



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Jennifer Virden

Office Seeking: District 10

Political Affiliation: Non-Partisan

Candidate's Website: www.JenniferForAustin.com

Why are you running for this position?

The mismanagement by our City Council has become so flagrant that it was impossible for me to stand by any longer. I've always been politically inclined and have thought for years that I could do this job better than the incumbent. What I will bring to the District 10 seat, and the Council in general, is my budget-based, common sense voice with the goal to foster teamwork across the dais to enact policy that will truly improve our city. As elected officials who profess to champion affordability in Austin, it is incumbent upon each Council member to strive to reduce the tax burden on Austinites, and STOP proposing obscenely expensive projects that haven't been properly vetted. I have a record of having voted in almost every general election since the year I became eligible to vote, unlike most of my opponents. I have been closely following the issues and I'm anxious to get to work on correcting Austin's current trajectory.

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

1. Opposed to "De-Funding the Police" – I support ALL first responders, including APD, AFD, and EMS. 2. Homeless Population Crisis - REINSTATE the Camping Ban, Cleanup & REAL Solutions. 3. DEFEAT the \$7.1 BILLION "Project Connect" – an UNCONSCIONABLE 25% City property tax increase NOW (and in perpetuity) – and for 10 YEARS – before it'll carry its first passenger. 80% of that \$7.1 BILLION won't service even 1% of our (pre-pandemic) projected mobility needs. Further, fixed-rail is antiquated technology, which has already been proven in at least 10 major US cities to be a complete failure.

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

I would pursue reinstating the canceled APD cadet classes and restoring APD funding. I would also pursue solutions to the frustrating difficulties that homeowners and builders are having navigating the building permitting/review processes (i.e., different city departments frequently issue contradictory comments in the review process, inspectors don't interpret building code consistently, ever-increasing fees, etc.). Regarding COVID, we need to open up the economy as soon as possible to give our

businesses a chance to survive this pandemic, and entrust Austinites to be responsible for their own health safety. We now know a lot more than we did back in Q1 2020 about the actual transmissibility of, risks of, and effective medical treatments for COVID.

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?

Let the free market work without government meddling. We are fortunate to have an abundance of experienced and creative developers in this city, but their hands stay tied by the rigidity of the LDC and our incredibly cumbersome review process. There needs to be a process through which builders and developers can request variances that senior staff are empowered by Council to grant. Further, in regard to improving affordability, increased fees assessed to builders by the City don't just "get absorbed by the builders" - those fees are directly passed on to the consumer, negatively affecting affordability. Further, it is irresponsible for Council to preach about "affordability" but then propose projects like a \$7.1 BILLION (no federal funds are guaranteed) antiquated fixed-rail "Project Connect" that will increase each of our City property taxes by an unconscionable 25% and only serve 1% of our (pre-pandemic) regional mobility needs. Renters - residential and commercial - need to understand that their rent will immediately go up by exactly that or more, because landlords do not "just absorb" increased expenses. Simply put: every time Council votes to increase taxes for any reason, it decreases affordability for everyone, and it's bad for business. Therefore, I will not support tax increases.

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?

The LDC needs to be SIMPLIFIED, so that the permitting and review process are more consistent, efficient, and less costly.

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.

I'm a native Austinite, and I'm a lifelong resident of what is now our District 10. My dad was a commercial and residential builder, and I grew up on his job sites - before the internet/cell

phones/answering machines/fax machines, working on those job sites before there was such thing as OSHA, eating lunch in the job shacks, and blowing construction dust out of my brain at the end of every day. I myself have been an independent real estate broker for about 30 years and builder/remodeler for about 15 years. I am the only District 10 candidate who has real estate and building experience. I have spent many days down at the permit office experiencing so many of the inefficiencies. I've been baffled by inspectors (to put it lightly). I understand the frustrations and inefficiencies when it comes to building in Austin. I would actively pursue solutions to the frustrating difficulties that homeowners and builders are having navigating the building permitting/review processes (i.e., different city departments frequently issue contradictory comments in the review process, inspectors don't interpret building code consistently, ever-increasing fees, etc.).

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

I'm a believer in letting supply and demand drive the market. There is data to support the position that we do have adequate housing currently available and being built in the Austin MSA. Similarly, supply and demand drive the cost of building materials and labor. Austin is an envious place to relocate to at present, so prices are rising. We should be thankful.

What is your position on Project Connect?

It is irresponsible for council to preach about "affordability," but then propose projects like a \$7.1 BILLION (no federal funds are guaranteed) antiquated fixed-rail "Project Connect" that will increase each of our City property taxes by an unconscionable 25% and only serve 1% of our regional (pre-pandemic) mobility needs.

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

In 2016, Austin voters approved \$720 million in mobility bonds for transportation and mobility improvements. Since we're already committed to that, let's complete implementing the mobility projects that were promised in that package, including improvements to roads, bike lanes, and sidewalks. Let's hit the pause button on committing anymore tax dollars on any projects besides maintaining the roads we already have. We need to wait and see what permanent changes in our mobility needs that this COVID-19 pandemic has caused. It is possible that these changes are long-term to permanent. (I personally refer to and appreciate the information at www.MobilityAustin.com for facts and for proven and already existing mobility solutions.)

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?

Genuine community outreach always goes a long way in positively positioning oneself. Right off of the top of my head, I thought that RECA could get a lot of Brownie points by taking on the plight of our local musicians and locally-owned restaurants and bars. This might also help save the our downtown real estate market . . .