



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: David Chincanchan

Office Seeking: Austin City Council - District 2

Political Affiliation: Democrat

Candidate's Website: www.DavidForD2.com

Why are you running for this position?

I'm running to do all I can to better the lives of working families in our community and to help build an Austin for all - a community where every family, regardless of where we come, has the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their potential.

When my parents immigrated from Mexico to seek a better life for our family, they laid down roots in Dove Springs, a working-class neighborhood in the heart of Southeast Austin, long before it was called District 2. This is the community I have known and loved my entire life and it's 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. It's where I learned the values I still hold today.

Despite being historically underserved and underrepresented, our vibrant, resourceful, and resilient community has given me so much. Thanks to the sacrifices my parents made and the invaluable support of bilingual educators, library and recreation center staff, and so many other 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.

Since my time at UT, I have worked to give back to our community and to create opportunities for the children and families that are still struggling with some of the same, and even bigger, challenges that we faced. That is why I have dedicated my life to public service, including organizing for workers rights on the UT campus, serving families through the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program, performing Census Outreach in southeast Travis County, providing and distributing food, protective equipment, and other vital resources to our community during the pandemic, campaigning for progressive Democrats like US Representative Lloyd Doggett, and serving as Senior Policy Advisor and Chief of Staff to an Austin City Council Member. My work at the City of Austin has been focused on improving the quality of life of all Austinites by pushing forward progressive initiatives related to affordable housing, public transportation, worker rights, environmental protections, and more.

Our community has faced decades of institutional neglect and, though we have 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 our neighborhoods have the services and infrastructure we need. As

a lifelong resident of District 2 myself, I know we deserve an effective representative who understands and cares about our community and will fight to empower it.

What do you believe are the three most critical issues facing the City of Austin, and why?

In addition to taking urgent action to address our ongoing health crisis and working to protect and support the communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, our campaign is focused on building long term community resilience. Our goal is to build an Austin for All - a community where every family has the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential. To realize this vision, we are focusing on three key areas.

1. Access to Safe, Healthy, and Affordable Housing. Ensuring affordability is key to ensuring a stable economy in which all of our working families, local and small business owners, and all other residents can thrive. As a Council Member, I will work to increase our housing options and opportunities, prioritize high-impact city housing investments, and streamline our permitting services in order to help meet our city housing and affordability goals.
2. Access to Frequent, Reliable, and Affordable Public Transit. After housing and childcare, transportation is the next highest expense for Austin families. Investing in public transit and multi-modal mobility will both help provide more affordable mobility options for our families as well as help support our local economy by better connecting people to our local businesses and job centers. I am proud of my record as a strong and consistent supporter of mobility investments, including helping pass the largest single mobility bond in Austin's history in 2016 and strongly supporting the Project Connect and multi-modal bonds on the ballot this year.
3. Access to Quality Education and Economic Opportunity. As we take on the housing and transportation crises, 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.

If elected, what other items would you like to accomplish while in office?

Coronavirus is a direct threat to the lives and livelihoods of our residents, especially in Southeast Austin, where decades of institutional neglect have amplified the worst effects of the pandemic. I am running to do all I can to better the lives of working families in our community, and taking decisive action to protect our friends, families, and neighbors is my 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 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;

- 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;
- adopting robust tenant protections like eviction moratoriums, utility assistance, and housing assistance;
- Providing direct assistance for medical and household expenses; and
- Funding caregiver meals through Del Valle ISD.

I also believe we must go further, and have called for adopting robust protections for working families, including:

- Stabilizing our childcare centers, which are a critical resource for working families;
- Guaranteeing emergency paid sick leave for part-time, temporary, tipped, and self-employed workers who are typically excluded from existing programs;
- Adopting stronger enforcement mechanisms to ensure employers and employees 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.

My platform includes creating access to small capital for small business owners, investing in credit building opportunities, supporting small businesses and advancing opportunities to grow small businesses through community lending. I also support the creation of small business incubators on city-owned land that can serve as spaces where historically marginalized entrepreneurs can test and grow their businesses in a stable environment with technical assistance from the City of Austin and other experts. Providing these opportunities will be even more important as we begin focusing on recovery efforts.

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.

How would you describe your position as it relates to balancing the needs of new job creation and big development projects, with the big problems of traffic congestion, cost of living, and affordability?

Our vision for Austin is a city that works for everyone, in which every family has the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We have a lot of work to do in order to achieve that vision - but I have faith in the ability of our community to put our differences aside and work together to support each other and make real progress toward this goal.

Austin today is struggling with an affordability crisis with many facets. Housing is increasingly out of reach. Transportation costs are rising. In order to make the vision of an Austin for all a reality, we need to solve the many crises that make up our overall affordability crisis.

We must be good stewards of tax-payer dollars and recognize that our budget puts our values into action. We have limited resources to allocate to many different, important city services, and the way we decide to allocate those resources indicates our priorities as a community.

As a former Chief of Staff to Council Member Pio Renteria, I have worked on multiple city budgets, a depth of experience that will be invaluable when facing the difficult decisions that will accompany next year's budgeting process. These past processes have taught me that one of the most important skills to bring to budget deliberations is knowing where to look and which questions to ask to ensure we are optimizing the use of our limited resources.

In looking to balance next year's budget, I will focus on maintaining the city's ability to provide the essential services our community expects from its local government, including our public health and safety - as well as ensuring that we are continuing to support our most vulnerable families through services that are essential to their daily lives, such as childcare, food access, and more. I will pursue this through a data-driven approach that identifies our budget's highest-need services and highest-need communities and prioritizes those accordingly. And I will work to do this with robust community input by working to implement more participatory budget processes.

I support the Council's adopted Economic Development Policy and am committed to job creation. Our local and small businesses are critical to Austin's economy - and have been hit extremely hard by the pandemic. While the city originally designed the Economic Development Policy with broader goals of supporting equitable employment opportunities, workforce development, and small business expansion, among others, I believe it also has the potential to serve as a key tool in stabilizing our local economy and promoting a healthy recovery.

As Austin continues to face the pandemic, we must first ensure that we help stabilize our small and local businesses, and support the many working families that they employ. And, as we recover, we must prioritize rebuilding a strong economy in which every member of our community can achieve their full potential. This means continuing to support our strategies to incentivize hiring from targeted populations, help our local businesses grow and expand, and provide broader workforce development opportunities.

We must also focus on obtaining middle-income jobs for our working families. Austin is an attractive city for many new and expanding companies, which often offer well-paying jobs that require higher degrees and specializations and are unattainable for many members of our community or lower-paying jobs that do not provide enough for families to sustain themselves. That is why we must remain focused on city policies that can help us create more middle-income jobs that provide more opportunities for families in Southeast Austin and help keep our economy robust. Making meaningful investments in housing, transportation, and renewable energy - as well as supporting our small local businesses - can help us make real progress on this.

Do you believe that our Land Development Code needs to be updated?

Yes

If you answered "Yes" to question #13, what would you want to see updated in our land development code?

I support adopting a new Land Development Code, updating our Transit-Oriented Development plans, and implementing our Strategic Housing Blueprint.

Our housing shortage is a major factor that is increasing housing costs and driving displacement and gentrification. We need to take bold actions if we are going to deliver greater affordability and ensure longtime Austin families have the ability to stay in and return to their communities -- and I am prepared to do that by implementing our Strategic Housing Blueprint and by pushing for a new Land Development Code that meets the challenges Austin faces today.

The central focus of my campaign is building an Austin for All – a community where every family has the opportunity to pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential. Stable and affordable housing is critical to realizing this goal, which is why 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.”

We can make good on this direction both through well-designed land use policies that better deliver housing options for working and middle-income families, as well as through strategic city efforts to provide housing opportunities for our most vulnerable residents.

These strategies include: 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, pursuing strategic land acquisition and land banking, and constructing affordable housing on city-owned property.

Additionally, as we take on a comprehensive revision of our Land Development Code, we must review our other zoning tools, such as our Transit-Oriented Development districts. The regulating plans for our TODs still offer strong visions for transit-supportive growth. At the same time, the city adopted these TODs over a decade ago - so it is critical that we review each of our regulating plans to ensure that they are consistent with the policies we are putting forward through the new Land Development Code.

If you answered "No" to question #13, what do you like about our existing code?

One of RECA's top areas of focus has been to improve the overall permitting process to make it more predictable for everyone. Please indicate any specific policies you have worked on (or will work on) while in office related to improving efficiencies in the permitting process.

Inefficient city processes present barriers to our small businesses, raise the cost of housing, and make it difficult for our residents to perform even routine work on their homes - which is why I will push to streamline our permitting system to provide both better service and better outcomes.

Ideally, our permitting process should be designed to enforce our city rules in the most efficient and effective way possible. In practice, however, the city has built its permitting and review processes piecemeal over time, periodically adding new procedural layers and fees to meet its immediate needs and interpreting city code in ways that sometimes lack consistency. While each step may make sense individually, the outcome is a process that is complex and expensive. Simply put, our residents and small business owners should not have to hire other people and spend thousands of dollars in order to navigate what should be straightforward processes.

I believe that the city should look to several key strategies for addressing this. First, re-writing our Land Development Code offers a critical opportunity both for streamlining approval processes where appropriate as well as for providing clarity regarding code interpretations. Beyond that, I believe Council must review the 2019 'closeout' memo on the Zucker Report and determine areas for follow-up and ongoing improvement, as well as closely monitoring the implementation of permitting and review activities at the new Highland location for potential opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration. Finally, I will seek direct input from the people who interact regularly with these processes in order to determine the most effective ways to streamline them going forward.

What specific policies would you support to address our severe housing shortage and the rising cost to construct and produce housing?

I believe that housing is a human right and am committed to ensuring quality, affordable housing throughout our city. In order to do that I will fight to implement the recommendations in our Strategic Housing Blueprint, to adopt a more equitable Land Development Code, and to champion initiatives that further Fair Housing goals.

Austin is experiencing a housing and affordability crisis, with housing shortages driving displacement and gentrification. As a Council Member, I will help address this crisis by advocating for a new Land Development Code that encourages workforce housing and a greater diversity of housing types, especially along major corridors and in activity centers. I will also push for bold investments in affordable housing and for utilizing publicly-owned land to create more affordable housing, in order to better ensure housing access for families of all income levels.

As a Council Member, I would be committed to continuing to fight for real affordability in our community, including by working on:

- Adopting a new Land Development Code that provides for a diversity of housing types, especially along our major corridors and in our activity centers;
- Investing city resources in creating affordable housing, especially in high-opportunity areas;
- Strategically utilizing publicly-owned land to create more affordable housing in a diversity of housing types;
- Streamlining our residential permitting process

Additionally, I believe that 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.

What is your position on Project Connect?

I fully support Project Connect. 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. A robust transit network helps provide real mobility options for our residents, and in doing so better supports our local economy, as residents have improved access to local businesses and working families have improved access to job centers.

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. Beyond that, making an investment in transit like this can help us combat climate change and serve as an economic stimulus to create jobs at a critical time.

It is an ambitious plan, but one we badly need. Simply put, we cannot wait to make the bold investments needed to provide real mobility options for our residents, to truly address traffic, 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.

What other measures would you support to improve current and future mobility throughout our city?

Ensuring robust multi-modal mobility is key to improving affordability and livability, as well as to helping our residents connect to parks, schools, libraries, jobs, grocery stores, and many other services and amenities. Active mobility options are also critical in overcoming the "first and last mile" barriers that prevent many folks from accessing the transit network.

I am proud of my record as a strong and consistent champion in favor of building out our multi-modal infrastructure, both through my work as a Council staffer and on campaigns. In 2016, for instance, 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 \$101 million for regional mobility and the \$482 million to make improvements to many of our city's major corridors.

Voter-approved bonds are a key strategy for funding such major capital improvements and have the benefit of direct feedback from the community. They also allow us to leverage federal and state funds that would otherwise go to other regions.

Additionally, we have the opportunity to rethink the way the city handles the mobility improvements it requires of new development. In the past, the city has approached the way it manages new development with a largely car-centric mindset. However, if we are to truly deliver a well-designed multi-modal network, we must include a strong focus on building out vibrant streetscapes with wide sidewalks, street trees, and bike lanes - as well as on continuing to adopt Transportation Demand Management policies that encourage greater use of multi-modal alternatives.

Do you support the expansion and improvement of major roadways and highways in our region, such as IH-35, US 183, and 360?

Yes

I support maintaining and improving our major mobility infrastructure, though I do not support adding additional single-occupancy vehicle lanes to our highways. I also believe that the city must fully engage with the state on improvement projects, in order to help guide their implementation.

While the city has authority over many of our major corridors, the state ultimately maintains control of our highways -- which makes it critical for the city to be clear and targeted in its goals. We know that simply adding new lanes, in and of itself, is not a solution to traffic congestion and, through induced demand, may even generate additional traffic that could make things worse. However, if the state is intent on adding new lanes to our highways, the city should still engage in those processes to try to steer them more toward city goals, to the extent possible, such as by securing transit-dedicated spaces, supporting safe multimodal mobility in the surrounding areas, and pursuing any opportunities to bring the city closer to realizing the vision of sinking I-35 and connecting East and Central Austin.

Mobility is a top priority for many Austin residents, and it is critical that the city design its policies based on the most up-to-date transportation research and national best practices. We are fortunate to have professional staff within our departments who push to stay at the forefront of mobility policy - which makes it important that we engage on state-driven projects in order to help provide this expertise and steer the project toward city goals and values as much as possible.

How do you think RECA or the business community should play a productive role in our city?

RECA and the business community have the opportunity to play an active role in partnering with the city to help formulate and implement solutions to some of our greatest challenges, including our housing and transportation crises.

One of Austin's greatest strengths is our strong tradition of civic engagement and participation. We must recognize the expertise that our community brings to the table, especially on the issues that directly affect them.

As a former chief of staff at City Hall, I have extensive experience in convening our city staff to work with communities on common goals -- and am also very familiar with the bureaucratic issues that often stymie the city's ability to truly collaborate with the private sector. I will always work to engage directly with our expert communities to learn about their direct experience with the city, the challenges they face on a regular basis, and the potential solutions available to help us advance shared community priorities.

Lastly, I understand that while questions of city process and procedures may seem dry, they are some of the most important issues for many of our residents, and they have a direct impact on our residents' ability to do everything from remodeling their home to expanding their business. And if we are to truly run a responsive city government that works for all of our residents, we must elevate those residents' firsthand experiences and solve for the problems they are facing.