



## 2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

**Candidate:** Alison Alter

**Office Seeking:** Re-election District 10

**Political Affiliation:** Democrat

**Candidate's Website:** [www.alisonalter.com](http://www.alisonalter.com)

### **Why are you running for this position?**

In 2020 we face multiple crises - a pandemic, high unemployment, systemic racism, and a climate crisis. Yet, I believe Austin's best days are ahead of us. I am running for re-election because this is a time for leadership and proven experience. I believe we can turn the current crises into catalysts for solving problems that have challenged our community for too long. Since elected in 2016, I have asked the tough questions, done my homework, and focused on long term solutions. I have proven that I respond with compassion, civility, and real action and I have always been honest with my constituents. I have four years of experience on council, navigating contentious issues. I know how to listen and learn, and I know how to get things done. I am proud of my record working to make Austin a place where all can thrive and feel safe. I have advanced many important initiatives - investing in wildfire prevention, children and education, parks and trails, workforce development, and public safety reform. I've fought irresponsible development and championed neighborhoods and the environment. During COVID, I'll continue to focus on supporting local businesses, nonprofits, nursing homes, and childcare centers and putting Austinites to work through projects like the Austin Civilian Conservation Corps which will make our city more resilient and beautiful. In these challenging times, I believe District 10 shares my belief that city government should solve problems and create a climate in which all can thrive.

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

1) Effective COVID Response: My top priority is improving our public health response to COVID and stabilizing our economy. We must be guided by data and the advice of medical experts and protect our vulnerable populations that have been especially hard hit healthwise and economically. The City has an important role to play in economic recovery, training and re-investing in our workers to be economically resilient and prosperous. We must help create safe conditions for our children to return to school and childcare. 2) Resiliency and Sustainability: In the coming years Austin will continue to be buffeted by climate change and public health risks. I believe we can make ourselves more resilient while also promoting a shared and widely-distributed prosperity. We have many public infrastructure projects we could be investing in to make us more resilient to floods, wildfire, or pandemics and we should continue efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. We also can plant and preserve trees to enhance our

urban forest, improve access to parks and green spaces throughout our city, increase broadband access, and enhance our sustainability initiatives. We can do this while training and employing workers for good jobs with living wages and benefits that also contribute to making our city safer for all. 3) Reimagining Public Safety: The goal of reimagining public safety is to make Austin safer for everyone. We have an opportunity to make meaningful, real change by rethinking how we deliver public safety and shifting responsibilities to the professionals who are best suited to carry them out. Our work in the FY21 budget to reimagine public safety is just one recent next step. Since I joined the council I have prioritized rethinking how we “do” public safety in Austin and understood how expensive public safety choices constrain investments in other community priorities. When the public safety contracts were being re-negotiated in 2017 - 18, my staff attended every single negotiation meeting between the City negotiators and the public safety unions. To our knowledge, this had never been done before. We were able to make important changes to our contracts because we put in the hard work to understand the nuances, the tradeoffs, and the possibilities. In FY 22 these contracts will be up for renegotiation and we still have more work to do. Finally, I want to note that for me, reimagining public safety is not just about APD; it involves all entities in our city that contribute to the health and safety of Austin residents. We need to be looking for new ways to work with AFD and EMS to enhance public health for instance. We ought to invest more in public and community health, in children and after school programs, in parks and community facilities and other social service needs and view those as contributing to public safety.

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

I would like to build on my first term efforts to prevent wildfires and to help Austin to continue to act as a climate innovator. To do so we will need to continue our purchases of water quality lands and implement Water Forward (our integrated water resource management plan). We will need to electrify our transportation system and accelerate our efforts to shift to renewables affordably so we can achieve our net zero goals. We also will need to continue to plant more trees and invest in parks and trails throughout the city. I would like us to significantly improve access to the internet / broadband. This requires us to consider broadband access as critical infrastructure and to partner with the private sector to deliver it. I also would like to pursue investments and policies to compassionately help our homeless neighbors exit into housing and manage the health and safety of our public spaces.

**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?**

These issues are intersectional. I believe we must manage our growth in ways that are aligned with infrastructure investments and we must do so in ways that do not harm our environment. For example, much of District 10 contains watersheds like Bull Creek that are part of our Drinking Water Protection Zone which means we cannot simply allow unbridled development without negatively impacting our water quality; we are also at high wildfire risk and have steep slopes, cliffs, and other critical environmental features. For these and other reasons much of the district will also remain with limited transit options. I believe the balanced approach is to target density to places with transit capacity including our transit corridors and Imagine Austin Centers like downtown and the Domain; we can also create nodes of density at major intersections and should make it easier for people to build ADUs and

duplexes. By targeting our growth where we can pursue transit, we can also positively impact our traffic congestion challenges. That's the balance that I call common sense. Simplifying our permitting process, targeting increased housing capacity to Centers and transit corridors, allowing it to be easier to construct ADUs and duplexes, are all ways to help with housing affordability challenges. We have other challenges as well. I've championed investments in our workforce development programs to ensure we have a creative workforce to meet our economic needs. Increasing our supply of talented and skilled workers in tech, healthcare, and skilled trades like plumbing are all important investments in our economy that give people the tools to get good paying jobs and also reduce costs for employers and contractors. I believe we must address both of these elements, housing affordability and workforce development if we are going to create the type of broad-based prosperity that ensures long-term growth and economic stability.

**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 making it easier to construct accessory dwelling units and duplexes. I support adjusting our zoning to allow for increased development on major transit corridors and within existing Imagine Austin Centers. I support simplifying the code to make it easier for everyday Austinites to make additions and renovations to their home. To that end, I co-sponsored several resolutions related to making it easier to construct accessory dwelling units, increasing development rights within the North Burnet Gateway and simplifying the permitting process for homeowners (the Family Homestead Initiative).

**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.**

I've always championed the requests of our Development Services staff who have worked to increase staffing levels to reduce permit wait times and to create a one stop shop within the new Planning and Development Center. I advocated for the creation of small business and residential ombudspersons to make it easier for everyday Austinites to navigate the process. I've met with DSD staff on numerous occasions to probe them on why they have failed to meet certain audit targets and why their audits continue to demonstrate problems in their process. I believe our audits demonstrate significant shortcomings at the Department and the need for continued attention. We must make it easy to file plans online, and we need to streamline the process so that issues are identified more swiftly in the review process so that resolutions can be identified. While I do believe our LDC needs to be updated,

this is also a reason the draft was deeply flawed. We know that a big part of why our permitting process is frustrating, is due to complexity and contradictions. I believe we were writing a code on the fly and were going to create both bad outcomes and inconsistent expectations. I believe one of our most important goals in a code rewrite should be simplicity and usability.

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

I support: \* Creating pre-approved ADU plans to make it easier for their construction. \* Creating incentives and financing mechanisms for modest, small-scale ADUs. \* Making it easier to construct duplexes. In many instances the zoning is available but our process makes it harder than necessary. \* Creating zoning categories for missing middle housing that can be applied for in a zoning case. This would allow for additional housing units, but approval could be granted through zoning. We can also begin to map those categories through a small-area plan process or map them within Imagine Austin Growth Centers. \* Allowing residential uses in all commercial zones (except those with health hazards such as Industrial zoning). \* Allow increased development potential on major transit corridors. \* Reducing the complexity of the permitting process; much of our zoning today allows for increased development but the permitting process adds time and expense that can be reduced. \* Increasing the skilled trade workforce pipeline

**What is your position on Project Connect?**

I voted to place Project Connect on the ballot for voters to decide whether they want to invest in a comprehensive light rail and bus system. I think it is important to note that I was skeptical when we started discussing the plan 3 + years ago that I would be willing to vote to advance it to the voters. Now, I believe the plan has evolved to be more comprehensive and to be fiscally responsible in ways prior transit plans were not. I have worked hard to make sure that our funding mechanism covers operations and maintenance, not just capital, and to make sure that the independent local government corporation that will oversee the project will be a responsible steward. Ultimately, I saw my job as putting a reasonable choice before the voters that would lead to a comprehensive transit system. I believe the system if funded would reduce congestion, help us address climate change, provide mobility for many that need the transit option, and, in the context of a recession, create good jobs. I also am mindful of the high cost of doing nothing.

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

I think we need to continue successfully implementing the 2016 mobility bond and the 2018 transportation bond. We need to finalize our street impact fees so we can fund additional improvements. We need to electrify our transportation system and strive to build out our various active transportation and vision zero plans. We need to stay open to experimenting with new mobility technology.

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

Yes

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

RECA and the business community function as one of the key pillars of our local economy. They should be active participants in a mutually proactive relationship.