



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Jimmy Flannigan

Office Seeking: Austin City Council, District 6

Political Affiliation: Democrat

Candidate's Website: www.jimmyflannigan.com

Why are you running for this position?

The last four years on the council have been an amazing experience serving the community, solving problems, and leading on issues during these most critical and unprecedented times. I am seeking re-election because the work is far from done. I've always been a politically active person, but decided to run for City Council for the first time in 2014 when Austin switched to the 10-1 system. As a resident of northwest Austin for 20 years, a small business owner, and former president of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce, I knew that the old establishment was failing our growing city and northwest Austin would need a strong advocate at the table. When I lost the 2014 election by less than 200 votes, I did not give up, ultimately defeating an anti-reform and ineffective incumbent to ensure a pragmatic and fiscally responsible voice represents District 6.

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

Mobility: Traffic and mobility have long been cited as the biggest concern in our corner of the city. I have led on new infrastructure and roads in D6, I support Project Connect, I serve on CAMPO and CAPCOG, and have led on regional transportation issues. We must continue to best leverage the state and federal transportation dollars managed by those organizations. Specifically in D6, I have worked on many road projects, pedestrian-safety enhancements, and shared-use infrastructure that have achieved specific neighborhood improvements. **Public Safety Reform:** As chair of the Public Safety Committee, I am helping to achieve pragmatic structural reform. Our initial work will fund mental health, permanent supportive housing, workforce development, and more. These first modest investments are part of the long-term strategy to ensure our emergency response departments are scaled to best match the issues facing the community. **Affordability:** I authored COVID relief for small biz, creatives, nonprofits, & childcare and helped them be ready to expand as more state & federal support becomes available, while ensuring that the city embraces equity as a guiding principle. Overall, Austin still faces extreme income inequality, and I have championed policy changes promoting affordable housing solutions, fiscally responsible budgeting, and efficient use of taxpayer funds.

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

In addition to continuing my leadership on pragmatic public safety reform, I plan to focus on real solutions for homelessness & our region's economic recovery post-pandemic. We all acknowledge that homelessness is a very complex issue without an overnight solution. However, the community must see measurable and visible progress and should be a priority for every council member moving forward. I am not waiting for 2021 to do that work either, convening council committee meetings in October to continue to focus on this critical work. With regard to economic recovery, regional collaboration will be key in addition to the work we can do as a city. As chair of the regional economic development board, I will continue to work across our 10-county area to leverage relationships and public dollars as best we can.

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?

Job creation and affordability are going to be integral issues in our post-pandemic recovery. I have been clear in my belief that growth in jobs and housing are critical components to reducing the burden on taxpayers, if with that growth comes a similar focus on the efficiency of government services. Hopefully with the adoption of Project Connect, we will have made a significant impact on traffic congestion but will require even more focus and renewed efforts on pragmatic government reform that helps reduce the rising cost of government in other areas.

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 was a leading voice on land development code reform, and while I didn't like every compromise made, it is unfortunate that it did not proceed. The City Council's goal when we set out was to build all types of housing in all parts of the city for all types of people at all income levels. The market in Austin for both residential and commercial is consistently much tighter than in other major cities driving up costs for everyone. Therefore, we must achieve broad reforms, both in terms of policy (TODs, mixed use, better bonus programs, etc.) and in process (streamlining reviews, variances, and site plans). The longer we force projects through a complicated process, the more we lose in opportunities for partnership for onsite or fee-in-lieu affordable housing or other community benefits.

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.

It's no secret that the permit process in Austin is very expensive, time-consuming, and often unpredictable. A bad permitting process only incentivizes bad actors to try and work around the system, especially for residential home improvement projects. The new PDC building should provide some help in streamlining internal processes, but the real culprits are more structural. We need code (and criteria manuals) reform to eliminate code confusion and conflicts, making permit requirements and inspections far more transparent and predictable (and likely cheaper). We need a cleaner expedited permit option for larger projects that actually matches requirements with the economic choice to use the option. We need to enable a tiered requirements process where issues beyond core health and safety do not shut down an entire project while still requiring compliance. I have even recently advocated for process advantages that can be accomplished through the potential contractor registration program. And I'm sure there is even more we can do, and I welcome the help of RECA in developing even better reforms.

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

We cannot deny the impacts of supply and demand. Many of the regulatory changes in the land code rewrite could have helped (changes in lot size, compatibility, unit restrictions, parking, etc.). Ultimately we make it too hard to build housing in this city. I have taken MANY hard votes trying to enable and support more housing, both market rate and with affordability restrictions.

What is your position on Project Connect?

I am fully supportive. Implementing the vision of Project Connect is critical to the mobility of our region. It is the high-capacity system that our city has so desperately needed for decades, and would provide legitimate transportation alternatives to just driving alone. The parts of Project Connect that improve the Red Line (increasing to 15min headways), improved commuter service with a new park and ride in the Four Points area, and providing rail service to the Airport are particularly valuable to my constituents in District 6. And a direct line between our growing airport and expanding convention center/hotel district will position us as not only regionally, but nationally competitive for visitor business. Perhaps most importantly, it would create an independent oversight body to manage the implementation using the most fiscally responsible and long-term sustainable funding source through a tax rate election.

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

As the council member who represents the district furthest from the central city and which straddles both Travis and Williamson Counties, I have been particularly focused – and leading – on regional transportation solutions in my roles on CAMPO, CAPCOG, and the Mobility Committee. It is critical that we work in partnership with CapMetro, regional bodies, as well as with the state and federal governments to leverage as many transportation dollars as we possibly can to create the high capacity

vision our community deserves. For Project Connect funding specifically, we are using long-term, sustainable funding sources that will ensure full operations, capital maintenance, and more, avoiding the pitfalls faced by other cities undergoing major transportation infrastructure projects. We must build transportation infrastructure with an increased focus on regional collaboration. We can and should expect more from CAMPO and the county, especially given the changes made in annexation law at the state level. In my district, I have advocated and funded new roadway projects in District 6, added new roads to the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, and implemented new sidewalks and pedestrian safety infrastructure to create a more walkable environment. I have also championed increased commuter service.

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?

As the former president of LGBT Chamber of Commerce, I continue to be a proud and vocal advocate for business community leaders and business organizations, as necessary partners to the work we do at City Hall. It's also fair to say that for many years those lines of communication have struggled to be heard beyond my office. I have appreciated the expertise from RECA and other members of the business community on the land development code, affordable housing, and economic sustainability and growth and this partnership will be particularly important in our post-pandemic recovery.