

2011 Austinist Questionnaire

1. City Council recently revoked Lustre Pearl's outdoor live music permit, which it had obtained just a few months earlier. What do you think is the appropriate balance between Austinites that want to rock out and those that want to rest in peace? What changes do you think should be made to the noise ordinance and/or permitting process?

The case of Lustre Pearl is an example of the growing pains we're experiencing in some of the most desirable and changing parts of town. Long-time Austinites want to preserve the neighborhood and are resistant to too much change too fast, and new businesses want to add to the character of those same areas, taking advantage of new energy and opportunities. The challenge for the City is finding a middle ground. In response to a resolution I co-sponsored, the City hired its first Music Manager, and subsequently a Sound Engineer. The appropriate balance is going to be different in every situation, but with these two positions filled with exceptionally talented individuals, the City has been able to respond much better to these issues. We have been able to facilitate conversations between neighbors and venue owners that have often resulted in the stakeholders coming to an agreement before the permit ends up appealed at a Council Meeting. Requiring a sound impact plan in conjunction with the issuance of outdoor music permits will help, too. First used in the most recent 4-day music permits issued during SXSW last month, a sound impact plan takes into consideration things like location and direction of speakers and the zoning of surrounding properties. Permits should be issued on a case-by-case basis, and both the venue and neighbors should have input into what works for everyone involved. Ideally, I'd like to see the process continue to be streamlined to make things as simple as possible for the business-owner and as transparent as possible for the neighbors. I don't think one neighbor should be able to dominate the discussion in any of these cases, but likewise I don't think a venue can rock out night after night without consideration of the impact it has on residences nearby.

2. Mayor Leffingwell recently said that "as the City continues to work to reduce expensive suburban sprawl and facilitate sustainable growth in Austin's urban core, the prospect of closing successful central city schools clearly runs counter to our community's long-term planning goals." Recent census data shows that most central Austin neighborhoods lost population over the last 10 years, particularly people under 18. What city policies would you enact, modify or eliminate to help more families live in the neighborhoods around the schools proposed to be closed?

There is no question that our land use policies have driven development costs up in central Austin neighborhoods. That, in turn, has made it more desirable for families to choose suburban areas where they can get more house for less money and less hassle. My record reflects support for density where it makes sense and also a willingness to support duplexes, condos and urban-style homes that are large enough for families. Besides continuing to support projects like South Shore PUD and Zilker Terrace that increase density near downtown, I will also support simplifying the process for families to do renovations and/or additions. I have been and will continue to be a strong supporter of the parks and recreation department, a critical component to family friendly neighborhoods, and I will continue to be judicious with respect to awarding historic landmark designations.

3. The average new U.S. home in 2009 was 2,438 square feet. Austin's McMansion ordinance limits the size of homes on most lots in central Austin to less than 2,300 square feet. Should the average family be able to build the same sized house in central Austin that they would be able to build in

suburban Austin? What effect does the McMansion ordinance have on reducing expensive suburban sprawl and facilitating sustainable growth in Austin's urban core?

The McMansion initiative may have started with the very best of intentions. In practice, however, this ordinance has been difficult to implement and has added enough red tape to the development process that it is impacting affordability and discouraging family-friendly development. I don't think this is just an issue of square feet and floor-to-area ratio. It is expected that a family may sacrifice some space to enjoy the benefits of living in the central city. The problem with the McMansion ordinance is that in many cases it makes new construction (such as the addition of an extra bedroom, playroom, or garage apartment) expensive to permit and difficult to build at all, and it makes building two units (i.e., duplex or condo regime) that are each large enough for a family nearly impossible on a typical SF-3 lot.

4. The restaurant Casa de Luz, which has operated in central Austin for the last 20 years, may be forced to relocate or close due to new enforcement of parking requirements. Do current parking requirements for central Austin businesses fit with your view of Austin's long-term planning goals?

Our requirements are based completely on the automobile model and do not take into account the pedestrian and bike friendly nature of a place like Casa de Luz. As density and connectivity increase in the central city, we need to relax our requirements for automobile parking. I voted for the Austin Bicycle Plan and have negotiated for high degrees of bike and pedestrian connectivity during the zoning process. I have also been exploring specific options for Casa de Luz; it is a complicated case for several reasons.

5. The Council recently adopted new rules for street parking downtown in the evenings and on Saturdays. Do you support the new rules? What else would you do to improve parking downtown?

I voted to extend parking meter hours in downtown. It was a tough call. It is never easy to start ask citizens to pay for something they're used to getting for free. But, just as some Council before this one made the tough decision to add parking meters to the streets in the first place, I believed that the benefits of the proposed rules outweighed the downsides. Besides generating revenue to support wayfinder signage, improved access to off-street parking options, and increased safety in downtown, all of which should make downtown a better destination than it currently is, the prospect of increasing on-street parking turnover should also help the current parking situation. I plan to monitor the results carefully, and I remain committed to other ideas currently being explored such as the development of a smart phone application to guide people to available parking spaces, the better use of the technology afforded by our new parking meters to facilitate same ticket use for multiple errands and/or meter max-time options, the promotion of Car2Go, and anything else to help make our City more walkable and bikeable.

6. City council has approved various payments to subsidize the development of the F1 track southeast of Austin, including \$13.5 million for water and sewer lines, and is considering adding \$4 million per year for hosting expenses. Should Austin tax money be used to subsidize private development in general and F1 in particular?

There have been no City of Austin subsidies for Formula One, and I have never been approached to support any. Last year we re-purposed an existing service line extension to serve the area where F1 is building. The extension request had originally been for single family homes, and to be transparent, the

City included Formula One in that change of use. I don't consider a service extension request, one we would have granted for single family home development, too, a "subsidy." The state funding to support F1 is contingent on a local F1 host committee generating matching funds; the match as I understand it is \$25 million in state funds if the local F1 host committee provides \$4 million. The City has not been approached with a proposal for subsidies, so you'd have to ask F1 how they intend to meet the matching requirement. There are pluses and minuses associated with F1 coming to Austin just as is the case with other large tourist-generating events such as ACL and SXSW; the City doesn't offer tax subsidies to ACL or SXSW, but incurs costs and enjoys benefits associated with both. Any role the City plays in private sector-driven special events like these requires careful consideration and cost-benefit analysis.

7. By some standards, Austin traffic is among the worst in the nation. Many Austinites think transportation should be local government's primary concern.

a. What do you think causes Austin traffic?

We all contribute to Austin's traffic. Even those without cars are part of a system that moves goods and services in and out of the city. We are overly dependent on the automobile and need to take every opportunity to make our city as multi modal as possible, and we also need to plan better for the future.

b. Do you see urban rail as a viable solution for downtown transportation?

Austin is growing, and is going to continue to grow. We can plan wisely for this and I am very concerned about how we will move the next 30,000 people in and out of downtown. I can foresee a time when urban rail will make sense for our City. Rail is going to be very expensive, however, and requires participation of regional partners and key stakeholders such as the University of Texas and State Government. Any plan needs to be about more than just traffic reduction and must support economic development and housing goals. I need to see a sensible business plan before endorsing urban rail.

c. Do you support adding a toll lane to MoPac?

I am open to it, but need to see a proposal before endorsing this idea. A high occupancy vehicle lane has also been discussed. I am concerned about how any plans might impact the potential for rail, too, given that there is already a track running down MoPac.

d. Do you think either of the above will reduce traffic for anyone other than the people riding the rails or paying the toll?

Yes, but traffic will continue to be a challenge for Austinites just as it is in virtually all growing, thriving communities world-wide. This question reminds me of something I discovered when I ran for the City Council in 2008: people in Austin hate traffic, but they also hate the solutions. There is no one silver bullet, and the City is one player among many in this region. We need a mixture of transportation modalities. I supported the recent transportation bond proposal for that reason, but also to ensure we had projects in the pipeline until a more comprehensive approach could be offered. I support the Strategic Mobility Planning effort currently underway. I have frequently voted for better sidewalks, have supported the City's Master Bicycle Plan, have been pleased to

support the creation of the Transportation Department, and have negotiated for the very highest levels of pass-through and interconnectivity on projects in front of the City Council during my tenure as a Council Member. Besides what has already been discussed in this section, I want to explore ways the City could do more to help Cap Metro in its mission for better bus service, and do more to promote carpooling, telecommuting and flex-time arrival and departure strategies for major local employers.

e. What effect do you think each would have on reducing expensive suburban sprawl and facilitating sustainable growth in Austin's urban core?

The current version of the yet-to-be-adopted Comprehensive Plan shows density "nodes" forming a ring of key points outside the City. If done properly, this should reduce traffic of all kinds into and around the city and should facilitate sustainable growth.

f. What changes would you suggest to either proposal (e.g., reserved lanes for urban rail or adding a non-toll lane to MoPac instead of a toll lane)?

I need more information before weighing in on this question.

8. LCRA is considering selling certain Central Texas water and wastewater utilities that cost more to operate than they generate in revenue. The Austin Water Utility is considering additional restrictions on water usage and rate increases. What do you think the proper role of LCRA and the Austin Water Utility is in providing water to Austinites? Other Central Texans? Should those entities take an active role in influencing land development patterns and/or the amount of water used by individuals?

The City of Austin benefits by serving as the water provider to the area. Environmentally, we are motivated towards water conservation and have steadily migrated water users off of well water (aquifer water) and onto surface water within our jurisdiction/CCN (Certificate of Convenience and Necessity). Economically, we can balance revenue and careful infrastructure planning to capture the value-add of being the retailer of water, too. The LCRA roles should be honest broker between and among the many competing water users in our basin, the steward of the highland lakes and Colorado River, and partner in water conservation and resource management. I think both the LCRA and the City of Austin should have a bigger say in land use decisions to prevent unwise or unsustainable development.

9. In 2009, City Council enacted the Waterfront Overlay, which restricts development (particularly height) along Lady Bird Lake, but as yet has failed to enact the "density bonuses" that were planned as a way to allow additional construction in exchange for community benefits. What "density bonuses" or other changes to the Waterfront Overlay do you think should be implemented?

The City adopted a Water Front Overlay in 1986, and there are some who believe that overlay would work just fine. If the 1986 overlay were working, however, Hooters would not be the nearest place for a meal when leaving the Long Center on our southern lakeshore! In 2009 Council undertook a rewrite of this overlay in an effort to create something that makes more sense for the City we have today, and appointed a seven member Waterfront Planning Advisory Board to make density bonus

recommendations. My nominee to this board is Dean Almy of the University of Texas School of Architecture. The new recommendations have been drafted and will soon begin their journey to Council. Inherent in the recommendations will be a strong sense of place and community. The waterfront has many features and many needs, and each of the sub districts along the water way will be tailored to elicit the very best in design and in uses. For example, some areas would be ideal for housing with a strong affordability component. In these areas the density bonuses are included to encourage height and floor to area ratio. Transportation nodes and walkability are key to obtaining bonuses in such an area. Community benefits such as affordable housing are contemplated "on site," which means that they're not transferable to areas off of the waterfront. Water quality is critical so close to the lake, and bonuses are being crafted to encourage builders to go above and beyond existing water quality regulations in protection of this key area.

I supported the South Shore and Park PUD projects, but additional height is not right for all areas of our waterfront. In some places, extra layers of design sensitivity, such as "wrapped" or shielded parking garages, will be required in the event that a project abuts single family or sensitive neighborhood areas. By and large, the 350 foot setback from the shore is being preserved to maintain the openness of the lake and skyline and to combine the energy of downtown with the peacefulness of our beautiful Lady Bird Lake. This is everybody's Austin, everybody's waterfront, and I am looking forward to design guidelines that incent the creation of a space where Austinites can live, work and play.

10. The city is now in the process of creating a city-wide comprehensive plan. How should we resolve conflicts between the comprehensive plan and neighborhood plans?

I expect the Comprehensive Plan to become a guiding document informing land use and transportation decisions as they come before Council. Visioning activities are very difficult, and can be far too amorphous for most people 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 community input is heard and incorporated into the plan itself.

However, the Comprehensive Planning process was ever intended to drill down to the level of detail we see in a Neighborhood Plan, or specifically in a Future Land Use Map (FLUM). The Council should consider the Comprehensive Plan as it weighs deliberations on a zoning change or a FLUM change, but it is my expectation that the FLUM and a neighborhood plan in its entirety will remain relevant and that neighborhood plan amendments will be processed as they are now.

Evaluating the plan on an ongoing basis will ensure that City staff implements the plan as intended and will also enable the Council to continue to work with stakeholders to ensure the plan is revised and/or modified as needed, so that the plan meets the community's needs over the long term.

11. Many see denser development, particularly along transit corridors, as the key to developing more affordable housing and more workforce housing, but neighborhoods have often resisted such projects. How should this conflict be resolved? What else should be done to keep or make housing in Austin affordable?

We need to be more willing to embrace change when it comes to building and preserving our affordable housing stock. I have supported central city projects, including the South Shore PUD, the Airport Blvd. form-based code initiative, and the East Riverside Corridor Plan. I have resisted and will continue to

resist the pressure of the Austin Neighborhoods Council (ANC) to over-apply our land use code to cap density in the central city. I believe that compatibility with single family residential can be achieved in Austin and still allow for reasonable infill and better family-friendly housing options, and I also believe many neighbors and neighborhood associations support that notion even if the ANC has not.

12. Downtown has traditionally been viewed as the area between the lake and UT and between I-35 and Lamar. Does this definition still make sense? Are there other areas that should be considered part of downtown?

This is a zoning question at its core. In any zoning case, I take into consideration what a reasonable use for the site is, and I look at current and future uses around the site, as well as looking carefully at the interest of any immediate neighbors and how each will be impacted by decisions. Thus Judges' Hill, ("downtown") is not going to have the same density expectation as the new South Shore PUD, (not "downtown"). Each has its own sense of place, whatever the nomenclature.

13. Do you think Austin is better now than it was 10 years ago? Do you think it will be better 10 years from now than it is now?

Yes, and I certainly hope it will be even better 10 years from now. My only motivation for serving on the Austin City Council is to help make it so.