



RECA
REAL ESTATE COUNCIL
OF AUSTIN

2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Becky Bray

Office Sought: Travis County Commissioner, Pct. 3

Political Affiliation: Republican

Candidate's Website (if applicable): www.electbeckybray.com

Why are you running for this position?

Travis County, but more specifically this Precinct 3 Commissioner district, has been my home since I was a little girl. Unlike my opponent, who is technically a resident of the district but has spent most of her time in other parts of Austin and Travis County, I grew up here. And for the past 25 years as a professional transportation engineer (PE) and a transportation/land planner (AICP), I have had a front-row seat to observe both the benefits and challenges that have resulted from our dramatic growth and development. I'm running for commissioner in order to address the challenges and find real solutions that benefit everyone. People are moving to Travis County in droves because it's a wonderful place to live, start a business, and raise a family. But it won't stay that way for long if we do not start electing people to office who will stop playing political games and focus on the issues that really matter like affordability and congestion – and now the Covid crisis. I don't see this as a partisan office, and I certainly don't see this as a position that should be involved in the culture wars and partisan bickering that surrounds so much of our public discourse today. Instead I see this office as a place where common-sense people can come together to find common-sense solutions to a variety of issues with the ultimate goal of protecting the place that we love for the next generation.

What do you believe are the three most critical issues facing Travis County and why?

- Fiscal responsibility/affordability • Transportation/congestion • Infrastructure/Development
- Fiscal responsibility – Like any business, Travis County must balance its books and make the most of limited resources. We must be good stewards with the taxpayers' funds and provide health and safety services first, and then make sound decisions with any remaining funds. Transportation – The County must work with the various municipalities as well as local agencies (TxDOT, CAMPO, CTRMA) to ensure that roadways are properly maintained, that new roadways are built when and where needed, and any new construction is built to accommodate all safety vehicles. Infrastructure – As the County's population continues to increase, we must work together (municipalities and county) to ensure emergency response times are reduced. This includes the planning for future fire, EMS, and ESD stations, the review of new developments to ensure adequate flood control measures, and the maintaining of our preserve areas and open spaces to address wildfire concerns. Of particular importance to Precinct 3 is the ability to ensure that sufficient fire response times and support needs are met. With much of Precinct 3 being preserve/open land, there are numerous opportunities for wildfire breakouts. We must plan ahead and be in position to respond.

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

The pandemic has really given us all the opportunity to pause and take stock of where we are and where we want to go. We have a unique opportunity to innovate and revolutionize County government. I look forward to being part of these new solutions. We, as the County, need to look at ways to better manage and maintain our County infrastructure. This includes roadway and drainage needs, wildfire mitigation, emergency preparedness, water management. I also have firsthand knowledge of the challenges that are encountered with the development review process. I look forward to streamlining the review process. While providing transparency and adherence to the state statutes. I want to lead the way in making improvements in the ability to train, deploy and fund our public safety personnel and emergency services operations.

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?

On the surface, these are interrelated, and Central Texas is in the enviable position of having these challenges. There are other parts of our state and county that are stagnant or are declining. We need to encourage and embrace the creation of new jobs while at the same time recognizing the need for large and small development projects. I think one of the most important responsibilities of a County Commissioner is to balance local needs with regional needs. This includes working in collaboration with multiple jurisdictions. I have a proven track record of working across the aisle as well as up and down the funding spectrum – federal, state and local officials – to find funding for and plan for roadway and other infrastructure needs. I think our community needs to have a real conversation about affordability. What are the items that are making our community “unaffordable”? The two that are continually discussed are taxes and housing costs. There are several items that go into each of these and I believe these needs to be presented, reviewed and discussed with the community.

Do you believe that Title 30 (Travis County/City of Austin Subdivision Code for ETJ) needs to be updated?

Yes

If you answered "Yes" to question #13, what would you want to see updated in Title 30?

In my opinion there are several things that need to be improved within Title 30. First and foremost, the City of Austin and Travis County have theoretically chosen to have one joint office for permit review. However, this is not the case and both entities are reviewing the various plans in their own offices and providing their own comments. In addition, the City and the County have agreed that site plans are not subject to Title 30 and there is still a dual process with the City and County working independently to approve all site plans in the ETJ. I believe that Title 30 does not apply the “shot clock” appropriately. As I understand the legislation, the “shot clock” was added so that reviewing entities respond to applicants in a reasonable amount of time. Under current review operations, an applicant must have all other reviewing entities approve a plan before the County even will accept the plan for review; thus, the shot clock begins. But there are entities that will not provide their comments until the County has reviewed. This begins the cumbersome and circuitous review cycle that significantly delays applications as comments often are in conflict and many times nothing is being addressed; the very things that Title 30 was supposed to have corrected. I would like to re-establish stakeholder(s) groups to better

understand the issues and start the process to make the necessary changes to bring how Title 30 is operating into compliance with the State Statutes. Lastly, I would better understand why the City of Austin applies Title 30 to subdivision permits. If an applicant is looking at a commercial permit, they must go through separate processes at both the City and the County. My understand was that the State Statue should be applied to both commercial and subdivision permits.

If you answered "No" to question #13, what do you like about Title 30?

One of RECA's top areas of focus has been to improve the overall permitting process to make it more predictable for everyone. Please outline any specific policies you will work on while in office.

Part of this was addressed in questions #14 with the convening of stakeholder(s) groups to better understand the issues. I would also like to look at the current County review process. I understand some reviews are taking 6 to 9 months and longer, this is incredibly long and increases a developments carry costs that ultimately gets passed on to the buyer in the form of higher prices. If the County does not have the staff to review in a timely manner, then we should be looking at hiring outside consultants to review and provide comments on the County's behalf. As a traffic engineer, I have done this for several communities within Central Texas. I helped reduce both the review times as well as the costs passed onto developers.

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

My priorities would focus on reducing impediments such as review times and doubling of fees as well as speeding up/streamlining the review process. Development and housing costs will continue to rise unless the County figures out ways to work with developers.

What is your position on Project Connect?

Project Connect requires a significant, permanent, property tax increase that, I believe has not been fully vetted and/or explained to the public. During this pandemic I cannot support Project Connect. Considering the current economic climate, it is the height of irresponsibility to ask taxpayers for more money. After so many people have lost their jobs, and others are operating on drastically reduced incomes, how can we look our neighbors in the eye with a straight face and ask them for more? In addition, there is quite a bit of uncertainty surrounding what the future will look like as it pertains to both housing and work environment. Many companies have already announced plans for increased telecommuting, and others are not far behind. This could change the game entirely and it would be a shame to lock ourselves into a trajectory right now that may or may not actually address the needs of our community in the future. There also appears to be some significant misinformation being put forth by both the City of Austin as well as Capital Metro. Each of the presentations I have seen has shown that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will pay for 45% (or more) of the project's cost, but it is not a guarantee. Each of the proposed projects must go through the FTA review process and then they may or may not be awarded funding. If the FTA money is not awarded and/or the award amount is smaller than expected, how will the difference be made up? What are these tax implications? This has not yet been addressed by the City or Capital Metro.

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

Given current uncertainty, there have been many conversations surrounding mobility that involve “outside the box” thinking which is exciting to me given my background. While at first there was some hesitancy to expand telecommuting and other work-from-home opportunities, I think many people (myself included) have come to believe this type of work environment can be maintained in the long term. As a community, we should develop a variety of different options to allow for greater work flexibility. This is not a one-size-fits-all type of approach, but rather something that can and should be reviewed often to make work-life balance better and to lessen roadway congestion. One of the things this pandemic has shown us, is that we do have the ability to determine what the new normal looks like. We should not want to go back to the same old environment.

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?

Having been involved with RECA for many years and having been on the board, I have been involved with many of the conversations on RECA’s role in our City. Once elected, I would look to RECA to provide expertise on many of the development needs, issues and/or concerns facing our community. I cannot speak for interaction with City staff, but I would like to see RECA (and others) work with County staff and address the review and development problems that only seem to be getting worse. I think RECA can provide unparalleled expertise given the opportunity to truly have conversations on how to solve the problems.