

**HousingWorks Austin
Austin CHDO Roundtable
Women in Housing
Candidate Questions
City Council May 2008 Election**

1. Affordability for renters, especially renters in central Austin, is diminishing as more and more reasonably-priced apartments convert to condos or luxury. If you are on the City Council, what will you do to promote preservation of centrally located affordable rental property?

The City should be focused on achieving more affordable housing in both central Austin and outlying areas. While the fundamental value system of our community dictates that we work to ensure that central housing is accessible to people at all income levels, we know broader and deeper affordability in outlying areas is easier to achieve because land prices and construction costs are lower. We also know living centrally isn't a desire for all citizens. But for those who do wish to live centrally, we should follow the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Incentives Task Force and create more tools that leverage the findings in the current Downtown Planning process. The City Council needs to focus now on ensuring the judicious use of voter-approved bond funding for affordable housing, on facilitating the development of the Community Land Trust, and on creating additional mechanisms that encourage participation of the private sector in the development of affordable housing. The City should also strengthen its relationship with key local non-profit organizations already working successfully in this arena. I also support expanding efforts like the redevelopment of the Green Water Treatment Plant downtown, as well as the 40% set-aside in the proposed Tax Increment Financing plan for affordable housing.

2. HousingWorks calculates that \$2 billion is needed to address Austin's housing crisis. How do you plan to address the issue? What is your position on developing a dedicated revenue source to support Austin's housing affordability needs?

As mentioned above, I would reach out to work with the private sector and also non-profits already working successfully in this arena. Regarding other affordability strategies, we should explore targeted exemptions and tax relief for original residents as feasible, and also seek ways to influence the legislature with respect to its over-reliance on property taxes, which is contributing directly to our affordable housing challenges. As for a dedicated revenue support for affordability needs, I would support another bond proposal as soon as possible if we get the results we are hoping for from the current one. Having a clear and transparent method for reporting and performance review will, hopefully, allow us to accomplish that.

3. In order to have a wide range of housing in all parts of town, planning and zoning changes will be required to include affordability. What is your position on the necessary steps to achieve this?

We should work with the private sector to create clear and reasonable benchmarks for affordability in future housing developments. I support the collaboration between the City and the Domain developers to set aside a percentage of rental units for affordable housing, but we can do more by creating these partnerships in all parts of town, as long as they provide a clear and compelling community benefit. Where possible, I would support transparent incentives and targeted exemptions for developers committed to including certain levels of affordable housing in development.

4. How should building regulations be evaluated in order to balance affordability against other public benefits and new code implementations such as green building, environmental issues, accessibility, and/or neighborhood aesthetics?

Our community values an emphasis on green building, environmental issues, and accessibility and neighborhood aesthetics, so I believe it's important that our building regulations reflect those values. Affordability does not have to be at odds with these regulations, as green building, for example, can actually help keep future costs down for owners and renters. I would leave the door open to waiving certain regulations to accommodate affordability if the need is clear, compelling and in the interest of the community-at-large.

5. Families earning less than \$35,000 represent 36% of the households in Austin. For a family of four earning \$35,000 represents less than half of the area's median income. What directions will you give the new city manager regarding housing and affordability issues which affect these families?

One of the priorities of my campaign is addressing poverty, and if I elected I will strongly encourage my fellow Council members as well as the new City Manager to also make it a priority. Too often issues related to poverty are at the bottom of our City's priority list rather than at the top. As mentioned above, I support creating mechanisms that encourage private sector investment in addressing our affordable housing challenges and strengthening the relationship the City has with leading local nonprofits working successfully in this arena. I would also encourage the new city manager to work with me and the rest of the City Council in exploring tax relief for original residents as feasible, and also seek ways to influence the legislature with respect to its clear over-reliance on property taxes.

6. To date (2006–2007 and 2007–2008), \$13.5 million from the \$55 million bond has been allocated for rental housing and home ownership. Specifically, \$6 million for rental; \$4 million for home ownership; \$2.7 for council priorities; and \$675,000 for acquisition. What are your priorities for the future spending of the \$55 million in bond funding?

I supported the 2006 affordable housing bond program and want to see it succeed, so we can do it again. We need a clear and transparent method for reporting and performance review to ensure success of the bond program and determine how to best prioritize future spending.

7. The Affordable Housing Incentives Task Force recommendations, which have been adopted by the Austin City Council, defined three core values:
- 1) *Deeper Affordability Targets:* It is desirable to reach deeper levels of affordability, i.e., to serve lower-income households;
 - 2) *Long-term Affordability:* We value housing units that will remain affordable over the long term; and
 - 3) *Geographic Dispersion:* Affordable housing should be dispersed throughout the City of Austin.

How will you maintain the Housing Incentives Task Force recommendations?

I will focus on strategies for affordability levels that range from 60% MFI to 80%. Different levels and different objectives (i.e. rental vs. ownership) require different strategies to reach deeper, longer levels of affordability. Regarding geographic dispersion, please refer to my answers above, specifically regarding the need to focus on affordability not only in central Austin but in outlying areas as well.

8. The Incentives Task Force recommendations also urged the City Council to be “as aggressive as possible to develop affordable housing on City-owned land.” How will you assure that the City adheres to the downtown affordability standards set for the Green Plant site?

Much like the bond program, success in redeveloping the Green Plant site will be contingent upon having a clear and transparent method for reporting and performance review to ensure that aggressive affordability standards are being met. I’m anxious to see the proposals presented to the City regarding the redevelopment of the Green site and hopeful they will not only meet but exceed the affordability goals set by the Council.

9. The Ending Community Homelessness Organization (ECHO) has a goal for Austin to develop over 1,000 affordable rental units for the homeless. These new units will help reduce the pressure on the health care and criminal justice systems. To do so, however, will require capital funds and housing vouchers, as well as additional social service funding. What specifically will you do to support the development and operation of these 1,000 units over the next five years?

We’ve got to do more to leverage the strengths of our local nonprofits, and help them better address this challenge. I plan to build on my extensive experience in the nonprofit sector to improve the way the City does business with basic needs providers. I will also work hard to create new resources by bringing private sector partners to the table, and I will actively pursue additional sources of federal funding that will likely become available with the upcoming change in White House administrations. Austin must not only get its “fair share” of those funds, it should hopefully get even *more* – by competing as successfully on that front as we do on so many others.