

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name

Danielle Skidmore

What's your favorite park in Austin? Why?

My favorite park is Vic Mathais Auditorium Shores at Town Lake Metropolitan Park. It is beautiful, accessible, and facilitates a range of activities that generate memories for tourists and residents alike. Personally, I've been running the Butler Hike and Bike trail with my son Peter (who's confined to a wheelchair) for 16 years now. People would recognize us, then over time the picture evolved... the size of his baby-jogger, the length of my hair, my clothes, etc. All these things changed over time as I underwent a transition to embrace my own identity, but the relief and enjoyment that running the trail brought me-and the opportunity to bond it provided me and my son-remained the same. It is one of the most consistently happy places I've been able to escape to throughout my years living in Austin and is right out our front door here in District 9.

Ensuring equitable access to quality parks for all Austinites is a key priority for Austin Parks Foundation. How might you work as a decision-maker for both your district and the city as a whole to move the needle on equitable access to quality parks?

I believe our D9 parks are more adequately funded and supported to than other parks in other communities throughout Austin, especially on the East Side. I am running to represent District 9 and all of Austin, so I believe our biggest priority needs to be more equitably distributing resources to parks throughout the city. Safe, convenient access to quality neighborhood parks in all of our city's neighborhoods is a key component of our Health & Environment Strategic Outcome. Focused investments in underserved communities will more dramatically impact the overall quality of life of the residents, and they should absolutely be prioritized.

The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department faces \$125 million in deferred maintenance each year, ranging from playground maintenance and aquatics needs to mowing and servicing trash and recycling receptacles. What would be your strategy for addressing this need?

I fully support Proposition C, which provides \$149 Million for Parks and Open Space to address a critical need for long term capital improvements. As these improvements are designed, they should also focus on providing facilities with the most efficient operating and maintenance costs; we must focus our efforts first and foremost on our existing facilities. Some other options for more sustainable funding mechanisms include community driven PIDs for parks, partnerships between other agencies such as UT and AISD and public/private partnerships with nonprofits like YMCA for aquatics.

Austin Parks Foundation is continuously involved in community engagement to ensure that our projects and work align with community values and needs. What is your philosophy on community engagement, and how would you engage with the community to ensure that their needs around parks and open space are appropriately addressed?

As I look at the shortcomings of the intended LDC rewrite, a very important point to note is that a solution necessarily needs to be citizen-guided from the get-go. This is where our prior attempt failed: residents felt that their voices were not being heard. The bridge in my logo is intentional-we need to bridge dissenting viewpoints, business representatives and social justice advocates, all districts throughout the city in a solution that considers the needs of and works for all Austinites. The conversations leading to this new solution will necessarily include, and promote, the importance of parks and open space-for the health of our city residents, and our planet at large.

What do you believe the role of private partners should be in maintaining and improving public parks? What actions would you take to strengthen and improve public-private partnerships?

We referred to a few examples of this in a prior question, but public-private partnerships are essential for maintaining our open space-and we are always looking for diverse funding streams to ensure they are maintained and improved. The conservancy model, for example its use in Republic Square, is strong. I would also look to PUDs as a tool to provide opportunities for public benefits, such as the Camelback PUD Project in consideration, which would provide 16 more acres of parkland than code would require.

Parkland dedication fees are one mechanism by which the city funds park acquisition and improvements. What is your stance on parkland dedication fees, and are you in favor of maintaining them during the Land Development Code updating process?

The compromise that was agreed upon in January of 2016 is a result of significant community input and debate, thus we want to be able to keep the fees mechanism intact. We also, however, want to keep open the opportunity to review and revise ANY ordinance to ensure it's achieving its original intent.

Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Yes, parks are a fundamental asset. Some iconic park spaces (the Town Lake train, Auditorium Shores, and Zilker) define our city for visitors and residents alike, but ALL community parks are vital for the health and wellbeing of Austinites.