

**Candidate's Name: Laura Morrison**

**Capital Area Progressive Democrats 2011 Austin City Council  
Candidate Questionnaire (Amended)**

1. What are (would be) your top three priorities as a Council member, how would you accomplish them and what in your past experience has prepared you to be able to accomplish them? Also, how long have you lived in the city of Austin?

As a City Council member, I have made, and will continue to make my top priorities (1) protecting Austin's quality of life, (2) supporting policies that promote both social and fiscal responsibility, and (3) promoting accountable, transparent, and collaborative government. I believe that throughout my first term, I have remained true to these priorities and have supported policies and initiatives to help achieve them.

I moved to Austin 30 years ago. My professional career has included working as an engineer for Lockheed Martin, as a consultant in export compliance, and in the field of pandemic flu preparedness. I hold a Graduate Certificate in Community Preparedness and Disaster Management from the School of Public Health at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; a Master's degree in Mathematics from the University of California, San Diego; and a Bachelor's in Mathematics from the University of California, Berkeley.

Prior to taking office, I served as President of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC), which provided an opportunity to get to know Austinites all across the city and to become familiar with a broad range of issues. I have also served with several organizations dealing with areas of particular interest, including affordable housing and health and human service concerns, with the Community Action Network Community Council and the HousingWorks Policy Committee.

2. Do you support single member districts? If so, what configuration would you support to achieve fair and adequate representation?

I believe that a hybrid system (including single-member and sector and/or at-large positions) would bring the Council closer to the community and result in more effective governing of the city. Such a change has the potential to bring the following benefits: increased accountability of Council members; better understanding by the Council of the issues facing Austinites; lower cost of running a campaign with a follow-on benefit of encouraging a broader range of candidates; enhanced access to Council members; and potentially increased voter turnout.

It is critical that any proposal withstand strict scrutiny and public vetting and provide an opportunity district for African American representation. Evidence from the discussions in 2008 indicates that the proposal of

6 districts may fall short in that regard. I will look to careful and transparent demographic analyses as well as Department of Justice review to ensure an equitable proposal.

**3.** Considering the environmental damage attributable to the coal fired generation of much of Austin Energy's electricity, the greatly heightened concern over nuclear generated electricity, transmission expense mandates, and the continued specter of significantly higher rates facing our most vulnerable citizens, what practical short and long term strategies would you, as a Council member, advocate to Austin Energy?

Austin Energy needs to develop a business model to resolve the paradox between achieving our goals in energy conservation (selling less energy) while remaining fiscally sound. This business model needs to respect that conservation and improvements in energy efficiency can reduce the need for added infrastructure costs in the future, which, in the long term, reduces pressures to increase utility rates. Additionally, the ongoing cost of service study must be both transparent and fair to provide the community assurances that utility is keeping affordability at the forefront.

It is important to keep in mind that utility rates have the largest impact on Austin families with the lowest incomes. During the past few years, we have looked at a number of programs and expanded outreach to help families needing assistance with utility bills and have made adjustments to our policies to avoid cutting power to families during extreme heat events.

As for nuclear power generation, I cannot support Austin's participation in the South Texas Nuclear Project expansion. Having researched impacts of nuclear power plant disasters during my studies in Community Preparedness and Disaster Management, I have particular hesitations from a public health standpoint. In addition, there is still no safe way to store radioactive waste, nuclear power plants use extreme amounts of water, the energy is not considered "clean" once construction, fuel mining and transportation are integrated into the equation, and even with a purchase power agreement, the financial risks are too great.

Despite all of the best intentions, safety regulations, and expert design, the situation in Japan has been a tragic reminder of the enormity of catastrophe that can result with nuclear power.

**4.** When making decisions on issues that come before the Council how would you, as a Council member, prioritize environmental impact compared to, for instance, current law, budget concerns, cost to citizens, and effect on growth, among other factors?

As with any decision made at the city, there's a delicate balancing of our priorities and the city's values. I believe my voting record as a Council member demonstrates my strong commitment to protecting the environment, as well as prioritizing fiscal responsibility and minimizing the tax burden on our residents. One of the best ways of ensuring that this balance is reached is by increasing the amount of public review for an item. I have helped institutionalize the boards and commission process and increased the opportunity for public review where possible, including requiring department budget review by the appropriate board or commission prior to Council adoption.

5. Given the context of the confluence of revisions to the No Sit/No Lie ordinance, the proposal to move the Community Court from county to city administration, and proposed budget cuts that will constrain Austin Travis County Integral Care's ability to provide services to Austin's homeless residents most directly affected by these developments, do you have any specific plans or strategies for addressing the plight of our homeless neighbors?

I believe that the city needs to invest further in the development of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). These facilities serve families and individuals with direct care services and provide the city with an enhanced opportunity to transition people out of poverty. By addressing the needs head on, we avoid other future social service and public safety costs, and, in the long-term, PSH is a fiscally sustainable approach to affordable housing.

As President of the Austin Neighborhoods Council, I led the passage of a resolution to support the city's core values to put low-income, long-term affordable housing in all parts of town. I am currently working with city staff on pulling together a stakeholder group to set up a process to address the concerns that come up with permanent supportive housing from adjacent residents proactively and achieve success in promoting these housing options.

As for the No Sit / No Lie ordinance, I helped bring forward amendments to the ordinance that would make the ban fairer to our residents with the most needs, including exemptions for those waiting in line for social services and those with physical disabilities.

6. What is your response, procedural or otherwise, to the release of Council members' e-mails from the dais and the resultant public concern?

In 2006, I supported Proposition 1, which would have made all public information available online in real time and accessible to the public. I believe if this proposition had passed, the city would be in a better position of public trust and accountability. Given the situation we are in now, it does however present a great opportunity to look at how we do business and make improvements for the future.

Last year, recognizing a need for better management of public records, I put the city's records management and retention program on the strategic audit plan for FY 2011-12. That audit is currently ongoing, and I believe the results of the audit will give us a more detailed look at the improvements that need to be made at the administrative level.

As a Council member, I have made it a top priority to have city decisions be made in public view with transparency and adequate time for public review and engagement. It is my fundamental belief that the more perspectives we have reviewing a decision, the better results we will have for our community. I will carry these values into my second term if re-elected.

My official city calendar has been public since 2008, and it is a direct copy printed from Outlook, not a re-creation.

**7.** Regarding a Differential Animal Registration, aka Spay/Neuter ordinance, in light of the support of the three major animal organizations in Austin and the Austin Neighborhoods Council, a 13,000 signature petition, and the success of similar ordinances in other cities, do you support such an ordinance for Austin and if not, why not?

I am committed to making Austin the nation's most humane city for animals and to eliminate the unnecessary killing of lost and homeless animals at our city animal shelter. That's why I led and supported the effort of our Animal Advisory Commission to develop a multi-pronged program to both reduce shelter intake and increase live outcomes. That plan includes a significant increase in funding for low-cost and free spay-neuter programs, and I am committed to continuing to study proven programs and policies to continue to make improvements in our city's animal-welfare policies.

So far, our plan has made great strides in improving the outlook for animals at our shelter. When I took office almost 3 years ago, only ~50% of the animals entering our city shelter resulted in live outcomes. In the months of December 2010 and January 2011, 88% of cats and dogs impounded at the shelter left the shelter alive through adoptions and transfers to rescue groups. That figure increased to 92% in February 2011, the highest save-rate month ever in Austin and the highest of any city our size in the country.

I believe we need to continue monitoring the success of the current no kill implementation plan and make adjustments in the future when needs arise.

**8.** What, if anything, do you think the City Council can and should do to help AISD with its budget crisis?

The City Council has passed a resolution asking the city manager to come back with recommendations on areas where the city can help partner with the school district to reduce costs. I have worked with our building management department to help identify city facilities that are under-utilized, such as community recreation centers that can help the school district with long-term costs. I also support looking at cost-sharing opportunities for the school district's telecommunications and public access channels.

Most importantly, however, we will need continue and enhance collaboration between the city and school district. As a member of the Joint Subcommittees of the City, AISD and the County, I have had success in bringing together the city, county, and school district to work together on policies and programs, such as the educational impact assessment. The educational impact assessment looks at the potential displacement of Austin families due to redevelopment in the urban core, and the impact it has on neighborhood schools. This will be a formal process in all development-permitting decisions.

When the city received money from the federal government to help with rental assistance, the Joint Subcommittees brought together City and AISD to work on a program that helps stabilize families to help reduce student mobility and keep children in the same classroom on the same education schedule.

Currently, under the Joint Subcommittees, we are instituting a program to connect information from each of the three governmental bodies on resources provided to individual students in order to better

coordinate services to the student. An ongoing effort is evaluating means to collaborate on youth court services.

I believe the situation facing our urban schools raises a broader issue of how the city makes decisions and what we are keeping in mind with our planning. We have opportunities under the Imagine Austin comprehensive planning effort to develop policies that integrate the goal of encouraging families and children in our urban core, and achieving that is one of the critical requirements of this effort.

## 9. As a Council Member, what three things would you propose to help alleviate traffic congestion within Austin?

There is no magic solution to solving Austin's traffic and congestion problems. A comprehensive, multi-modal transportation system tied in with proper land use planning is the best way to address the city's continuing traffic and congestion problems. Our comprehensive planning efforts should reflect this.

As part of the Strategic Mobility Plan, I made sure that both short-term and long-term congestion relief solutions were included. There are immediate solutions that can be done to Austin's arterials and roadways that help people today with their daily commutes while strategically planning for our transportation system for tomorrow.

Building roads cannot, alone, solve the problem, nor is there room in the central city to expand roadways to serve increasing demand for single occupancy vehicles. The focus for long-term congestion relief needs to be on alternative modes of transportation, which includes bike lanes and sidewalks. Single-occupancy vehicles pollute the environment and hurt overall public health.

## Questionnaire

### 1 A spay/neuter ordinance for Austin's cats and dogs:

#### Current History:

The three largest animal related groups, Animal Trustees of Austin, Austin Humane Society and Emancipet have all passed resolutions asking for a spay/neuter ordinance. The Austin Neighborhoods Council has passed a resolution asking for a spay/neuter ordinance. Over 13,000 Austin residents have signed a pen on paper petition asking for a spay/neuter ordinance. Every large city in Texas except for Lubbock and Austin have passed a spay/neuter ordinance. That includes Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, Ft Worth, Lubbock, Arlington, El Paso and even Waco and Paris Texas; which have all passed spay/neuter ordinances.

Last year, when the City was cutting the budget for every other program, they increased the animal services budget by \$1,200,000.00 (18%) to help fund the "No Kill" Resolution . To put cats and dogs above programs for our children without some sort of mechanism in place to lower the number of cats and dogs being born seems ill advised.

They make babies 7 to 10 times faster than we do. The City's current philosophy of working only on the adoption end of the equation is like being on a boat with a hole in it. Yes we should buy a bucket and bale the water but shouldn't we at least talk about fixing the leak?

In King County (Seattle) , Washington passed a spay/neuter ordinance in 1991. Over the next ten years while Seattle grew, just like Austin; they watched the animal intake at their shelter drop almost 50%. They went from killing close to 4000 healthy adoptable cats and dogs a year to zero and road kills (the strays?) dropped 90 %.

Apparently many members on the Animal Advisory Commission;oppose a spay/neuter ordinance.

The new shelter director the City just hired ( hand picked by those same commission members) has already been quoted in the paper as saying the Austin Community is going to have to spend a lot more money than they currently spend if they want to achieve "No Kill" status. We all know that

money has to come from other programs including our libraries, public safety, housing the homeless , parks and recreation, the arts, health care for our less fortunate citizens and so many other truly worthy programs.

**QUESTION: If you become a city council representative, would you support funding of increased pet adoptions or would you support a spay/neuter ordinance? What efforts would you undertake to effectuate your position?**

I am committed to making Austin the nation's most humane city for animals and to eliminating the unnecessary killing of lost and homeless animals at our city animal shelter. That's why I led and supported the effort of our Animal Advisory Commission to develop a multi-pronged program to both reduce shelter intake and increase live outcomes. That plan includes a significant increase in funding for low-cost and free spay-neuter programs, and I am committed to continuing to study proven programs and policies to continue to make improvements in our city's animal-welfare policies.

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I believe we need to continue monitoring the success of the current no kill implementation plan and make adjustments in the future when needs arise.

## 2 Imagine Austin/Comprehensive Plan and Community needs

There are several seemingly paradoxical directions within the *Imagine Austin/Comprehensive Plan* at this point. Here is one of them:

The *Imagine Austin* current "preferred scenario" seems to promote compact linear redevelopment to add high densities along transportation corridors that support transit/transportation mobility (*based on City staff future population/employment projections*). The presumed premise being Austin's long term 'sustainability': discouraging the drain caused by urban sprawl, including density directed away from, & protecting the Edwards Aquifer.

Yet

A) the basis for a "public/community" choice of placing "density chips" leading to the current "preferred scenario" were maps with no Edwards Aquifer's boundaries shown; nor neighborhood plans with added densities.

B) the "preferred scenario" as fine tuned by staff adds more density to nodes over the Aquifer, & other locations with proximity re. developmental precedent & further impact. Current "groundwater wars", possible climate change conditions, etc., conceivably heighten the importance of all available water resources, including groundwater.

C) recent land use decisions from the Council have minimalized existing plans for environmental feature preservation issues within the city such as the waterfront overlay, neighborhood plans ( re. in-city neighborhood livability/quality of life issues) that also logically contribute to discouraging urban sprawl.

*(Task Force, Planning Commission & Council actions did not follow initial staff/consultant recommendation to "endorse" the scenario, but sent it on to the next phase of 'building block' working groups )*

**QUESTION: Do you have ideas/solutions for reconciling both the preservation/protection of the Edwards Aquifer underground water reservoir & the protection of in-city neighborhoods' livability / viability for Austin's long term sustainability?**

On Council, I have a strong record of voting to protect the Edwards Aquifer (and other environmentally sensitive land) and to defend and enhance the character of Austin's neighborhoods. The two goals aren't mutually exclusive, and I believe it is important for us to keep both in mind as we continue to develop the comprehensive plan for our next generations.

As a member of the Council's Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee, I have ensured that real data analysis has been inserted into the comprehensive planning process and the decisions being made are information-based. I directed staff to prepare the zoning capacity analysis that gives a market-based, realistic look at the capacity of our neighborhoods to handle growth, both in terms of zoning entitlements and within the adopted neighborhood plans. With these numbers, we can have a more informed conversation on how we want to direct growth in our community and what decisions need to be made in context of the comprehensive plan.

There is still much work to be done, which is why I made the motion to move forward with the preferred scenario rather than endorsing it. I believe the working groups will be essential in resolving the remaining issues, including removing the density nodes over the aquifer and ensuring that all of the existing plans are incorporated. I also will look to the comprehensive plan to help refine our policies for family-friendly housing to ensure that our urban infill is harmonious with the changing lifestyles of families with children, which are the foundation for truly sustainable neighborhoods.

## Circle C Democrats Questions

1. Do you favor removing the extension of 45 SW (S Mopac to 1626) from the CAMPO Regional Transportation Plan?

I oppose the construction of SW 45 and support its removal from the regional transportation plan. It is detrimental to the environment and will fuel growth over the aquifer, including land outside the city's jurisdiction for land use controls.

2. Please detail your plans to enhance mass transportation options and general mobility in SW Austin and Oak Hill.

I support working with Capital Metro on express and rapid bus opportunities to give direct links from Oak Hill centers, especially the Y, to other employment and entertainment centers in Austin. Also, the city needs to do what it can to have the landowners at the Y work together to create a well-connected, well-planned town center with mixed-use opportunities. This node of activity is important to provide the ridership necessary to make transit financially feasible for the area.

I believe our strategic mobility plans should also include a review of current right-of-way preservation opportunities to ensure we maintain the ability to extend mass transportation options to SW Austin in the future, including the potential for commuter rail.