

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS

Thank you for participating in this forum. We really appreciate you taking the time to answer our questions and engage with our community. Please answer the questions below, and return them to [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) no later than September 1<sup>st</sup>. Please keep your answers to no more than 150 words. Again, we want to thank you for participating – and we look forward to seeing you at the Forum!

PLEASE INTRODUCE YOURSELF

1. How long have you lived in District 7 and what neighborhood do you currently live in?

I have owned a home in District 7 for the past 12 years. I moved to Rosedale in May 2002. I've lived in Austin for 34 years. Before Rosedale I lived in neighborhoods in what now are District 1, District 10 and District 5.

2. Are you a member of your neighborhood/homeowner's association? If so, for how long.

Yes, I first joined when I moved to the neighborhood. I have been a member of neighborhood associations and community groups since moving to Austin in 1980, and PTAs when my daughter was in AISD (Hill, Murchison, Anderson High). Being a member helps you stay informed and is important to developing and sustaining community.

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT THE TOP THREE ISSUES THAT CONCERN YOU

3. What are the three most pressing issues facing the city of Austin?

Affordability, property tax reform, and water.

4. District 7 is divided by 183. What are the three most pressing issues for the neighborhoods and businesses above 183?

1. Affordability
2. Public safety
3. Lack of services and infrastructure (sidewalks, open space, pools, libraries, etc.)

5. What are the three most pressing issues for the neighborhoods and businesses below 183?

1. Affordability
2. Transportation/corridor planning process (future development along Burnet and Anderson will impact traffic further south)
3. Redevelopment, especially with respect to compatibility

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website: [www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

Please Tell Us Where You Stand On District 7 Issues

6. Do you think CodeNext's re-write of our Land Development Code is addressing the needs of District 7 neighborhoods and businesses? Why or why not?

While CodeNEXT is in its early stages, it must take into account the infrastructure capacities that neighborhoods and corridors have for potential increases in density, and respect the vision of the neighborhoods found in neighborhood plans already on file with the City. CodeNEXT is intended to provide a map for future development and aligning it throughout the City. Many of the recent amendments to the land development code have been aimed at downtown and the central city - outlying neighborhoods have been largely ignored.

7. Many city planners say communities need work, home, and third spaces (community centers, parks, etc). What do you see are the third space gaps for District 7 and how would you address them?

Upper District 7 needs pocket parks, pools and libraries. The YMCA partnership for the rec center is a good idea for making community centers happen, although strict assurances need to be in contracts about community control. Funding for projects like these traditionally has come from bond proposals. I would appoint constituents from Upper District 7 to serve on these citizen task forces. Their vision has been missing and I would change that. Additionally, I would support efforts to brainstorm new, creative approaches to funding civic assets as a way to both provide communities with these necessary assets while keeping new debt issuance low.

8. Many Austinites are concerned about preserving livable neighborhoods, where families, children, and senior citizens are welcome. Do you see this as a priority for District 7, and if so, how would you address this?

Yes, livable neighborhoods are a priority for District 7 as they are citywide. Ensuring affordability means keeping our property taxes low so residents and new families who want to live in our neighborhoods can afford to live there, including renters, seniors, people with disabilities, people on fixed or middle-class incomes. It also means fostering a local economy that benefits all residents, not just those at the top. The lack of growth in middle- and working class wages is a piece that is usually ignored by elected officials. We need to stop the giveaways and entitlements that add to our debt and drive up affordability costs.

9. What do you see as the major public safety issues that need to be addressed in the district, and how would you address these?

Call outs for APD are concentrated in specific areas around Rundburg. Council was briefed recently on the status of Restore Rundberg. They found crime had decreased markedly due to extra officers on walking beats. As long as the program is working, it should continue. The city has no problem deploying enough officers to keep visitors to downtown safe - we need to do the same or more for the residents of District 7.

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website:  
[www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

10. What does 'affordability' mean to you? How would you work to achieve affordability as a City Council member?

Affordability specifically means cost relative to a person's ability to pay; in practice, this translates to having income sufficient to maintain your daily activities, your way of life, without accumulating debt; being able to live and raise a family within your means in the community that you chose. The recent housing market study identified the housing gap for very low income (30%) MFI households that needs to be addressed. The council has more ability to affect the cost side - taxes, utilities, services, fees. But I believe the council (and the rest of city government) can do more on the income side.

11. What is the difference between affordability for renters, home owners, and small businesses? How would you address these differences?

One example of the difference among them is our tax system has deductions and credits that benefit homeowners and small business that are not available to renters: interest paid on mortgages, capital asset amortization schedules, and so forth. Rent is less stable or predictable than a business loan or mortgage – landlords will almost always charge top of the market if they think demand warrants it. State law essentially prohibits inclusionary zoning, but the city could do more to leverage our public dollars by partnering with private entities to keep rents more affordable. Specific to the Burnet Corridor plan, we must make sure small local business isn't driven out by inevitable change. It would be a priority for me to make sure that doesn't happen.

12. One of the issues that has been raised in regards to affordability is the cost of utilities. What are three specific ways you would address this issue if you were on City Council?

It's difficult to control infrastructure costs to existing residents when the City underwrites new development. The City should stop using utility transfer funds for economic incentives: new development should pay its own way. The City can help low and moderate income people by creating a Mandatory Minimum Energy Standard for rental buildings to address duct leaks and require insulation. This would lower utility costs for the structures and reduce demand on the grid. Austin has a large capacity surplus in its water treatment systems (in 2013, Austin used 173 million gallons per day at its highest peaks; with WTP4, Austin will have 335 million gallons per day), so a third way would be to leave some water treatment units dormant to save on operation and maintenance. Debt issued for WTP4 – which I opposed when I served as a commissioner for Water and Wastewater – equals 15%-20% of the water utility bill.

13. What do you see as the major transportation issues for District 7? Please include traffic congestion, public transit, and issues with the last gap.

The City has pursued policies to attract more residents which puts upward pressure on housing costs, making Austin less affordable for many residents and newcomers. The solution for many has been to move to the suburbs, thereby increasing their transportation costs and regional congestion. To counter this, the City needs to lower the cost of living here – see the initiatives

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website: [www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

in #12 – and improve the routes and increase the frequency of existing transit; and focus attention on providing sidewalks and bike lanes to create or improve connectivity.

14. Walkability and bicycle access are both challenges for District 7. What three specific ways would you address these challenges?

1. Properly pave and maintain roads, bike lanes, and sidewalks, with priority on where they provide a link to transit.
2. Continue to educate the community about the legitimate role of bicycles. Most of us recognize the mismatch advantage of vehicle v. bike, but too often motorists see bikes as a nuisance in the lane. As someone who has commuted to work by bike, I know how vulnerable a rider is, and how easily a driver can miss seeing someone on a bike.
3. Ensure that District 7 – especially the northern part – is integrated into all transportation planning and scheduled changes.

15. Do you support the corridor plans that are being implemented for District 7? Please explain your answer.

I support planning for the corridors as long as the planning respects and makes use of the input neighborhoods bring to the process. A comparison reading of neighborhood plans and FLUMs for NACA, North Burnet/Gateway, Crestview/Wooten, and Brentwood/Highland from the early 2000s, for example, show similar visions for each area, and is striking in the fact that the goals are still the same: zoning and land use, transportation issues, economic development, public safety.

16. In District 7, we have many infrastructure issues. What do you see as the major infrastructure issues for the district, and how would you address them?

Traffic: we need options. The reality is that families must juggle complex schedules of work, school, and activities and they need to be able to get where they're going without losing time to traffic congestion. Also: parks, pools and public safety are priorities for me in District 7.

17. If you were given 5 million dollars to spend on capital improvements in District 7, what specific capital improvement projects would you fund for District 7?

An APD substation to bring greater presence, community policing, to address crime in the District. There's a park deficit: District 7 doesn't meet council-adopted standards of parks within ¼ mile in the urban core or within ½ mile outside. And sidewalks – the state of repair throughout is abysmal. I would ask residents to rank their preferences and then I would follow their guidance.

18. Many neighborhoods in District 7 are located on watershed and/or flood plains, and so face unique challenges. Please talk about these challenges, and how you would address them. Please make sure to include creek restoration, flood mitigation, and improvement of water quality.

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website:  
[www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

The new Watershed Protection Ordinance finally brings equity to our environmental consideration of creeks. I support projects like the new bridge near Hart Elementary that brings together creek restoration, fighting crime, transportation, and public health. We must also be sure not to increase density entitlements in flood plains (e.g., secondary apartments infill option on those properties).

The city has in recent years revised east Austin flood plains and will continue to work through how the revisions affect the creeks and existing developments. I will pay careful attention to these efforts and make sure that both creeks and neighborhoods are protected. In general, our region will need to be better prepared for greater extremes in weather, including flash floods. Also, TCEQ has determined Walnut Creek has unsafe levels of bacteria and is finalizing plans to clean it up. The plans include creek setbacks and protection of riparian zones, which I support.

19. There are some environmental issues that District 7 shares with the City of Austin, and there are some environmental issues that are unique to the district. Please discuss how you feel a City Council member from District 7 should address both sets of issues, and please tell us what are three specific ways you would address some of these environmental issues.

See question 18 above re creek restoration, especially in areas that have been traditionally neglected water-wise. We must make sure they are strong on water conservation and that outreach for programs are tailored to District 7 communities (e.g., languages, that they go where people gather – don't expect them to come to you). Development over the aquifer must be limited, but that doesn't mean we need to build anything anywhere inside the District – there are appropriate and adequate ways to do infill.

PLEASE TELL US WHERE YOU STAND ON SMALL BUSINESSES

20. Many candidates for District 7 have said they will be an advocate for our small businesses. Please discuss what issues you feel that small businesses in District 7 face, and three specific ways you would address these issues.

1. Rising rents are a form of gentrification. I would incentivize local business in the new zoning code modeled on why downtown density bonuses work. I would work with AIBA to bring more iBiz districts to District 7; I live in the LoBurn area and frequently walk or bike to the restaurants and shops. I would investigate economic incentives program for small biz including tax abatements (may need a legislative change at the State level).

2. Our permit issuance and review processes are need an overhaul. It is especially difficult for small businesspeople with neither the time nor resources to wade through the bureaucracy. Online permitting/payment will help, but we need to have satellite offices so that people don't have to go downtown and wait for hours.

3. Work to make property tax appraisals more fair. When big businesses don't pay their fair share, small businesses and homeowners have to make up the difference. It's hurting all of us.

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website:  
[www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

PLEASE TELL US WHERE YOU STAND ON CITY-WIDE ISSUES

21. Austin has been in a drought for 7 years. How would you address the issue with our shrinking water supply?

I support the recommendations in the Water Resources Task Force report, e.g., increased conservation, and an integrated water management plan that works cohesively on decreased usage and financial stability. The City needs to take a tough look at where and how we grow so keep grown from overwhelming our natural resources or outpace its capacity.

22. We need a Council member who will work for all of Austin, not just our district. Please tell us about two specific neighborhood or local business issues in other districts that you would be committed to addressing.

1. Rental Registration: the new Council should revisit the proposal made earlier that didn't get to four votes and consider a pilot for Upper District 7 and a few other areas of town. The repeat offender route the city went has not shown it's working – yet. Only eight properties have been tagged for registration, and Upper District 7 has many needed.

2. Water conservation – I would work to expand the program city-wide with relevant education and outreach in every neighborhood.

An additional area I would continue working on is with the coalition of seven neighborhoods (Allandale, Rosedale, Ridgelea, Oakmont Heights, Brykerwoods, Highland Park West Balcones, Westminster Manor) on the sale of the state-owned land along Bull Creek Road. This effort was successful at the Legislature in 2013 in ensuring neighborhoods would be included in new development, a big change for Texas state government that traditionally has never acknowledged local input when locating and building its facilities. The changes that we won affect provide a statewide model for inclusion, and that's not only for Austin or Travis County. The State has identified other parcels in the City, in other Districts, for sale.

23. Do you support the 1.38 billion dollar urban rail plan? Please explain your answer.

I have used rail systems in many cities and support rail that works. Austin's current proposal is flawed and may not pass. It costs too much and voters don't feel it will take them where they want to go. The ballot language should have separated the rail from the road bonds so voters have a clear choice. The proposal will likely absorb a large portion of our bonding capacity years into the future which negatively affects affordability. Alternatives, if the rail bond fails, is to expand and enhance existing bus transit (improve routes, increase frequency, expand to underserved areas of Austin), and redouble our efforts on a transportation vision that includes all of Austin.

24. Do you support tax incentives to attract and retain businesses in Austin? Please explain your answer.

In general I do not – as mentioned above, tax incentives shift the cost of infrastructure onto existing homeowners and is simply unfair. Businesses should pay their own way. Austin would Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

Gracywoods Neighborhood Association & Love North Austin  
Upper District 7 Candidates Forum Questionnaire

do well to concentrate its economic development activities on small local business. We are at the top of our game in Austin at this time – Forbes has ranked us #1 for economic growth – and it’s ridiculous to give taxpayer money away to bring people here.

25. Do you support a land bank and/or rental registration to address the problems of Code compliance, public safety, and affordability in Austin? Please explain your answer. I’d like to see an analysis of where land for a land bank is available in the County – not just the City – and work in partnership to analyze feasibility of a land bank initiative. My understanding is that much of the buildable land is taken. I would definitely support an effort along these lines as part of a new way of looking at building affordable housing.

As for rental registration, the City is responsible for the health and safety of its residents. Last year Council authorized a one-year pilot registration program to test the effects of stiffer penalties for repeat violators of the City’s health and safety code. We should examine the results of that pilot to determine the effectiveness of that effort. I would have supported Council Member Tovo ‘s proposal to cover specific problem areas (three votes). I’d work to bring that idea back to the new council.

Gracywoods Neighborhood Assoc. Email: [info@gracywoods.org](mailto:info@gracywoods.org) Website: [www.gracywoods.org](http://www.gracywoods.org)

North Austin Community Newsletter Email: [info@lovenorthaustin.com](mailto:info@lovenorthaustin.com) Website:  
[www.lovenorthaustin.com](http://www.lovenorthaustin.com)