



2020 General Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate: Morgan Witt

Office Seeking: City Council, District 7

Political Affiliation: Democrat

Candidate's Website: www.morganforaustin.com

Why are you running for this position?

I'm running for City Council because Austin is still struggling with the same problems it's faced for decades — and the pandemic has only made it worse. We need a new leader with a proven track record of community advocacy who's tuned in to their community, and who brings fresh ideas to the table, to offer effective and creative solutions to old problems. I decided "enough" with the status quo. It's simply not working and we need to change tactics. I care very deeply about the people who live here and I have deep roots in this city. I'm a born and raised Austinite and I've dedicated my life and career to serving my community in various ways. Because of it, I not only have seen issues like affordability and traffic from different perspectives, but I've also developed well-rounded skills that have prepared me for taking my service leadership experience to the next level.

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

Austin touts itself as a progressive haven, but data (and reality) tell a different story. While we grow in both size and industry, our city is becoming less livable and a lot of people are getting left behind. We're approaching a point of no return. If we're going to change course, we have to tackle these long-standing issues in a comprehensive, effective way. My most urgent priority for Austin is "livability" and includes three interconnected priorities — affordability (housing & transit), sustainability (combating climate change), and most importantly, equity (systemic social/public safety reform and the prioritization of essential community services).

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

Well, of course I want to accomplish everything. But two of my passion projects would include: 1) Preserving and cultivating our iconic live music scene by establishing a dedicated, ongoing Live Music Preservation Fund and investing in programs that support minority- and women-owned venues (and musicians and industry professionals, too). 2) Making local government more accessible and inclusive. This means taking a more proactive approach to community outreach for town halls, City Council

meetings, and gathering resident input. It means offering communications in more languages, and building strong partnerships with diverse community organizations and leaders. I'd also work for certain city charter amendments in an effort to make our campaign and elections processes more fair and democratic, including a token system for campaign fundraising and ranked choice voting.

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?

These issues are closely interrelated — job creation and development projects come with addressing Austin's big problems. It's well-documented that when implemented effectively, development and public infrastructure projects are excellent economic stimulators and job creators. Simply put, I'm strongly in favor of both when done effectively, equitably, and sustainably.

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?

Where to start? We must update our archaic and exclusionary land use code to promote the development of more diverse housing options — in all neighborhoods. For example, I'd like to see four units legalized on every lot; NCCDs eliminated; minimum lot sizes reduced or eliminated; greater flexibility for building placement on lots to comply with heritage tree and impervious cover requirements; a sliding scale for impervious cover (e.g., lower for a single unit home, higher IC for two units and greater); and parking minimums greatly reduced or eliminated (save for accessibility spots).

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.

Where to start? As an experienced operations project/program manager I can say that the process not only needs serious overhauling, but I'd personally delight in being a part of it. The Zucker Report outlines a laundry list of specific recommendations. To keep it brief I'll start with one example: I know efficiency and predictability in early stages of the process would be a vast improvement — and that begins with better cross-functional collaboration between departments. I see a need for streamlined and standardized steps in the process, but also flexibility and room for creative decisioning. I think Austin could benefit from a setup similar to the Q team that Dallas has implemented.

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

Austin already has bold plans for addressing housing, and as with many of its other plans, there are two main problems: they lack equitable representation in public input and therefore are misguided in their goals, and they're usually never achieved. As councilwoman, I'll work to develop better plans and implement them effectively. I'll also focus on two key areas of housing development that will help us address both the shortage and the rising construction costs. 1) Increase market rate housing supply and diversify housing options by overhauling the land use code to eliminate apartment bans and NCCDs in Austin's central neighborhoods. Also, streamline the permitting process and severely reduce parking and lot size minimums. 2) Achieve our goal of Affordable Housing supply by heavily incentivizing higher density housing construction and Affordable Housing projects. I'd also like to look into ways to "bake in" Affordable Housing into housing development instead of treating it like a separate area of planning from market rate housing.

What is your position on Project Connect?

For decades Austin has desperately needed a comprehensive and efficient public transportation system. I support Project Connect (along with the mobility bond) and think it will be essential in ensuring we not only make Austin more sustainable, but also more accessible and affordable for all residents. I appreciate that anti-displacement measures are an integral component. I'd also push for connection to Tech Ridge and investment in other public transit infrastructure in the N/NE portion of my district, which usually gets left behind. I'd also work to make sure we build our housing and businesses around this transit network to make it more successful.

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

We should fully fund the Austin Bike Plan, Sidewalk Master Plan, and Urban Trails Master Plan. Accessibility is a priority. Any high quality-public transportation system will need accessible and complete sidewalks; protected cycling lanes; transit shelters; benches; and street trees to complement the entire system (network). Making it as comfortable, accessible, and comprehensive as possible for riders will incentivize residents to utilize public and active transportation systems. I'd also like to look into other ways we can support people without cars — for example, let's give massive subsidies for electric bikes to make them deeply affordable or free. I'd subsidize public transit for low income residents. I'm eager to see what else we can do to support the project's success.

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?

I see a lot of divisiveness and antagonism in government and politics today — at all levels. If we want a brighter future for Austin, we need to invest in partnerships. A top priority for me is updating the Imagine Austin plan to truly represent 1) what we need to accomplish to solve the issues we face, 2) all residents voices, and 3) our values of equity and inclusion. That plan should be the benchmark for all policy decisions, and I'd partner closely with the business community (in all its facets) so that we can collaborate in achieving those goals.