

CANDIDATES QUESTIONNAIRE For Austin 2011 City Council Election

- 1. Do you agree with the Council's decision to decline the settlement in the Nathaniel Sanders case? Please explain your position on the Nathaniel Sanders family settlement.**

I continue to hold out hope that the Sanders case will result in a settlement agreement that enables the community and the Sanders family to move forward without having to endure what will likely be a painful trial. I strongly disagreed with those who called for the case to go to trial as "the best path to justice," but I rejected the settlement agreement proposed last summer after much deliberation, prayer, research, and outreach. I spoke with neighbors in and near the Walnut Creek Apartment complex, police officers, citizens of all socio-economic backgrounds, ages, race, and gender. I carefully reviewed the facts of the case and considered the circumstances that had changed between the date of the Council's discussion of negotiation parameters for a settlement agreement and the date of the Council vote on the proposed agreement. I believe the City could have handled the situation better, but stand by my vote last summer and remain open to a settlement agreement that helps heal the community rather than divide it.

- 2. Mayor Lee Leffingwell has stated his desire to have the issue of single member districts placed on the 2012 ballot. Do you support single-member districts? How would you implement a legally sufficient single member voting system in Austin? What safeguards or provisions would you support to ensure African-American representation?**

The subject of single member districts is very complicated and speaks to the very essence of how citizens of Austin are represented at City Hall. I expect the Mayor to form a charter review committee soon, and it sounds like ChangeAustin.org has already launched a petition drive to promote discussion on its proposal. I am opposed to the bill proposed by Senator Wentworth that would mandate a change in Austin's form of local representation; I feel strongly that such a change should be a vote of Austin citizens and not the State Legislature.

I currently have more questions than answers regarding the proposals currently being circulated, including Mayor Leffingwell's. Minority populations in Austin do not live in concentrated areas, something especially true for the African-American community, so it seems nearly impossible to draw districts that would guarantee African-American representation. Furthermore, if the assumption is that African-Americans and Hispanics would fare better in district races than in city-wide races, then I would be concerned about the perception that in a hybrid system, district seats are less powerful than city-wide seats. We would not want to have a situation where Council Members from minority communities are "downgraded to less powerful seats." According to the criteria set by the Supreme Court, a legal challenge to fair representation must prove: historical under-representation, a compact population, proof that the minority group votes as a block, and proof that minority candidates are being defeated because white voters vote as a block. Any new system for representation would have pass muster at the Department of Justice, and I am not sure any of the proposals I've seen circulating right now would.

Most of all, I want to better understand what specific problems the community wants to address with respect to our current system. It seems critical to first vet the options for addressing each of those problems

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individually before coming to the table with a pre-conceived proposal. For example, most cities see a spike in local elections after a change from one system to another is made, but then return to low turnout levels. Voter turnout in Austin could increase automatically and sustainably just by shifting city elections to November. Likewise, if the problem to be addressed is the financial burden of running a city-wide race, we need to be cognizant of the fact that running in a district with 150,000+ people is still a very expensive undertaking unless you rely on voter turnout remaining at the currently low levels. Similarly, if the problem to be addressed is geographic accountability then the community needs to actively debate the trade-offs of possibly losing guaranteed African American representation and also becoming a city government more focused on district initiatives than those that are city-wide. We need to play out the scenarios of having a city government with the majority of the Council accountable to only 10 – 15% of the population and therefore NOT accountable to the other 85 – 90%. Our current system is far from perfect, but I never take a vote now without thinking about the community as a whole versus thinking about working for one geographic area over another. Again, I look forward to the discussion and hope for active and engaged debate with local citizens driving the results they hope to achieve.

3. How well do you see the African-American community being represented in the comprehensive planning process? If anything, what would you do to ensure that the African American community is involved in the process?

There are members of the African-American community who serve on citizen’s advisory task force working on the comprehensive plan, but my sense is that there is a fairly high level of frustration among many of the citizens who serve on the task force regardless of age, ethnicity, or gender. Members do not always feel heard. I am not on the Council’s Transportation and Comprehensive Planning Subcommittee, but I am following the process and approved the task force membership, as well as the process and framework thus far. Visioning activities are very difficult, and can be far too amorphous for most folks to get their arms around. While the first phases of the process have been important, it is the development of the actual plan that gives us the best opportunity to ensure that not only is there African-American community representation on each of the working group teams charged with writing the various sections of the comprehensive plan, but we can also incorporate the African-American Quality of Life Task Force recommendations into the relevant sections of the comprehensive plan, as well.

4. Given the changes with the relationship of the Tri-Party Agreement (City of Austin, Austin Revitalization Authority and the Urban Renewal Agency), how do you see East 12th Street redeveloping and what is the timeline for that redevelopment?

The City is currently in the process of hiring a team to conduct an analysis of the area and prepare a development strategy for both East 11th and 12th St. The team will identify barriers to re-development and recommend incentives to encourage development that hasn’t happened earlier. The team will work with City staff and a steering committee comprised of key stakeholders to propose a strategy within the next six – nine months. Once a strategy is developed, the City and URA will work with the stakeholders to carry out the plan. Now that the ARA is no longer involved through the Tri-Party Agreement, it is up to the City to leverage what resources it has and/or can otherwise leverage to drive projects that enrich the area. Aside from the economic conditions that are making real estate development challenging citywide, this area has had the extra burden of enduring many starts and stops. Going forward, I am hoping the path to enriching the area will come with greater attention to the history of the area. I am also hoping that the African American Cultural

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Center (expected to break ground this summer and open in 2012) will be the anchor it is intended to be. If it is, then it will be a fantastic driver for cultural and business development on E. 11th.

5. What is your assessment of city's relationship with African American businesses? What have you done or intend to do to sustain and enhance African American entrepreneurial efforts in Austin.

The City's relationship with African American businesses is good, but could be better. The City of Austin has the most comprehensive database of African American-owned businesses of any entity in the region. I serve as a member of the Council's Minority-Owned and Women-Owned Business Enterprise and Small Business Committee, and have seen first-hand how challenging and rewarding it can be for African American-owned businesses to work with and for the City. While there are several City departments and prime contractors with an excellent understanding of how to contract and/or subcontract with MWBEs, there are many that don't. I built on relationships I had before my time on the City Council (i.e., from my service on the board of directors of PeopleFund) and worked hard in my first term to expand relationships and facilitate introductions, especially in departments that have new leadership and/or weaker track records than they should for working with minority contractors. I worked with the Black Contractors to coordinate an open house hosted by the City's Small & Minority Business Resource Department that specifically introduced local businesses to new opportunities related to the "going green economy." I have also supported and hope to enhance support in the coming years for the Mentor-Protégé Program, and I have championed efforts of the Capital City African American Chamber of Commerce. I look forward to the day that the Chamber re-locates to what will soon be the visitor center on E. 11th St.'s Dedrick-Hamilton House.

6. Since housing is intricately connected to educational outcomes and economic development; and since concentrated poverty in communities can lead to politically, socially and economically isolated individuals/families and neighborhoods, what suggestions do you have to facilitate the development of affordable housing in all parts of town?

I live in the Clarksville Neighborhood and appreciate greatly the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of my neighborhood. I appreciate it whether I am attending services at the Sweet Home Baptist Church, attending a meeting at Mathews Elementary School, or just simply enjoying the playground at Mary Baylor Park. I would love to see every neighborhood in Austin have such diversity and access to good schools, but I also realize that much of the fabric of Clarksville's earlier history was lost when Mopac was extended, wiping out a huge swath of the neighborhood. We feel a lot of pressure associated with change and gentrification today, but really our City has been transitioning from being a "sleepy college town" to one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country for several decades now. During that time it has been incredibly difficult to balance the benefits of increased property values, economic opportunities and community progress with the challenges of maintaining affordability especially for long-term residents. I am a supporter of the City's affordable housing programs, and have helped secure private, state and federal funding to support affordable housing initiatives in many parts of the City. I don't believe we've been focused enough on efforts to increase family-friendly housing options citywide, and as I explain in the following question, I have been concerned about not using affordable housing resources to support our community's most house-burdened citizens first. Furthermore, I would like to see greater emphasis on geographic disbursement of those dollars. I have been a huge proponent of the City's GO REPAIR! Program and would like to expand that program. It has been one of the best ways I've seen to increase the reach of the Urban League, American Youthworks, Austin Area Interreligious Ministries, Meals on Wheels and other organizations that are dedicated to helping people stay in

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their homes by offering critical upgrades, weatherization, roof repair and maintenance, and other repair work to help low-income homeowners. These efforts help keep people in their homes while also helping neighborhoods become safer and cleaner and less isolated.

- 7. The precise number of homeless in the Austin region is unknown, what is known is that homelessness is a significant issue in our community. Last year the Austin City council agreed to devote some of the remaining funds from the 2006 housing bond towards permanent supportive housing. What ideas do you have for the design, financing, components and location of a permanent supportive housing unit in Austin?**

I support the City's affordable housing initiatives and am a proponent for geographically diverse affordable housing options. I have co-sponsored Council Resolutions to prioritize housing for the lowest income citizens in our community (those who make below 30% of the Median Family Income); to endorse the Permanent Supportive Housing strategy; and to move forward with creating a Leadership Council with members outside of city government to examine and recommend financing strategies for achieving our goal of creating 350 permanent supportive housing units throughout our community. There are significant challenges ahead, but at the top of the list is the lack of clarity about which tools are best suited for which types of people the City is hoping to help through its programs. Not all of our community's lowest income residents need on-site support services, but some do. Some people may need on-site support services in conjunction with housing for a short-time, but others may need on-site support services for a life-time. We need to do a better job dividing and conquering. Rather than trying to solve all the housing challenges with a broad, catch-all initiative, I'd prefer we focus our efforts, seeking the necessary resources to support each segment of the population we are trying to serve in the way that makes the most sense for that segment of the population.

- 8. What would you want your legacy to be after you have served on City Council and what steps are you taking or will take to achieve it?**

My prayer is that I leave the City better than I found it when I first joined the City Council in 2008. I have been a long-time community volunteer and business leader in Austin, but serving on the City Council is a new endeavor – one that I know is only temporary versus what I hope to be a long life-time in Austin. From infrastructure planning to land use and economic development efforts, the City Council has to have an eye on the future, and we have to think regionally, remembering that we are but one player at the table. At the same time, however, we need to become much more vigilant when it comes to prioritizing core city services. There are many days when I feel like I am supporting the “nice to haves” over the “have to haves.” If I could leave a legacy, it would be to build a budget process that clearly prioritizes activities related to the basics – providing clean, safe neighborhoods citywide, and reliable, affordable utilities to all citizens. If the City can get those things right, the other challenges we face as a community will be much easier to meet. I have taken some steps to support this notion such as leading an effort to re-bid the City's social services contracts for the first time in 15+ years to prioritize basic needs, successfully advocating for increased parks maintenance citywide, supporting a new energy generation plan that calls for increases in renewable energy sources while capping rate increases, but I want to do much more. With your support I hope to do so.