



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Robert Thomas

Office Seeking: District 10

Political Affiliation: Non-partisan race. Centrist independent, center/right leaning. Voting history is public record.

Candidate's Website: www.RobertATX.com

Why are you running for this position?

Are you better off now than you were four years ago? I am running for city council we, as a city, are now. The current City Council has lost our trust and demonstrated that they are more concerned with embroiling our city in national partisan issues than dealing with the city's core responsibilities to its residents. We need changes, and that change must be flexible to meet the needs of a city that has exceeded one million people. Those changes, though, cannot be beholden to special interests, cannot destroy the neighborhoods that have attracted so many people to our city, cannot jeopardize our public safety, cannot create public health care crises, and must not cause exploding property tax increases which drive our families from our homes. I moved to Austin in 1990 and I married into a long-time Austin family; I have owned, invested in and managed many Austin businesses through all of the booms and busts. Austin is my family's home, we love Austin, and we want to see it be the booming, vibrant, uniquely diverse, dynamic city that it has every potential to be.

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

- Homelessness - The current city council has failed Austinites on this issue, and made everyone less safe. I will work to reinstate the camping ban, sell the hotels to homeless service charities, and direct the city to partner with existing charities who already provide a safe, clean, centralized location that serves our homeless population's needs for mental health services, health care, addiction treatment, workforce training, and permanent housing solutions.
- Public Safety – First responders are a city's core responsibility to its residents. The City Council's knee-jerk, two-week vote on police funding made Austin measurably less safe. Police brutality cannot be accepted or tolerated, but defunding the police will not fix this. I will work with our police department and City Manager to implement systemic, meaningful and measurable change, and to recruit and train outstandingly qualified men and women who have the aptitude for community policing.
- Affordability and Transportation - Austin needs smart, reasonable and affordable multi-modal transportation solutions. Project Connect is not smart, reasonable, or affordable. The massive 25% property tax causes

gentrification of all Austinites. I will develop an affordable and sustainable multi-modal transportation plan, in conjunction with neighborhoods throughout Austin, because one size does not fit all.

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

Approve a reasonable, workable, affordability focused LDC that prioritizes Imagine Austin neighborhood focused overlay. Push for a full efficiency, effective and affordability focused permitting, inspection and enforcement processes and department. Long term actionable and budget-based utility and infrastructure improvement, upgrade action plan. An incremental, affordable and community targeted mass/public transit plan that does not rely on huge bonds or tax increases for financing - supporting TOD in an IA neighborhood sensitive way. Fully fund and reform public safety.

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 position is a pragmatic, reasonable and commonsense approach. That said, please all of the other issues addressed in Question 11, with discuss transportation, LDC, etc. all impacting affordability. As a former Workforce Commissioner, I know the economic perils for cities that do not have a strong, ready diversified workforce or a strong diversified business base to employ those workers. Austin's commitment should be to always move the needle forward in reasonable, pragmatic, consistent steps, executing against a long term detailed strategic plan with metric driven accountability for assessment and course correction, as necessary. The failure to have done this has resulted in the spiraling affordability and transportation crisis.

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?

Please see answer to Question #11 above. Further, Having a vibrant, living, balanced and straight forward LDC, that aligns with a healthy 50-100 year master plan, is the singularly most important thing we can do to address both the housing shortage and the rising cost of housing. A good LDC will create regulatory "simplicity" and predictability, reducing the time and expense for redevelopments, remodels, developments, etc., thus reducing the time to get diverse housing stock on the market. It would also reduce the friction between the various constituencies, as it would remove the code ambiguities and inconsistencies that many argue result in "gotcha" situations. As a Board Member of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, I have a keen understanding of the need to support, and encourage, policies that promote broad and diverse housing growth, development and redevelopment that in turn promote a COMPACT and a CONNECTED city. Within each of our compact and connected areas of the city and region, we need the appropriate mix of housing stock to meet the diverse socio-

economic realities of a healthy and growing city. In addition, I would support economic development policies that bring good/solid middle wage paying jobs to our area to help people afford more of our housing stock. I would also support training and retraining programs that allow our citizens to increase their wage earning capacity to compete for those better paying jobs. Yes. It was not perfect, but at least it was inclusive, allowed for neighborhoods and planning areas to have input, without jeopardizing the essential elements of the communities. Growth is good, and should be welcomed, and Imagine Austin was an effort to do so with an element of transparency and area level buy in.

If you answered "No" to question #13, what do you like about our existing code?

N/A

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.

Please see the answer to Question #11, above.

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

As a former board member of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, I have worked statewide on housing and affordability issues. Question #11 includes responses relevant to this question, and are incorporated herein. Please also see answer to Question #14.

What is your position on Project Connect?

Too much, too long and NOT part of a global, comprehensive strategic plan. Here is what I said in 2014, and it is still relevant today, and applicable to Project Connect: "I agree with ABoR's policy position on this issue: "If Austin is to remain a desirable place to live and do business, infrastructure improvements and investments in multi-modal transportation solutions should be our top priority." First, we must invest in roadway infrastructure growth, as well as public transit options. Second, we need to re- envision the existing delivery of public transportation options. I am not convinced that we are utilizing the existing options in the most cost effective, efficient or transparent manner. An audit of best practices should be done, much like John Sharp did as Comptroller for the State of Texas. Third, we need a comprehensive multi-modal transportation plan that correlates with the city's long-term development plan (Imagine Austin) and serves all areas of the city. Fourth, the region should consider a new regional transportation authority that replaces the patchwork of various entities that currently exist in order to streamline transportation development plans and to coordinate federal, state and local funding resources to solve regional traffic congestion. Finally, there must be patience, but with deliberative and thoughtful action. It took 50- 100 years to get to be one of the most congested cities in America. We will not get out of this mess overnight." Lets develop a plan of significant, but incremental steps, to show

proof of concept that don't require unfathomable sunk costs, and lets show the public that we can be responsible and positively impact their commuting experience in order to better understand what really does work, and that the city /region can be trusted as fiscally responsible and pragmatic, affordable solutions oriented.

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

In addition to the answer to Question 19, above, I would continue to advocate for using existing approved transportation bonding capacity to build out park and rides in key locations throughout District 10, and the city. The investment would be in a fleet of smaller high frequency shuttle bus type services that have frequent and consistent stops throughout neighbors and connect with increasingly larger nodes with larger buses (Using the dedicated lanes we have already paid for and built) to quickly, efficiently, conveniently and affordably move people across the city. It does not take \$7.6 billion and a irreversible 25% property tax increase to change how we manage and administer our existing public transportation system.

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?

I have been hugely frustrated that the business community has sat on its collective thumbs and been afraid of various mayors and city council. This is one of the few cities where the economic engine continues to capitulate to partisanship and politics. The business community has a major role and function in ensuring good, commonsense and pragmatic leadership. San Antonio's business community is a prime example of how the business community can demand reasonableness, pragmatic solutions and be willing to hold elected officials accountable for executing against a reasonable budget, and metric driven action plan. This has been a huge knock on the Chamber, RECA, DAA, and others for far too long.