



RECA
REAL ESTATE COUNCIL
OF AUSTIN

2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Ann Howard

Office Sought: County Commissioner Precinct 3

Political Affiliation: Democratic Party

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

Why are you running for this position?

I am running to tackle the toughest issues we have — from wildfire to transportation to housing. I decided to run because Travis County deserves a leader who is an innovator, a fighter for solutions, and a proven champion of collaboration who can get stuff done. I often say: I am running to make Travis County a great place to grow up and grow old. That takes a long-term commitment to solve problems using data-driven methodology, thinking outside of the box, and recognizing problems — and solutions rarely exist in silos.

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

Today, western Travis County is growing faster than ever and facing new, large scale problems. Communities can no longer simply replay tired fights or rely on the same old ideas to confront our challenges. Our rapidly growing communities in Precinct 3 need safer roads and transportation options, a more secure water supply, and better wildfire protection. I believe these issues are critical—and connected. Each of these issues impacts each other and so much more. For instance, we must address transportation and transit in order to address labor shortages in western Travis County. We must contemplate the cost of transportation and transit projects in relation to other solutions like affordable housing. And we cannot succeed on any of this without cooperating with regional partners. Too often, local leadership views solving our problems as an either-or dichotomy. I will look for connections, build partnerships, and leverage budgets to meet our needs.

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

There are many other issues to address. I hope to play a leadership role in determining, at the state level, better ways to address wastewater discharge, land use, and flooding—and to use my advocacy skills to help expand Medicaid for more Texans - to name a few. Travis County's approximate 1000 square miles is significant to the state of Texas, in terms of government, higher education, transportation, integrated healthcare, entrepreneurial technologies, regional water resources, and the gateway to the Hill Country. I will build on this foundation by taking actions to promote and protect what we have and to use opportunities to ensure a greater number of people enjoy the robust Austin area economy that is certain to return.

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?

I'm convinced that even more people will want to live and work in the Austin area post-COVID as they prioritize quality of life. The best way to balance all mentioned above is to provide the most flexibility to enjoy the benefit of big developments and the jobs afforded while protecting what we love about our community. My vision is smarter development that considers the surrounding eco-system, and I'll use my office to help achieve this. I will look for any opportunity to work with the Statehouse to ensure that maximum flexibility is afforded to our community—as we take on a significant share (and sometimes burden) of the Texas economic boom. I will also hold partners accountable for the deals we agree upon.

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?

I don't hold a position on updating Title 30. Throughout the campaign, I have responded to questions where I don't have a strong opinion with a simple answer: I will seek the opinions and guidance of those most impacted and educated on the topic. In other words, I will keep an open door and mind to the expert opinions of those like the membership of RECA. I have a track record of convening government officials, business executives, and civic leaders to find solutions for housing, healthcare, social services, and law enforcement engagement for our community. I will do the same as County Commissioner. However, it's worth noting that as a candidate, the only Precinct 3 constituents who have reached out to me to help with issues all involve land use that is adversely impacting residential neighborhoods and water quality. Two are residents whose neighbors have cleared the land for cement batching type activity, and two have experienced detrimental runoff from recent nearby development. In all situations, neither the County, the City, or other agencies has adequately addressed the concerns.

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.

While I don't have a specific policy change, I recognize that there is an urgent need for timely responses, standardization, and predictability. Frankly, this is true for all processes in the County. For example, I hear that it can take months and even years to hear permit decisions back from the County. Customers deserve timely answers. We know time is money—and affordability is at stake. I read that recently the County launched a pilot to hire a 3rd party reviewer to handle some of the caseloads. I'll be eager to hear the pilot results and both policy and practice implications. My time as an executive at a non-profit, with significant interactions with the County, prepared (and motivated) me to address streamlining functionality throughout the system. I will ask our customers and our staff for a list of problems and suggested solutions – and then get to work with customers and staff to make improvements.

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

First, as mentioned above, let's improve any related county processes for maximum efficiencies. I advocated and campaigned with the organization called Housing Works to pass the Affordable Housing bonds in 2012, 2013, and 2018. Our campaign focused on the fact that "Our community needs the people who need affordable housing," and it featured first responders, teachers, and home healthcare workers. It also called for all types of housing in all parts of town so that people can live where they work and play and keep families together. I will continue to support public-private partnerships using allowable strategies (bonds, density bonuses, TODs, etc.) to build and preserve affordable housing. I also advocated for the 2016 Austin transportation/mobility bond that would improve corridors and emphasize housing along those corridors so people could have access to shopping, housing, and mobility. I will continue to advocate transportation and affordability solutions that help families and seniors reduce costs and access things they need and love. I'll look for county land that could be used strategically for affordable housing and be ready to help broker deals. I'll use my experience managing federal and state contracts to help draw down federal and state dollars, tax credits, grants, etc. to leverage local partnerships.

What is your position on Project Connect?

If the voters pass the City's transportation tax called Project Connect, I will advocate for my constituents' needs. Precinct 3 is a geographically diverse area—from downtown to Jonestown—with varying transit and transportation needs. I will balance those needs and pursue any benefit Project Connect may have for Precinct 3 communities. Personally, I'll vote for it.

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

The strongest measure I can employ will be to work with all communities' leaders to understand what is needed in individual communities and how those needs match up to regional approaches of transportation planning. We must identify common needs. It will take a good deal of work to bring people with competing ideas to the table. I'll volunteer for a seat at CAMPO and other regional planning bodies and immediately build relationships with other members. Travis County needs to mend fences, make friends, and win more projects. I can do that. I'll also hold regular conversations with jurisdiction leaders within Precinct 3 to work together with a stronger voice.

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 all the chambers should continue to focus on mobility and affordability. Share your executives and your experts so we can find solutions that we can afford. Compromise when necessary. Lead when it makes sense. Listen. The business community participated with the Housing Bonds, the Mobility bond, the Medical School, and the response to Covid-19. You supply volunteer leadership to the non-profit sector that cares for those suffering despite our strong economy. We can continue to improve on this collaboration and build a better region for all of us.