



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Leslie Pool

Office Seeking: Austin City Council, District 7

Political Affiliation: Democratic

Candidate's Website: www.lesliepoolcampaign.com

Why are you running for this position?

I'm running because, quite simply, the work is not yet done. In the five-plus years since I was sworn into office, I have worked diligently for my district residents and for the entire Austin community, and my mission-driven record of hard work won me election and reelection with substantial margins. And the work is not yet done. The issues we face today have never been so large or complex or immediate. From rewriting the City's Land Development Code, to passing and implementing historic ballot measures for transportation and housing, to approving a consequential new System Plan for bus and rail, to police brutality and civil protest, and all in the midst of a global pandemic that has sent everyone indoors and struck at the very roots of our worldwide economic systems. That's a lot of disruption and unrest to deal with, and the things I just mentioned are from just the last year and a half. It's no wonder people are anxious and searching for reassurance. So, there's a lot yet to do, and the learning curve is pretty much straight up and, given the complexities, it's more important than ever before to lean on knowledge and experience, and the demonstrations of a proven record. And knowing what I do about the resilience of this community, how we can lean on one another, I have a strong belief that we will make it through.

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

1. Economic resiliency (as we grapple with & emerge from the pandemic). Continuing to provide financial relief programs to those affected by the pandemic by building on all our COVID-19 work to date. 2. Environmental quality (e.g., land, water, air, solar). Resolution on Climate Resilience and Green New Deal. Flood and drought are a part of Austin's history; we have to be prepared for these extremes because we don't know when they'll hit us. 3. Systemic reform. Resolution on Community Resilience & FY21 Budget adoption. Reimagining and rebuilding policing is the first of what should be a series of deep-dive audits of our policies and procedures to identify and eliminate racism & discrimination.

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

As we continue managing our way through the pandemic, my continuing concerns center around ensuring the fiscal health of the City of Austin, and extending the partnerships the City has with the private sector and other governmental bodies in Travis county. If you'd asked me last year what the City of Austin could do to work more closely with other entities or what the FY22 or FY23 budgets would look like, my answer would be different. Today, though, as we continue watchfully to endure the strictures of COVID-19, I would say that we don't yet know what our economy will look like when we do emerge. Relationships will be different. The economic landscape will be different. How people work and interact and travel will be different. There will likely be an even greater reliance on computers and technology than there is today, and quite possibly fewer people working downtown. That adds to our civic responsibility, and it's going to be crucial to strengthen every partnership, and that will likely determine how quickly equilibrium is restored in Austin.

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?

My chief goal since I first ran for Council was to make sustainable and consistent improvements to the civic assets that Austin residents regularly tell us they prize the most: our parks, our trails, our libraries, and fresh air and clean water. We have indeed made good progress on these items. Intrinsic in these calls for access to quality civic assets is the expectation of safety and good health. These all combine to support a livable community, and that - above all - is what I hope to accomplish while in office: a livable community where all can pursue their unique dreams and thrive. The City of Austin has talked for a long time - decades! - about tying transit to housing concentrations. We have moved slowly, however, in implementing TODs. One is hovering on the edges of becoming real in District 7, however, and that is quite exciting. The city-owned parcel on Ryan Drive and adjacent to the Red Line rail will go out for bid before the end of this year. Depending on responses and financing of course, a new Transit-Oriented Development may break ground in the near future. The community developed a vision for that 5.5 acre site that is long on housing and parkland, with affordable rents high priority. Direct access to the train platform is part of the vision, too.

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 agree with most in Austin that the LDC should be updated, and I support doing it in alignment with Imagine Austin, the City's comprehensive plan. I support density and mixed use along corridors which provides more foot traffic, more small business opportunity, and overall increased commerce and space availability for retail, business and creatives. Transition areas that were discussed during CodeNEXT & LDC2 were exceedingly problematic and I did not support how the transition zones were mapped without residents' agreement. The adoption process was also being done in violation of Texas statutes,

as Judge Soifer ruled in March. I do think the issue has been unnecessarily divisive. I think any amendments to the LDC must have the support of the community. Property rights are paramount in Texas, and those rights extend to the uses and zoning of land that Austin residents own. Government should serve its residents, not the other way around. I support the City following state statutes with regard to notice and protest rights.

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.

As the Vice Chair of Audit & Finance, I have been working with the City Auditor to craft the audit plan for the next year, and my staff and I have identified several areas that need intensive review, including the City's AMANDA permit recordkeeping system. Used by over 11 departments as well as by the public, this outdated system is inefficient and burdensome, often causing undue delays and confusion for City employees, residents, and businesses alike. Improvements to, or replacement of this system, though it may be invisible to many out in the public, will go a long way to easing a time and cost burden of small business with our programs and permitting.

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

Municipalities in Texas have few real regulatory authorities with land development and zoning because the state legislature has not provided them. This lack of authorities has restrained cities from providing more affordability, even when the electorate demands it and policy makers agree. At its root is the statutory prohibition on inclusionary zoning. If the only way to ensure low rents is for the city to subsidize them, then taxes will continue to escalate even as the number of affordable units won't keep pace with demand. The Legislature should rethink these bans. Doing so truly would help cities accomplish the rational planning and land use regulation that assures livability and affordability.

What is your position on Project Connect?

I support Project Connect. Council recorded three separate votes on elements of the proposal: the system plan, the financing, and the governance structure. I voted yes on all three items, and also voted to put the proposition on the ballot for the community to have a voice, too. For infrastructure project of this size, carrying a significant fiscal burden into the future, I believe it's imperative to hand the final decision to the voters who, as taxpayers and residents of our community, bear the responsibility for paying for it.

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

If our planning and regulatory authorities were expanded, we could also finally move more quickly on designating more TODs. The Council put a \$300mm carve-out into the Project Connect proposal to monitor and address displacement that can happen along improved transit routes so we are poised to take action both to add to housing stock along transit lines and also to forestall the loss of lower-cost housing, thus providing some protections for those who otherwise are at risk of displacement. No one should lose her home as a result of Project Connect.

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

No

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

In addition to an expanded partnership mentioned above, I'd like to see us be stronger collaborators at the State Capitol. The Legislature has a history of treating Austin and Travis County differently than other cities, large and small, and it's time for that to change. I'd like to see us working together to amend the state government policies against affordable housing, for example. The sniping between the city and the state is counter-productive. I'd very much like to engage with your leadership and collaborate to those ends.