

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name

Justin Jacobson

What's your favorite park in Austin? Why?

Edward Rendon Sr Metro Park. Specifically, the shaded bench next just west of the pedestrian bridge as one is leaving the baseball fields, is such a calming spot. I've spent many an afternoon, or paused during a run, sitting there and soaking up the city. Some of the trees in the park were planted by an organization near and dear to my heart, the Christi Center. It was a very important place for me after my mother died, over ten and a half years ago. While they've planted many groves over the years, in many places, it's this one in particular that I cherish the most. I find it a nice gentle reminder of my mother. This park is a special gift to the city.

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 want to intensively identify the wants and needs of District 3 in regards to Parkland, acting decisively on them. Given that many parts of District 3 have historically and currently remain undeserved by park land, I want to, as Council member, take this information back the city as a whole, use it to effectively advocate for the allocation to meet these wants, but also express to our neighbors throughout the city the transformaitve effect this investment would have. Putting faces and names to this shortage could be the difference between scratching the surface and radically addressing historical inadequacies. In order to move this up on the list of priorities, humanizing the issue of equity, having folks be witness to others reality, both strike me as the most meaningful ways to make headway.

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?

The funds proposed in Prop C are a good starting point, but speak to only half of the back log on deferred maintenance, per year. When Parks and Rec funding is contextualized in both how it makes Austin more competitive in the Knowledge based economy of the future and the transformative effects it can have to the most in need in our city, I believe those positives could be parlayed into a future bond that would a sizable dent out of any outstanding needs and provide funding for a long term parks endowment. Leverage that with more public-private partnerships, identifying more enhanced dedicated funding sources and revenue streams, reexamining fees and permitting costs for events that use our park lands, would all have the cumulative effect of ensuring the quality of our parks.

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?

I believe that there can never be enough community engagement. Through switching to the 10/1 system and other efforts, Austin is moving towards a city government that is closer to reflecting the diversity present in our citizenry. As a former organizer, I want to leave in place a system of contact teams in every neighborhood across the district to keep a pulse on things. Whether those function through traditional neighborhood associations, groups of folks coming together block by block, or some mix there of, the need to be going back out in to the community, outside of normal channels of city government, is imperative. Not only meeting them there, but being more present in the digital realm and a greater swaths of public places, we can help facilitate conversations around their priorities of the city, I imagine chief among them, the status of our park lands.

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?

They are highly important, especially in light of the finite resources that the city can command, but should not give us cover to shirk away from responsibilities and obligations. The Trail foundation is but one example of how this can be done well. Transferring that kind of success to smaller neighborhood projects, without the same kind of cache, is where the greatest potential lies for these partnerships. Council's job needs to be marshaling the philanthropic support to the most under served areas. Once again, this comes from members communicating the needs of their constituents, humanizing them, and leveraging that story to effectively get resources. Whether we are establishing something like the Pease Park Conservancy or looking to fund big dollar items, Council members are best situated in harnessing these energies and directing them to the real needs of the community.

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?

I fully support these fees. I also believe in maintaining them in any future update to our city's Land Development Code.

Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Parks are an essential community asset. In an attempt to save space, I would like to echo the myriad of reasons as outlined in your Policy Platform as absolutely true. The benefits of parks are pervasive and wide reaching. But also, these are some of the strongest markers of place for city. If not for them, we'd be just another collection of buildings dotting the map. They are also one of the best assets our city can develop, preserve, and maintain that will keep us competitive in the world of tomorrow. Parks, they are at the core of our identity and the key to our future success.
