

District 6 Candidate Forum
Moderated by League of Women Voters Austin
September 30, 2020

Carol Eckelkamp:

Welcome, all, to the City of Austin's District 6 Candidate Forum. I am Carol Eckelkamp with the League of Women Voters Austin Area. Today we have partnered with the City of Austin Ethics Review Commission to help you get to know the candidates vying for your vote. The League of Women Voters Austin Area, founded in 1919, is an organization with men and women members. We believe in empowering voters and defending democracy.

Today's questions are put together by the League of Women Voters Austin Area and have not been seen in advance by the candidates. These questions come to us from many community organizations, the students at UT, and through our public email box. This year, students in UT's Steve Hicks School of Social Work helped construct some of our questions. These students would normally be out in our community completing their service hours, but due to the pandemic, they are learning, along with all of us, how to manage their lives differently.

A special thanks to these students and other volunteers in the League of Women Voters of the Austin Area. Candidates, you will have two minutes for your opening statement and two minutes for your closing statement. You will also be given one minute to answer the questions. Our timekeeper will hold up a yellow warning card at the 30-second mark and a red card when time expires in your questions.

Candidates are asked to refrain from any personal attacks of their opponents. In the event a candidate loses their connection tonight to this forum, they may reconnect and are allowed to answer the questions that were missed, time permitting. We will begin in ballot order and rotate so that each of you has an opportunity to answer first. We'll begin the two-minute opening statements with Mr. Flannigan.

Jimmy Flannigan:

Thank you, Carol, and thanks to the League of Women Voters for your long-time support of democracy in our city and in hosting these forums and to the league for partnering with my office in 2018 and 2019 for our high school voter pep rallies that we held to register and educate high school seniors in McNeil and Westwood High Schools in the last couple of years.

My name is Jimmy Flannigan. I'm a 20-year resident of Northwest Austin, a former small business owner, former president of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce, organizer of the Northwest Austin Coalition, the current Councilmember for District 6. I'm also the first openly gay man and first

Williamson County resident to serve on the city council. In the last six years, even before being a councilmember, I have held more than 60 different town halls, meetings, and community events to listen and engage on every topic facing our city.

I have turned that unparalleled community engagement into solutions, new roads and infrastructure in all corners of the district, slowing the rise of government spending, and being a policy innovator during the pandemic, as well as leading on citywide issues of affordability, equity, and justice as Chair of the Judicial and Public Safety Committees, Chair of the Regional Economic Development Board, Chair of the Community Enhancement Network, and representing the city at a regional level, taking District 6 to the head of the table on some of the most critical issues facing our city and our region.

I have proven my ability to deliver solutions that have earned the trust and support of the partners you need to get it done. I've earned endorsements from labor, environmental, and business groups, as well as the EMS Association. I'm proud to be the only Democratic-Party-endorsed candidate in the race, including every democratic club endorsement decided countywide, and those including District 6 community leaders and the support of five of our overlapping District 6 Democratic House members, but the work is far from done, and that's why I'm running for reelection and why I'm asking for your support.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Kelly, you'll have two minutes.

Mackenzie Kelly:

Thank you, League of Women Voters, for hosting this forum. My name is Mackenzie Kelly. I am Austin City Council Candidate for District 6. I'm a mother, a wife, and a person deeply invested in the community. Austin's in my blood. My parents live in our district. My brother and his fiancée live in our district. My in-laws even live here. I was born and raised here. I've been here 34 years and 1 month. I've learned life's hard lessons here, and now I roll up my sleeves to help others navigate life's challenges in this ever-changing city.

I spent eight years in the community as a volunteer firefighter at the Jollyville Fire Department. I've led volunteer cleanup efforts at the overflowing homeless camps under our expressways. I've worked hand in hand with our first responders, and as president of Take Back Austin, I fought to keep our politicians held accountable. The city is facing multiple crises right now, a crisis of homelessness, a crisis of public safety, and a crisis of affordability. I'll advocate for our police department to be fully staffed and funded.

I will work to make sure that our taxes are kept low, and I'll ensure that our homeless population is taken care of through policies that work towards identifying and treating the systemic problems that cause homelessness. Those types of solutions are safe and compassionate. Living in unsanitary and atrocious conditions is not. I am the only candidate in District 6 to have been endorsed by a former democratic mayor, Lee Leffingwell.

My campaign has also been endorsed by the Travis County Republican Party, the Williamson County Republican Leaders, the Austin Young Republicans, the Pflugerville Youth Republican Club, former Texas Republican Party Chair James Dickey, and current Texas Republican Chair Allen West, due to my stances on correcting the crisis of public safety in our city and my commitment to fiscally conservative values. These leaders and groups have seen the work I've done in our city firsthand and now that I will be successful in my role as a city councilwoman in District 6.

As Austinites, we deserve a city that is safe, prosperous, and forward planning. We need servant leadership, not typical politicians at the helm. Now is a time to put aside political agendas and take action to insist on a better community that services us. Fighting for a better Austin has been the honor of my life, and I look forward to being your next city councilwoman. I humbly request your vote. My name again is Mackenzie Kelly. Thank you so much.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Mushtaler, you have two minutes.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. I'd like to thank the League of Women Voters for the wonderful work that they do and for hosting the forum this evening with the Austin Ethics Review Commission. I'm Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler. I'm a board-certified physician and surgeon with over 20 years of experience, the last 10 at the North Austin Medical Center. My husband and I have been married for 20 years, and we have two daughters, a Leander ISD High School junior and an eighth grader.

I grew up in Houston, where my father worked with NASA, and so it should not surprise you that I developed a love for science. I came to UT Austin on an academic scholarship to earn my bachelor of science in electrical engineering cum laude, while co-oping at IBM. My love of science, combined with my desire to serve my fellow person, led me to a career in medicine.

I earned my doctorate from Southwestern Medical Center Parkland and completed my post-graduate residency in Fort Worth. During that time, I

worked in the Parkland Psychiatric Emergency Room and later at the Tarrant County Jail Clinic for Female Inmates. We have been back in Austin for the last 13 years. I'm currently serving on a Medicaid physician advisory panel, and I have an appointment to the Texas Health & Human Services Commission on ethics and informed consent.

I'm the current president of the River Place Homeowners Association and limited district. I'm running for city council because I'm very worried about Austin and our future, particularly in light of COVID. The decisions that we make now and in the next year will be crucial to our individual and collective health. I was asked to run by neighbors and other neighborhoods to better represent District 6 in Austin on issues of safety, public health, homelessness, property rights, and fiscal responsibility.

I believe that my experience as a physician and in executive leadership will be a necessary asset to move our city forward, to get our children back in the classroom, citizens back to work, and our businesses open. As a councilwoman, I will treat my fellow constituents, my fellow councilmembers, and the public in a civil and respectful manner befitting of a professional. I support fair public input, accountability, and practical solutions, and I hope to earn your vote. Thank you very much.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Harrison.

Dee Harrison:

Thank you very much, Carol. I really appreciate the League of Women Voters hosting these candidate forums. I know it's a very important role you all play in the democracy of our country and our city. I'm Dee Harrison, and I'm a candidate for District 6 on the Austin City Council. I recently retired from the state and began my consulting work, but like many others, the COVID-19 virus threw a monkey wrench into my plans. Since I first moved to Austin in the early '80s, the population has more than doubled, and the city's changed from a no-growth to a go-growth city.

Lots of things have changed about Austin. Some things have changed for the better. Others have not. While I might miss some of the places that are now gone, I know they're going to be replaced by something better, something more diverse, something more ostentatious, if you will. Right now, Austin's facing challenges unlike anything we've ever faced before. We're in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic that has changed the way we work, learn, live, and play. People have lost their jobs, their businesses, their families, and friends.

By education training and profession, I'm uniquely qualified to serve District 6 in the city. I've established, coordinated, and served on countless

community coalitions and working groups at the state, local, and federal levels throughout my career. I'm the only candidate with experience in public safety, criminal justice systems, strategic and crisis planning, and emergency management.

I'm not running as the candidate of a political party. Our city council elections are supposed to be nonpartisan. In these changing times, I believe your vote is more important than ever before, and I urge everyone to vote for the candidates of their choice, both up and down the ballot. I believe I'm the right choice for District 6. Thank you for your time and your interest. Please go to my website, DeeHarrisonForDistrict6.com, to learn more about me. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. We will begin the questions this evening with Miss Kelly. Kelly, this is a question on city services. From roads and bridges to storm systems and sewers, do you think our city's infrastructure is strained due to the rapid growth of Austin? What are the infrastructure needs of District 6, and is the city doing a good job of keeping up with the demands on your district's infrastructure? Miss Kelly?

Mackenzie Kelly:

That's a great question. So I've driven these roads out here in District 6 my entire, I guess, life, since I was 15 and I had a learner's permit. I know that, from my experience driving out here, we do need more infrastructure as far as the roads go. I know that there are several potholes that residents here have told me about that frustrate them. I know personally, also, with my relationship with my husband, that he had damage to his car almost a year ago because of a pothole in the road.

Thankfully, he was able to reach out to the city and have that corrected. A lot of our residents express concern because they don't know where to go for those sorts of issues, at least the ones that I've talked to while I'm out in the field discussing issues. It's very important as a city councilperson to address those needs, but to also know the means by which they can be fixed. I think that it's very important for our city council to be invested in those needs and to ensure that they're corrected. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you, and Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. There are some really meaty challenges across all of Austin. Particular to District 6, we have topography and areas that have created, essentially, due to dense vegetation and some of the Balcones Preserve, we have the fifth highest wildfire risk in the nation, and this makes roads

and development a challenge in this area, whereas I understand, in other districts, the challenges revolve more around flood plain. Unfortunately, the growth has outpaced the infrastructure.

We've had trouble with our roads being overcrowded, and we have very high accident rates, and it was to our big disappointment this past summer, while I was working on the 620 Corridor Coalition with a number of other neighborhoods, that we lost 633 million in very needed road funding to 620, and unfortunately, that was under the current incumbent. I would like to see the road infrastructure improved, but we also need to look at how water drainage works and how we have safe evacuation paths for our residents in and around these Firewise areas. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Harrison? You are muted.

Dee Harrison:

Thank you for reminding me to unmute myself. Thank you for bringing up the idea about our crumbling infrastructure. Our infrastructure has been an issue across the county, across the city, across the state, and across our country for years. It is crumbling. Our roads and bridges, some of them are meeting the end of their life spans, and they have to be replaced. We can't just keep shoring them up or patching them willy-nilly here and there. We have a big problem with our dams and drainage also. Every time it rains, I cringe, because I don't know how flooded my neighborhood is going to be. You can't repair roads without repairing the underlying drainage that goes along with the roads. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Mr. Flannigan?

Jimmy Flannigan:

Thank you, Carol. In my four years on the council, we have funded extensive infrastructure projects across the district. You can see new road projects coming in at 2222 and 620 on Anderson Mill. You can see new flooding information being funded in Angus Valley. We have added pedestrian safety and school safety projects in Avery Ranch, on Anderson Mill Road by Live Oak, and Deer Park Middle School.

New crossings, new streetlights, new traffic calming devices inside of our neighborhoods, and we've even funded more wildfire mitigation services to help those neighborhoods that sit along the preserve. I was also the only councilmember to add new roads in the city's Strategic Mobility Plan, both to help serve the Vandergrift High School campus and through the Robertson Ranch property to help take the strain off of Palmer and 183.

And while the state leaders decided to divert money from 620, I did fight vigorously opposing that change and even getting my colleagues on the council who serve with me at a regional level on _____ 00:15:40 to oppose that change, as well, but those projects are still at the top of the list.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. For our second question, we're going to start with Dr. Mushtaler, and this is on affordability. We're all familiar with the term time value of money. According to several developers currently building projects in our city, the length of time and the difficulty of the city of Austin permitting process is a contributing factor to the increased rent and rising home crisis. Do you agree or disagree with this? Please explain.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

I do agree with that. I think affordability comes from two important concepts. Both inventory and fiscal discipline. So inventory means that we need a new and modernized Land Development Code derived through deliberative collaboration with our resident stakeholders, and there are practical opportunities to create affordable workforce housing along corridors that make sense.

And also need to streamline permitting process that's free of costly bureaucracy or the need to hire permit expediters to get your work done, it means not allowing developers to buy out of requirements to provide housing at specific income levels, like was done in recent votes by the incumbent with MileStone, Plaza Saltillo, and the most recent one in South Lamar. So I do think we need some reform and some sharpening in the city bureaucracy to streamline the process, both for developers and for residents.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

Dee Harrison:

Thank you so much. I agree with that statement, that affordability is time and value oriented. I've spoken to a couple of contractors that I know about opportunities to place bids to build commercial developments in the City of Austin in Travis County and in Williamson County. To the letter, they have all said they do not want to bid on any construction project in the City of Austin because of its god-awful permitting process.

I've had some issues with code enforcement and permitting myself when we did a little bit of work on the house. It's not something I would wish off on my worst enemy. We do have to fix the Land Development Code. We do have to fix our permitting process. There are many things we need to fix,

and I believe that, in District 6, whoever is elected, should make that one of their priorities. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Mr. Flannigan?

Jimmy Flannigan:

Well, we've gotten similar questions to this in the past. Everyone acknowledges that the Land Development Code needs to be rewritten. It is a big source of reason why the process is so difficult, why developers have to pay additional money to bankers and carrying costs that could've otherwise been invested in community assets and affordable housing, but the devil's in the details. If you're going to say that supply and demand is a fundamental rule of housing affordability, which it is, then you have to be able to articulate specifically where and how that housing is going to go.

While I haven't appreciated every compromise that's been necessary in order to get the votes across the dais, I do believe that we needed to move the Land Development Code forward because it would've helped streamline these processes, get housing built on the corridors and in commercial centers where it would be most supported by existing infrastructure and even help with the permitting process, because one of the major issues with the process is that the rules are so convoluted from our 1980's written Frankenstein code, but until we fix them, it is a Scythian effort to get those processes reined in. That's why we must continue to rewrite process.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Kelly?

Mackenzie Kelly:

Yeah. Permitting rules need to be simplified so that they're clear for applicants. Standards need to be reviewed so that there are not unnecessary burdens on people trying to get permits. The cost for permitting is exceptionally high in Austin compared to other major cities, and it also takes longer. Development fees have increased materially when the budget for development services was moved from the general fund two years ago. The development review process needs to be fair to everybody.

We can't put the burden on taxpayers to get permits. Yes, certain Land Development Code needs to be changed, but we cannot do so at the expense of quality of life in our city. Property taxes are too high, and that needs to be addressed along with permitting, but moving the Land Development Code forward without quality of life in mind is a terrible choice for our city that will have long-term effects for years to come.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. This was the number one issue coming into our box for this year, and we will start with Miss Harrison on this question, and it is on the police funding. Following the recent protests over systemic racial injustices in policing, the current council has voted to reduce the Austin Police budget funding. If elected, what would you do, if anything, to further address these concerns of your constituents?

Dee Harrison:

Systemic racism has been going on for generations in this country, and it is rotting our country from the inside and out, but cutting the funding to the Austin Police Department is not the answer. We need to search for sustainable, restorative justice solutions. We cannot just do piecemeal things. We cannot move victims services out of the police department, because you need victims services because you meet them when it's the worst day of your life, when you become a crime victim, and race has nothing to do with that. We need to pull our partners to the table. We need to pull our stakeholders to the table and find a better solution, one that enhances restorative justice in our city and in our state. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Mr. Flannigan?

Jimmy Flannigan:

I have been leading on issues of addressing racial injustice and reforming our public safety entities for years. As Chair of the Judicial Committee, I led a reform of the municipal court, a historical reform that replaced judges who were not treating folks in the way that was reflective of our community's values. That work then led into a reform of the training academy that was initiated last December, before Mike Ramos, before George Floyd. I co-sponsored a resolution with Councilmember Harper-Madison to reform that effort.

And then leading into this year now as the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, having earned the trust and respect of my colleagues on the dais, we have continued that work, investing in permanent supportive housing, substance abuse, 911, telemedicine, mental health services, and identifying areas of continued work, but ultimately, a 20- to 25-million-dollar change from the city's largest general fund bureaucracy, a department whose budget has nearly doubled in the last 10 years, while population has grown just 30%. There has to be a better way.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Kelly?

Mackenzie Kelly:

I would address public safety by advocating for the full funding of our police department. Like many others, I do believe it requires reform. Some of that reform is addressing racial bias. Other reforms that I would advocate for are through more thorough hiring screenings, increased training, and to provide the most updated equipment and resources to the department.

I think that one of the biggest things that we need to strive for is to ensure that those that we bring on board to the police department are not experiencing any sort of racial bias...yeah, sorry, we don't want any kind of racism or discrimination. Having funding without a sustainable plan in place is the worst idea I've heard in a long time, but once that's addressed, when we have staffing levels that are adequate for our city, that would help us. Unfortunately, the current council stopped the hiring process for the most diverse police cadet class in history. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. You know, I've been listening to a lot of residents and my patients from all over Austin tell me that they were shocked and disappointed by the rash and knee jerk decisions that ultimately have led to increased division and misunderstanding, and quite frankly, they're growing more afraid for their safety.

The vote to defund the police, the talk about demolishing the APD headquarters and the rhetoric by the incumbent on his website to abolish the office of the police chief in favor of five different commanders will ruin important specialized task forces and years of work building our programs. You know, thinking through the best methods for providing security is reasonable.

We need to restore our cadet classes so that officers are not required to work excessive overtime that can negatively affect their skills, or worse, what's happening now, officers are being pulled from other units, like gang violence, drug rings, victim services, and property crimes. We need to provide and require ongoing education and certification for our officers.

This would include up-to-date techniques, maybe open shooter team drills. You know, through regular education and team drills, we would provide a mechanism for rooting out racial bias and those with violent tendencies, while creating best practices using data-driven techniques for de-escalation. We need to increase community-engaged policing to have safer communities and to recruit the finest officers from within our communities.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

I want the Austin Police Department to be the shining star for _____
00:25:42.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Dr. Mushtaler. Thank you.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Carol, I can't see the time flag, by the way. I'm sorry.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Are you on the grid view where you can see all of us? Got it? Perfect. All right, this next question, we're going to begin with Mr. Flannigan, and we had a lot of questions on the environment due to this district, and the students had a number of questions. We kind of distilled it down. Much of District 6 lies over the Recharge Zone of the Northern Edwards Aquifer. Do you believe the current programs and projects in place to mitigate runoff and other contaminants are sufficient? Are more efforts needed to protect this sensitive region? Why or why not? Mr. Flannigan?

Jimmy Flannigan:

The City of Austin has some of the most environmentally forward-thinking development regulations, certainly, in the State of Texas, those that are allowed within the confines the legislature has placed on us, and in the code rewrite, we were trying to take it a step farther by further eliminating and reducing impervious cover in areas where it had already existed, trying to cull back some of that runoff that's already happening. In District 6, we are the only district that touches Lake Travis, and we are only one of two districts on Lake Austin.

And so what happens in District 6 with the preserve and these environmentally sensitive resources is critical. I have been proud to support every environmental initiative that has come across the dais, including working on renewable energy, because the city controls the power company, but also in environmentally sensitive and forward-thinking development regulations, including the Water Forward Plan, our 100-year plan to ensure sustainable water sources and conservation for our region.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Kelly?

Mackenzie Kelly:

Our city does have good plans in place to protect the community and the environment. The Balcones Canyon land area is very important to the

residents of the district. Growing up, I jogged up and down a road that ran right next to where that area is. I've spoken to lots of residents who don't want to see anything happen to that area, but it also puts us at risk for wildfires, and so we need to ensure that we have good plans in place so that the residents of the district are protected in the event that happens. While we have that area, we also do have some of the district that touches Lake Travis, and we need to ensure that those areas are protected from floods.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

I'm concerned about District 6. I've been working on the limited district regarding the nature trails at the Balcones Preserve, and we've been working with both the Balcones Preserve and Texas Parks & Wildlife on the sustainability in balancing both the green spaces for human use and the natural spaces that we want to preserve. I'm concerned about the development that is happening currently, because I don't think it's in any kind of coordinated fashion and doesn't look at our water recharge zones, better use of gray water, and things that are incorporated into the Water Forward Plan. So I'd like to see more of that as we move forward, and I would like to see development that specifically takes these environmentally sensitive areas into account instead of trying to wedge dense housing where it doesn't belong, where it might endanger lives or the environment.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Harrison?

Dee Harrison:

Thank you for the question. I agree with everyone else, that Austin has been on the forefront of environmental protection, and it has been for generations, but one thing we need to remember is Austin sits right on the edge of what's known as Flash Flood Alley, and when we get a flash flood, we have millions of gallons of water rushing through our creeks and our drainage systems or storm systems and our wastewater systems.

We have to spend more money on mitigation projects to prevent all that storm water runoff from entering into the Edwards Aquifer in our Recharge Zone. We also need to look at how we operate our hazardous materials for spills and transportation issues. We've got a great HAZMAT team here in this region but more can be done. More can be spent on their equipment, their training, and their practices. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Our next question, we will start with Miss Kelly, and the second-most requested item to ask under the police issue was on transportation, and you all have touched a little bit on Prop A. I'm going to go to Prop B on the ballot in November. It asks the Austin voters to invest in a 460-million-dollar transportation bond to fund alternative transportation options, including much needed infrastructure improvements, more sidewalks, urban trails, safe routes to school, bike lanes, and more. What is your position on this proposition, and what advantages and disadvantages will this confer on the entire city?

Mackenzie Kelly:

Prop B is definitely important for the residents of the City of Austin. Actually, recently looked into what all was included in that plan, and I found it to be very helpful for a lot of the residents who use alternative modes of transportation. One of the biggest problems in District 6 that we have is transportation dead zones.

That's what I call them, and it's places where people have to go further than a typical person would to get to a bus stop. So anywhere from a mile to two miles. I've spoken with residents here who use the bus as a mode of transportation primarily, and they're very disappointed with the fact that some of the sidewalks aren't there so that they can get there. Thankfully, some of those problems will be addressed with this.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

I think it's very important. I want the voters to understand, there's a big distinction between what's being proposed in Proposition A and what's being proposed in Proposition B. Proposition A is a property tax, and that needs to be carefully looked at. I'm sure we'll get to that. Proposition B is a bond fund, and I do think there are some, actually, very good items that are in Proposition B. I'm an avid cyclist myself. I enjoy that.

We have the type of climate that really allows for people to have that choice as a commuter option. So I would like to see the bike plans completed out. Also, in looking in Proposition B, there are some important sidewalk projects that will be completed in other areas of the city and other districts, and I believe those are important also. There are some special interest projects I'm a little more curious about and will do some more research on, but in general, I think this is a good, positive direction for Austin.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

Dee Harrison:

Sorry, my cursor was bouncing around the page. I agree that some of the things outlined in Proposition B in the bond package would be good for the city, but like the doctor said, there are some sort of special interest projects in there that I'm not sure are the best thing for the city at this point in time. We've got an economic impact from COVID-19 that we can't begin to measure yet.

We don't know how far-reaching the economic impact is going to be, and you know, even though it is a bond election, do we really want to incur more bond indebtedness for our city in these financially uncertain times? That's something only the voters can decide, and they'll decide on November 3, and the new council or the old council, as the case may be, whichever council it is, will have to abide by whatever the voters decide. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Mr. Flannigan.

Jimmy Flannigan:

Well, Prop A and Prop B are very different. I voted no on Prop B when it was in front of the council. I was very concerned with the process that was used. We didn't follow the multiyear, or at least a yearlong, bond task force process that prior bonds have used.

Also the projects that are contained in Prop B, while wonderful projects, are not centered in District 6, and there's very little in District 6 being addressed through that proposition. You know, I think it's important that we all acknowledge that there's not a difference between a property tax and a bond measure, insomuch that your property taxes pay for the bonds. In fact, 20% of your city property tax are voter-approved bond measures.

So it comes out of your property taxes either way. The missing sidewalks and the bus service challenges that we have in Austin are being solved through work I've done as a councilmember. The repairs to Anderson Mill Road that are under construction right now will close the missing sidewalk gaps to bus stops in District 6 and in addition to the other active transportation projects I have solved as a councilman.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. The next question, we will begin with Dr. Mushtaler. This is on economy and jobs. Should the city incentivize business development and expansion in Austin? What kinds of businesses would you like to see in your district, and how would that impact job growth for those living in your district?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

This is going to be a very important part of our recovery coming out of the pandemic. Our hospitality industry, our creative artists are suffering a lot, and so I think the opportunity to bring new and innovative companies into the region is going to be crucial. I support some of the Chapter 380 agreements that've been discussed through the chamber because I believe that, you know, good jobs provide for good family incomes and opportunities while paying back dividends to the city and the public. I think there are a lot of opportunities to recruit industry here, but I think we need to do it in a way that is friendly to industry and brings them into a part of our community. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

Dee Harrison:

Hi. I agree with Doctor Mushtaler, that our hospitality industry has been adversely impacted by COVID-19. What I would like to see when we go forward, recruiting businesses to Austin, is to look at the ones that can restore the businesses we've lost instead of just new ones. I know Austin is the tech center...the Silicon Valley of Texas. Plano claims that title, but we're better than Plano on any day of the week, but I think we need to do it in a fiscally responsible manner. When we just give out money without the promise or the expectation that the jobs will come from or be...that we will recruit Austin residents versus importing employees from other cities or states, I think that's something we need to address in our future projects. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Mr. Flannigan.

Jimmy Flannigan:

Thank you. I have been involved in many of these types of agreements, ensuring that the contractual obligations that come with a 380 agreement with the City of Austin are fulfilled and full represent all of the different diversity and access to jobs that we're trying to accomplish.

This is true as when I was the president of the LGBT Chamber of Commerce, as now as a councilmember and chair of the Regional Economic Development Board. These agreements can be powerful because they allow us to obtain broad community benefits in exchange for what is some of the national leading strategy in terms of how you structure a 380 agreement. Austin really leads the nation in doing these in a way that projects the taxpayers' interests and brings jobs that aren't just the jobs that are the company that you incentivize.

But the entire economy that surrounds them, and our district has benefitted maybe more than most from these agreements, and many District 6 residents work for companies that will go out to Austin through these agreements. We're also currently exploring, and I'm co-sponsoring a resolution, to expand this to our hospitality and live music venues and restaurants.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Kelly.

Mackenzie Kelly:

Yeah. The pandemic has killed local businesses that made the iconic landscape of Austin what it is. It's hard for us to know what's going to happen moving forward, but I would like to support businesses that helped create Austin what it is today. Our musicians, our restaurants, and other hardworking members of the community have been affected, and the city should help them in a way that ensures that they not only come back, but thrive in doing so. While we need to be judicious and who and how we help them, it's important the council leads this effort. What we're doing is failing the backbone of our city's residents.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. On this question, we're going to start with Miss Harrison. Going back to the...you all have touched on this a little bit. We're going to hit the Land Development Code, and I want you to be very specific. The CodeNEXT was scrapped after years of work, and we still do not have a Land Development Code rewrite, and we are now in litigation. If elected, what are your plans related to this important project?

Dee Harrison:

Well, I think part of what we need to start with is whatever the court tells us we have to do. We cannot move forward with any sort of Land Development Code that violates state law, the Constitution, or any other rule or regulation that is set forth by the court. I would just say to the city that we need to quit wasting money appealing the court decision.

We need to take the throat punch that we got from the judge and move forward. We have to get rid of the current code because it is just an absolute mess. It is adversely affecting the way we can move forward for this city. It's adversely affecting our housing, our development, our business opportunities. We've got to fix it, but we can't do it in such a way that we violate the rights of our homeowners and our residents and our businesses. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Mr. Flannigan.

Jimmy Flannigan:

Well, as we all agree, we need to rewrite the Land Development Code. Unfortunately, the court ruling has upended decades of standing practice that has led to really positive policy reforms in the past, like the McMansion Ordinance or Parkland Dedication or some neighborhood plans that, unfortunately, never seem to come to District 6, but have been cherished in Central Austin. Those processes are now upended because of the judge's ruling, and so we need the appellate court and the court system to provide the additional clarity that the legislature hasn't, or the legislature can take it up in the next session.

But ultimately, what we have to do is solve the problem of supply and demand. We need to build housing for all Austinites at all income levels, both for our essential workers that are being gentrified out of the city and for the next generation of Austinites that want to be able to afford to live in this community. There is so much opportunity in the reform of this, and it has to be done right, which is why I led the effort to cancel CodeNEXT two years ago, and am leading on getting a better code after so many years of public debate.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Kelly.

Mackenzie Kelly:

I, too, agree that the Land Development Code needs to be changed, but it needs to be changed in a way that promotes quality of life. Neighborhoods are important. Families are important, and so is quality of life. I don't believe that driving families out of Austin is good for our community. Single-family home ownership is important because, for working people, land and property ownership is typically the only path for generational wealth. We have to protect the property rights of homeowners, and as a born and raised Austinite and Texan, I believe in the Texas Constitution and what's outlined as far as property rights go in that. If the city had done things right the first time, we wouldn't have had to go to litigation, and we wouldn't be spending the tax dollars to fight it.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Dr. Mushtaler.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. Let's be clear. This is not the state legislature's fault. We're still being sued by the incumbent, okay? Our money is still being used to sue us, and you know, the irony is here that, at the League of Women Voters in 2016, the same incumbent stated that he wanted to save us money

by...and I'm going to quote the incumbent. Quote, "Ending the wastefulness of government by lawsuit." End quote.

What happened? We didn't involve our stakeholders. We didn't involve our neighborhoods. We didn't involve our residents and give them voice. There are good opportunities to create transit-oriented corridors and to bring in good workforce housing and transportation that marries the needs of affordability and inventory, but this is not the way to do it, and I'm really appealing to the current council, please stop suing us. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Our next question, we will begin with Mr. Flannigan, and this is a question on the 10-1 district representation. It has now been six years since the City of Austin went to a 10-1 geographic council district representation. Do you think the 10-1 plan has had a positive effect on your district? Why or why not?

Jimmy Flannigan:

Well, it's been incredibly valuable. It's been valuable in that it has resulted in our most diverse council dais. It has resulted in an ability to get stuff done for District 6 that wasn't getting done before and giving a voice to neighborhoods that I still fight to ensure are included in the work that city staff does. It's also benefitted by ensuring that our school districts, which, in Austin, are not just AISD.

District 6 is mostly Round Rock and Leander ISD, but they're included in the programs that the city does in partnership with the school district. It has elevated our status at a regional level because I am a Williamson County resident and the first to serve on the council. I'm able to work at a regional level and bring the city into conversations where we had just been ignored in the past. It has been a huge benefit to District 6 and to our diverse community across the City of Austin. I'm incredibly proud to be the councilmember in that system right now.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Kelly.

Mackenzie Kelly:

In 2014, when we went to 10-1 redistricting, the idea was that we would actually have someone on council who will represent our district. My thought that I would like to throw out there is that if you have someone in a place where they are failing as a football coach for a college football team, you'd replace them, and right now, the needs of our district are such that we need somebody who can take that football and teach the district on what needs to happen and listen to their ideas and take it home and win it for the team. Unfortunately, sometimes when council makes decisions, it's

not in the best interest of District 6, and we need somebody who actually has deep roots here that would be willing to do that.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. I think, you know, like anything, there are pros and cons to the decisions that are made, and this is one where we need to carefully consider that before making any decisions going forward. The idea of having the different districts was to bring in more diverse representation and to expand the democratic process to represent everybody across the city. You know, unfortunately, it hasn't quite played out exactly the way everybody would've hoped, but there have definitely been some advantages. There are some interesting discussions going on about whether or not we would be better with a strong mayor system and what that might look like, but we'll have to consider that very carefully before putting anything like that on the ballot.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Miss Harrison.

Dee Harrison:

Hi. Thank you for asking the question. 10-1 district representation, or however many people the city ultimately decides in the future to have on the council, usually has a positive effect on the district. However, from where I'm sitting, I haven't seen much of a change. The city hall was responsive before, and I assume it's still responsive now. I haven't had a reason to contact Mr. Flannigan's office.

But I have contacted other city officials on different areas, but as a district councilmember, you have a duty, an obligation to represent not only your district, but the city as a whole because the city council is the governing body for the entire city, not just the northwest part of Austin and I guess it would be the southwest part of Williamson County where I live. It was time for a change and I'm glad we made that change. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

All right, this'll be our last question, and we'll start with Miss Kelly, and this is on the COVID-19 response. Do you feel the city has done an adequate job in their response to COVID-19? Please explain your response and explain how you, as a councilmember if elected, would address the future response of our city.

Mackenzie Kelly:

Thank you. So I actually have the ability in my career to work for the Williamson County Office of Emergency Management where I actually learned quite a bit from Dee Harrison on how to respond to and work in a disaster. All disasters are local, and from my standpoint, I saw the City of Austin have a very disjointed response to the COVID disaster. South By Southwest was on, and then it was off, and then we were encouraged by local leaders to go out to the businesses in crowds and actually patronize them.

We needed strong leadership from the city to be a role model for the rest of the people in Austin, and our response was less than stellar. If elected and something like a pandemic were to happen under my leadership, I would definitely be a stronger leader and be involved in sit reps, or situation reports, and ensure that our city knew exactly what was going on so that they could prepare for and respond to the situation at hand. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Dr. Mushtaler?

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

I want to say thank you to all the nurses and doctors and administrators and my colleagues who have been on the front lines with me through this process. I want to say thank you to the leadership at ACA, Ascension, Baylor Scott & White, University of Texas, and Austin Public Health. Our city would've not done as well as we have if it were not for your teamwork, your professionalism, and your collaboration, and I'm very proud to be sitting here to represent you in this pursuit for city council.

We have a lot of challenges going forward, and I know that's not what people want to hear, but the pandemic's not going away, and this is why we need medical representation on the dais. We're going to be faced with waves of recurring infection. We're going to be having to help communities that are going to need extra support and extra services through this, and we're going to be able to have a cohesive plan on how to bring a vaccine forward, how to distribute it, and how to educate people. It's time for a physician on the dais. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you. Miss Harrison?

Dee Harrison:

Thank you. What we saw with the city's response to COVID-19 was, in part, caused by the failure of the leadership, our public health leadership, at the state and national level. We got confusing and contradicting information several times a day, sometimes several times an hour. The messaging that the city and the state and the nation put forth was confusing and

contradictory. It led everybody mad, confused, and frustrated, and concerned.

Not to take anything away from our medical first responders who have done an absolutely outstanding job at dealing with this pandemic, like the doctor said, but we have to advocate for better public health preparedness in the future. If we don't prepare for the future, we're going to find ourselves in the same position in the future, and it might not be 100 years from now. It might be two years from now. We went through H1N1. We went through Ebola. It's time to get it right. Thank you.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. Mr. Flannigan?

Jimmy Flannigan:

When the pandemic first arrived and Mayor Adler canceled South By, was the decision heard round the world. I am proud to have been a city that led on that decision. That night, I was convening stakeholders in my council office from music venues and musicians and small business owners who were going to be the first hit when the pandemic started shutting down the economy.

That then led to my offering the first omnibus resolution in March that directed staff to start building the programs needed to address this concern. I then authored a small business support program that led to tens of millions of dollars through the federal CARES Act into local businesses across the city, but also funding child care and nonprofits and even PPE and supplies for small businesses to adapt.

Then, most recently, I am co-sponsoring a resolution to double down on that support for the industries that are going to be most affected over the long term, music venues, hospitality, restaurants, and child care, and this is the important work that's going to take a long time, and ultimately, I have been endorsed by the EMS Association and our medical first responders.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much. It's now time for your two-minute closing statement. The hour goes by very quickly, does it not? We will begin with Dr. Mushtaler.

Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler:

Thank you. Again, thank you to all the candidates for stepping forward to serve our city. The task ahead will be difficult, and my patients, my colleagues, and neighbors want me in city hall to help guide our policies. I reassure my daughters that we will get through this, but I want to help all of us get through this while minimizing loss of life and loss of livelihoods.

I want to bring our community and our police together so that Austin will have safe communities and so that every citizen, regardless of race, gender, or gender identity, can feel confident that they will be cared for by our law enforcement. I want to create policy that respects the livability of our city and our businesses while helping persons experiencing homelessness to get the assistance that they need. We can have a modernized Land Development Code that values our neighborhoods and provides for affordable workforce housing opportunities for all throughout our city.

We can protect our waterways and our green spaces and have growth that is thoughtful and sustainable. We are the live music capital of the world and a technology hub with one of the most respected public educational institutions in this country, and we need policy that enables this to flourish. If elected by District 6 to serve, I will bring an experienced public health and safety voice to council to effectively address all of our needs.

I will apply my skills in running a successful business and managing public tax dollars with fiscal responsibility. I am committed to listening to all of my constituents and fellow councilmembers just as I have listened to my patients. I will bring a rational and thoughtful approach to city governance. My name is Dr. Jennifer Mushtaler, and it would be my honor to represent you. Thank you for your consideration.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much, Dr. Mushtaler. Miss Harrison.

Dee Harrison:

Sorry, I was messing with my little cursor there. I'd like to thank the League of Women Voters and the City of Austin again for putting on this District 6 Candidate Forum and remind everybody tuning in, listening, or viewing this at a later date that this is probably one of the most important elections in my lifetime because there are so many important issues that we face, not only as candidates, but as a city, as a state, and as a country, not the last of which on the ballot in November is Proposition A and Proposition B.

I'll spend just a few seconds on Proposition A, which is Project Connect. You can go to my website DeeHarrisonForDistrict6.com and read my beliefs and thoughts on Proposition A as well as Proposition B. I also agree that we're facing an uncertain future in this city, and we cannot afford to pit one community against the other. We can't afford to consider things in our current economic climate that are going to break the bank later on down the road. Again, I'm Dee Harrison. I'm running for District 6 on the Austin City Council, and thank you for your time and listening pleasure this evening.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you very much, Miss Harrison. Mr. Flannigan.

Jimmy Flannigan:

Thanks, Carol, and thanks again to the League of Women Voters for conducting these candidate forums. Always an important step preserving our democracy, which has never felt more threatened than it feels right now. In Austin, the challenges that we face are serious and complex, and the city and the district needs leadership unafraid to be honest and direct, who understands the details, and who has shown the courage needed to take these issues head on.

My record on the council has shown that I can bring solutions big and small, from streetlights and crossings in Avery Ranch, flooding infrastructure in Angus Valley, the upgrading of Anderson Mill Road, approving a new fire station in Canyon Creek, new road projects from east to west in the district.

My work has been detailed and public from the eight public safety committee meetings I've chaired that are all archived online, to my weekly live show that I put up on Facebook and YouTube where I detail the specifics of what's going on at city hall and how District 6 is benefitting from that work. The trust I have earned from my colleagues on the council has led to success in the district and in the region and also the respect from the voters and the residents of District 6.

I'm the only candidate who actually gathered signatures from District 6 voters from every neighborhood in the district to earn my place on the ballot instead of paying the filing fee. It is that level lot attention to detail and hard work that I have brought to my job as your councilmember for District 6, and I hope I have earned your support and your vote in November.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Thank you, Mr. Flannigan. Miss Kelly.

Mackenzie Kelly:

Thank you very much for hosting this tonight. It was great to be able to speak to the voters and to the residents of District 6 directly about where we stand on issues that are so critical to the future of our city. As I stated in my opening statement, I have deep roots here. My entire family lives in District 6, and like what I did when I was a volunteer firefighter at the Jollyville Fire Department, I aim to fix problems that come before me. While I did that, I may have been in some of your homes on the worst days of your lives. My goal of being your councilperson is to help you and your families in the future.

Our city is facing an unprecedented crisis right now, the crisis of affordability, a crisis of public safety, and a crisis of homelessness. We need somebody who can stand up to those bad policies and problems and actually create solutions. I hope that you will consider voting for me on November 3. My campaign website is MackenzieForAustin.com. You can search for me on Facebook, Mackenzie Kelly for Austin City Council, and you can find me on Twitter @MKelly007. I hope that if you have any questions, you'll reach out to me, and thank you very much for your time this evening.

Carol Eckelkamp:

Candidates, thank you very much for your sincerity in answering our questions this evening. Want to remind you and your constituents of a number of important dates. It's the last day to register to vote before the 2020 general election. In Texas, early voting begins on October 13 and ends October 30. November 3 is our Election Day. Our nonpartisan Voter's Guide will be available online. Paper copies of the guide will be available around town and inserted in the Austin Chronicle the week before early voting begins.

Your personal ballot can be viewed at Vote411.org and is now live and populated. Vote411.org was launched by the National League of Women Voters Education Fund in 2006, and it's a one-stop-shop for all election related information. Now more than ever, it is important for all of us to educate ourselves on issues that will affect our communities and to vote. Cast your vote, but do not stop there. Keep track of those that we elect to serve by communicating with their offices and holding them accountable. We appreciate your attention from wherever you are listening. Thank you, and have a good evening.