



RECA
REAL ESTATE COUNCIL
OF AUSTIN

2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Pooja Sethi

Office Seeking: Austin City Council District 10

Political Affiliation: Democrat

Candidate's Website: www.poojaforaustin.com

Why are you running for this position?

I am running for office because I have been working in the community, engaged at City Hall, and trying to make Austin better for years. Through this experience, I understand that real change for Austin comes from the dais. For me, running isn't about a single issue I disagree with, but about providing representation and a voice for the people of District 10. We have a lot of work to do to make Austin a cleaner, greener, better city. I am running because I know how city policies affect our daily lives. As our city continues to grow, I believe I can be a voice of unity, change, and action on the city council who brings people together to solve problems. My experience working in the community and in local government includes: Member of the City of Austin Climate Plan Steering Committee, 2nd-term as City of Austin Asian American Quality of Life Advisory Commissioner, member of the Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce Policy Committee, and an appointed member of the ACC Regional Advisory Committee. I previously served on the Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities, and the Office of Police Oversight. I founded nonprofits that support women and people experiencing domestic violence and volunteer with the Survive2Thrive Foundation. I also organized a community-based response to feed vulnerable communities during COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I am a Board Member on the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life, a supporter of Austin Community Foundation's Women's Fund, as well as a graduate of both the Leadership Austin Class of 2019 and the New Leaders Council Class of 2019.

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

1. Public Safety: Moving forward we must commit to bring community members, law enforcement, and advocates to the table as we reimagine public safety. I have developed a community center plan (available at poojaforaustin.com) that brings resources to the community to make our city safer and stronger, including emergency and mental health providers, property investigators, resources for women facing domestic violence, and services for those experiencing homelessness. I would advocate for implicit bias training and continued professional development among our law enforcement. These measures will move our public safety system closer to one that prioritizes prevention over punishment, and help to make our city safer and our law enforcement more effective. 2. Transportation: Austinites

need reliable, efficient, and affordable transit options. I support transportation plans that make our city more sustainable, our streets safer, and expand access to opportunities. I would support multi-modal transit plans that increase mobility for Austinites. Furthermore, expanded public transit and mobility options are essential to reduce traffic and make Austin a greener, more sustainable city. 3. Good Government: Local leadership needs to be accessible, transparent, and accountable. We should make council actions and agendas more accessible and prioritize citizen engagement. We should also continue to look forward as our city recovers from COVID-19, a crisis where local leadership and communication has proven essential. Part of being a strong leader in that regard is ensuring residents and businesses are aware of recovery opportunities along with ensuring we have plans in place for vaccine distribution. Continued engagement with Austinites about the issues our city faces should be a priority. I will hold town halls and seek community input and form a D-10 Neighborhood Advisory Council to ensure Austin City Council meets the needs of residents.

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

Making Austin affordable is a priority--our city is the least livable U.S. city for minimum-wage workers. On city council, I would support increasing affordable housing in collaboration with neighborhoods and AISD, increasing transit-oriented development with affordable housing, diverse building types, and ADUs that align with any transit plans that we approve. I would also work to simplify and ease the City of Austin permitting process for homeowners, business owners, and builders.

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 am a small business owner who understands that our small and large businesses are essential drivers of economic growth in Austin. In order to maintain affordability, I will be vigilant about keeping our tax rates down, by maintaining fiscal discipline for general spending of our city budget, while supporting policies that will drive long-term economic growth by supporting Project Connect, a new land development code, and public safety, to encourage businesses and workers to stay and grow in Austin. In addition, on large development projects, I would partner with our industry leaders and developers to encourage hiring local Austin residents and supporting local vendors in order to generate more jobs locally. When looking at future development it's important to balance the needs of the city as a whole with the neighborhoods in which there is development. Thus, I would increase incentives to developers to include affordable housing in large new developments. We should also encourage mixed-use developments like Mueller, that enable developers to minimize traffic by increasing services, such as childcare, within walking distance. Lastly, in addition to large transit investments like Project Connect, we should increase walking and biking infrastructure in new developments which can reduce traffic congestion.

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?

Austin needs more housing. We should have a development code that is clear and easy to use. I support density, where appropriate, including ADUs, mixed-use and multi-family housing to reduce sprawl. I support transit oriented density and any LDC we develop should prioritize it. We should have a housing plan that aligns with transit to address mobility barriers in many of our communities. Without an increase in housing options and housing overall, Austin won't be able to sustain its growth. I also support a land development code that seeks to increase housing units while improving water quality, decreasing flood risk, and maintaining green spaces. My vision for Austin is to create more compact mixed-use communities where people have access to their jobs, small businesses, arts venues, and homes.

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.

Austin's permitting process is lengthy and unduly burdensome. We need to simplify the process to make it more efficient and less costly for homeowners, developers, and business owners. Thus, we need to hire more city staff to help with the permitting process, work towards a more transparent process, and create accountability systems to ensure that the process is operating efficiently and timely. Furthermore, an updated land development code that is simpler and easy to read will help with the permitting process.

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

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What is your position on Project Connect?

While Project Connect does not greatly increase transit options in District 10, it will make Austin a greener, more sustainable city and decrease congestion. I support Project Connect because we need an active, dependable transportation system. Transportation is essential to make our city more equitable

and accessible. I would also advocate to include funding to improve District 10's streets to make them safer and add more sidewalks and street lights.

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

Over the next 10 to 20 years, I hope Austin will be able to implement a public transit plan like Prop A and Prop B, to increase our sidewalks, bike lanes, and urban trails. Each of these projects increases multi-modal transportation, reduces congestion, and will make Austin a cleaner, greener, and more accessible city. I also envision compact communities where people have access to businesses through multimodal transit options.

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 a small business owner myself, and a part of the Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce, I know that our businesses are the key to our city's prosperity. Thus, RECA and the businesses community should be a part of and consulted on policies passed to ensure we invest wisely and efficiently in transportation, public safety and our land development code. We need Austin to be a forward-looking city that brings the business community to the table to provide data, expert knowledge, and partnerships to help our city grow and thrive. To that end, it is imperative, as Austin businesses are closing due to the pandemic, that we work with our business community and RECA to create a bold economic resilience plan. This is a plan where we, as a city, would work with RECA and prioritize our city's small business grants; execute more city-wide outreach to inform local businesses about local, state, and federal loan programs; create partnerships with local businesses and larger companies to encourage buying local, and collaborate with local restaurants and arts programs to utilize city spaces for retail and performance spaces.