; that would result in 2 billion dollars in funds this time. Funds should be used to build new units, conduct home repairs, buy land, and buy existing lower cost housing.</p>
Reedy M Spigner	<p>I agree with the recommendations of the blueprint. New funding, new regulations, new programs, new and deeper partnerships and collaborations with non-profit organizations, legislative changes, land development code changes, and participation from the private sector in order to increase supply are all necessary.</p> <p>Public/private collaboration and partnerships are necessary to fight displacement of legacy renters and homeowners whether from private, state or national funding. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has a program call The HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). HOME provides formula grants to States and localities that communities use - often in partnership with local nonprofit groups - to fund a wide range of activities including building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. HOME is the largest Federal block grant to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households.</p>
<p>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?</p>	

Natasha Harper Madison	<p>An answer that could probably be repeated with any question regarding Austin's affordability issues is that we must rewrite our land development code. We can no longer get by with a land development code that seemingly encourages that nothing get built for income earners who earn less than 150% of our regional MFI. We can achieve a more attainable housing market for those currently earning more than 80%MFI by ending exclusionary zoning and allowing the construction of more affordable housing types, like triplexes, fourplexes, and row homes in all parts of our city. Increasing the amount of housing units available in all neighborhoods can help make Austin more affordable.</p>
Lewis Conway Jr	<p>—In short, the most effective way for us to address inventory for families for individuals who are currently priced out, is with a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust. We began our campaign looking across the country at states and cities, that were using ideas that we thought would work well here. One of the ideas we found was a program used in Massachusetts, that sought to preserve communities the same way we conserve wilderness spaces. We have included a reference here.</p> <p>—What can a local housing trust do?</p> <p>A local housing trust allows municipalities to collect funds for affordable housing, segregate them out of the general municipal budget into a trust fund, and use the funds for local initiatives to create and preserve affordable housing. Examples of what a local affordable housing trust can do include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide financial support for the construction of affordable homes by private developers (non-profit or for-profit); • Rehabilitate existing homes to convert to affordable housing; • Increase affordability in new housing development projects; • Develop surplus municipal land or buildings; • Preserve properties faced with expiring affordability restrictions; • Create programs to assist low-and moderate-income homebuyers; • Create programs to help low-and moderate-income families make health and safety repairs; • Educate and advocate to further affordable housing initiatives.
Mariana Salazar	<p>Here are few ideas that come to mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Preserving existing (naturally occurring) affordable structures, as the cost for building new housing is significantly more expensive than the cost of existing housing. Options include providing home repair subsidies to maintain these structures. ● Initiating and promoting Neighborhood Empowerment Zones , giving a tax break to multi-family properties that provide affordable housing opportunities for families. ● Facilitating construction of more units by removing barriers like minimum lot size and parking requirements, removing or reducing height restrictions around single family developments along Imagine Austin corridors and having a more time-efficient review process to reduce the burden on construction due to delays or long review time.
Vincent Harding	<p>Supply and demand economics play an impact on the cost of housing. I want to see an increase in housing capacity and density on the corridors followed by missing middle housing options directly behind it, and a protection of neighborhoods. Land development code changes can help provide additional less expensive housing options and reduce some of the demand for the existing single-family housing options.</p>

Reedy M Spigner	The Council must demand more of developers and require each new development to offer solutions to the existing challenges of the subject area. The Council adopted a Strategic Housing Blueprint last year. As new and existing developers seek to obtain permits, the city must educate them on the blueprint and the city's goal and expectations regarding affordability, supply, transportation and all the pertinent issues facing the city. A good corporate partner would work toward the city's goals and create a win-win situation for the citizens, businesses and city government. Planning is key and these discussions should be concluded prior to issuance of permits for development not after. With the critical nature of Austin's problems, the council and neighborhood planning groups should provide clear lines for development of each neighborhood, subject to comprehensive city-wide concerns.
-----------------	--

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?

Natasha Harper Madison	As the employees of Austin's largest employers deal with many if not all of the same issues we do one of the best things we can do is better engage with them. There is no reason why large companies with employees at multiple income levels shouldn't be contributing to Keep Austin Affordable to help pass prop A, to HousingWorks to fund research on housing policies for Austin and with our area NPOs that work to build Big A Affordable housing. It is surprising how little we hear from some of Austin's leading industries and I'd like to see them be more engaged in working toward solutions.
------------------------	--

Lewis Conway Jr	<p>Our only concern is: Banks find themselves in a unique position to provide the residential mortgage financing resources, needed to assist communities and employers with employee assisted-housing programs. This of course allows for the continued discrimination against people of color. We believe there are several key elements of Employer Assisted Housing that we can leverage when advocating for affordable housing for their workers. We looked around the country to identify best practices and The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency caught our attention. Please check the link for a comprehensive look at the program, we will highlight a few of most exciting aspects for us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benefits to the Employee: Eligible employees can receive a Keystone Advantage Assistance Loan of up to \$8,000 for down payment and/or closing cost assistance in the form of an interest free loan amortized over 10 years. Employees must meet the eligibility requirements for the Advantage Program to qualify. Assistance under the Program is limited to the lesser of 4% or \$6,000 to non EAH borrowers. ● Benefits to the Employer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduced turnover costs Greater retention Attractive recruiting feature Controlled expense-set budget amount Community revitalization Eases tardiness and sick leave use Strengthens loyalty and morale ○ When it comes to encouraging large employers and private sector partners in Austin to contribute to the provision of affordable housing for their workers and the industries serving them; we have to establish the premise of where a person lives - can be pivotal. ● Issue - We believe the biggest priority, and concern, for business leaders in 2019 will be retaining employees in a competitive talent marketplace. A study by Future Workplace and Kronos, found that 87% of employers said that improving retention is a critical priority for their organization. Replacing an employee can cost as much as 150 percent of their annual salary in lost revenue from separation pay, replacement costs and reduced productivity. ● Solution - Employer-assisted housing programs help build employee loyalty and increase productivity through improved morale, an enhanced employee work/life balance, and decreased absenteeism. The unavailability of affordable housing can make it difficult for employers to attract quality employees. By offering housing benefits, employers are able to set themselves apart from their competitors, markedly improving their competitive position.
Mariana Salazar	<p>I support the Austin Strategic Blueprint recommendation that calls for the City to “partner with local employers to contribute to a revolving housing fund to help finance the construction and preservation of rental workforce housing. This model has proven successful in other high-cost areas, including in Silicon Valley.” I look forward to learning more about other options and advancing them.</p>
Vincent Harding	<p>The affordability component has a cost component and an income component. I want to encourage employers to pay their employees more so they have more options. Further, I would encourage employers to provide workforce housing and contribute to affordable housing projects in Central Texas to help possibly some of their workers and the public at large.</p>
Reedy M Spigner	<p>The Austin City Council should revise its economic incentive policy, expanding the incentives to employers and private partners who advocate for affordable initiatives that affect their workers like ride-share, carpool, public transportation, flex hours and telework. These incentives may enable these entities to expand their efforts.</p>

4.What city policies and roles can the city play to prevent formal and informal evictions among low income tenants?	
Natasha Harper Madison	A family that goes through an eviction feels pain that nobody can get over any time soon. This can paralyze a child's schooling and have negative effects on health and wellbeing. It is important that the city do all that it can to help organizations that help folks keep a roof over their head. It is also critical that we reform our housing policies and allow for more housing types for all income earners in our highest opportunity areas and start making better inroads on getting in front of a crisis in large part fueled by our lack of housing.
Lewis Conway Jr	Our position is simple: we should do everything possible to keep folks in their dwellings and pursue evictions as an absolute last discourse, and possibly one that is eliminated. The root of the issue is too few affordable units available, not the people. <u>Here are recommendations for best practices and policies:</u> 1. Affordable Housing is a human right. We will seek to house folks, by any means necessary. 2. Low-income renters are not always able to pay rent. We will establish the People's Housing And Tenant program to provide the necessary assistance through employment or housing assistance, before we pursue evictions. 3. Once housing is lost, low-income renters face significant barriers to accessing replacement housing. Our People's Plan for Affordable housing plan will provide permanently affordable, low-income and municipally subsidized housing. 4. Evictions can cause homelessness. We will pursue a 0% homelessness and a zero-tolerance for anti-homelessness legislation.
Mariana Salazar	To prevent formal and informal evictions among low income tenants, I would like to work with stakeholders, including the Austin Tenants Council, to develop better strategies to prevent evictions in the future. Initially, here are some ideas that come to my mind: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better understanding predictors of evictions and improving city-funded rental assistance programs based on data findings, to better serve tenants before they are evicted. ● Improving/expanding tenant education on lease requirements and successfully maintaining leases. ● Given most evictions are due to non-payment of rent, improving access to better paying jobs among low-income tenants through flexible and effective workforce development and skill-training programs. ● For landlords and property management companies already working with housing programs, getting them to let tenants get out of the lease more easily, so tenants don't get the eviction stamp on their credit, that hurts them when looking for their next housing options.
Vincent Harding	The City can increase emergency rental assistance programs for people that need help and try to prevent some evictions. Texas, unlike New York, cannot implement rent controls. Another thing the City can do is to help people obtain the training and education they need to potentially get a higher paying job. More money would help people have a greater chance of being able to pay their rent. One thing the City can do is provide additional protections for renters by providing information and education about their rights. Many renters are taken advantage of without knowing their rights, so increasing access to this information, whether online, or through existing city infrastructure like our cities libraries, renters can be on an even playing field with their landlords.

Reedy M Spigner	Low income tenants face difficulty with rent but also utility costs, transportation and housing. I support increasing the variety and duration of some debt forgiveness programs. However we need a comprehensive approach that moves people from into homes. That requires workforce development plans that will aid in increasing wages and ending the need for these programs.
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?	
Natasha Harper Madison	The number one thing I look to here is access to transit. Transportation costs are the second highest expense for our low income families and if we can provide them with safe, reliable transit within walking distance then suddenly we've empowered these individuals with options. The next thing is access to fresh foods. Far too many families in Austin don't have fresh food within a five minute drive, yet alone trying to walk there. When given the opportunity to decide where housing goes access to food should be high on the list of determining factors. Next, access to employment. Building in areas with little to no employment doesn't do a lot of favors for low income earners. Last thing I'll share here, knowing there are many other things that are important, the quality of schools. We have to be building our Big A housing units within reach of Austin's best public schools.
Lewis Conway Jr	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with community on redevelopment efforts 2. Environmental impact to vulnerable residents and communities 3. Leveraging City assets to deliver on policy objective (local workforce) 4. Developer / non-profit partnerships (community land trust) 5. •Create anchors that can increase value ... and enhance ability to achieve policy objectives
Mariana Salazar	<p>All housing, and especially affordable housing should be coupled with amenities, so our families can be part of communities where schools, transit, work, food, homes, and healthcare are all within reach . I would like to talk to stakeholders to have a better sense of the top criteria to rank affordable housing, but based on our current values and goals on, affordability, environmental stewardship and having a compact and connected city, I would support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing near current or future transit services, - Housing in proximity to quality child care centers or including on-site quality child care whenever appropriate. - Family-friendly housing, including housing with 3 or 4 bedroom units. - Housing that benefits both renters and homeowners. For housing that benefits renters, having housing affordable to residents at 30% of the Median Family Income (MFI) and 50% MFI.
Vincent Harding	One important factor is the tax impact on the land and how that would impact the city's income stream. Another important factor is how close is the affordable housing unit near mass transit stops because transportation is one of the largest drivers of unaffordability. Further, the energy efficiency of a potential development is important to be environmentally friendly. Moreover, the total number of people helped by a project and whether there is the opportunity for individuals to stay additional time if they succeed and exceed income guidelines and is not forced out the very next day.

Reedy M Spigner

1. Amount of affordable units,
2. The variety of affordable units
3. Will it increase the city's tax base
4. Will it help to attract new employers,