

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name

Kathie Tovo

**What's your favorite park in Austin?
Why?**

I have two favorites:

(1) Shipe Park: I first started swimming at Shipe soon after I moved to Austin in 1991 for graduate school, and I've been swimming there ever since. I now swim there with my daughters - and I'm looking forward to the pool re-opening in the summer of 2019. It's a great gathering spot where families from surrounding neighborhoods and beyond come together for movies, playground time, or community events.

(2) Nicholas Dawson Park: When I moved to Bouldin Creek neighborhood in about 1999, this pocket park had high grass, a dilapidated and swingless swingset, and little else. A small group of neighbors came together and transformed the spot into one with landscaping, swings, and local art. It is a real jewel and now provides access to trails that lead to Bouldin Creek. It's a testament to the hard work volunteers in every part of our community do everyday to help improve our neighborhoods.

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 support - and have successfully fought for - increased and ongoing investment in our parks, pools, and community assets.

During my time on Council, I have strongly and consistently advocated for improving our parks and pools and ensuring they are accessible to residents of all ages and abilities. These have included, among other things, leading the Council or otherwise supporting efforts to:

- Establish a dedicated source of funding for maintaining and improving our historic cultural assets through Hotel Occupancy Taxes.
- Develop a system-wide transition plan to bring our parks into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Approve an Aquatics Master Plan with a strong focus on equity and ADA improvements.
- Invest an additional \$100,000 in this year's budget for making key ADA improvements at our parks and \$382,000 in next year's budget.
- Over the last three budget cycles alone, increase PARD's budget by more than \$13 million.
- Adopt the 2012 parks bond to invest nearly \$78 million in parkland acquisition and in accessibility, infrastructure, and other types of improvements at our parks, recreation centers, and cemeteries.
- Place a 2018 bond on the ballot which, if approved by the voters, would invest significant resources in parkland acquisition (\$45 million), aquatics (\$40 million), parkland improvements and development (\$25 million), parks facilities renovations and accessibility (\$21.5 million), and playscapes, trails, and other infrastructure (\$17.5 million).
- Establish consistent investment of \$115,000 every year for providing lighting at City parks.

My leadership has helped us make significant progress on improving our parks and enhancing parks accessibility - and I look forward to continuing to work on these issues if re-elected.

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 have stood up for increasing our investment in our parks, pools, and community assets - and for establishing dedicated and ongoing funding sources.

These efforts have included:

- Establish a dedicated source of funding for maintaining and improving our historic cultural assets through Hotel Occupancy Taxes, which will provide over \$11 million next year alone to cultural sites.
- Approving a budget this year that includes recycling in every City park as well as a significant increase in addressing deferred maintenance for our parks assets.
- Resisting an effort to focus on pool closures through our Aquatics Master Plan and instead re-focusing the City on making important investments in maintaining our pools.
- Adopting a 2012 bond to invest nearly \$78 million in our parks, recreation centers, and cemeteries.
- Placing a 2018 bond on the ballot to invest \$149 million in our parks and pools.
- Increasing PARD's budget by more than \$13 million over the least three budget cycles alone.
- Establishing a consistent investment of \$115,000 every year for providing lighting at City parks.

I look forward to continuing to work with our private parks partners to increase our parks funding and to explore opportunities for stable, ongoing revenue sources.

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?

Community outreach and engagement is critically important to City policymaking and should be at the heart of everything we do.

During my time on City Council, I have been a strong advocate for robust community engagement efforts that make our government accessible, and I have worked to build community engagement into every major initiative I have led. For instance, I led the effort to establish an Aquatic Master Plan Task to provide opportunities for public feedback on the plan and its strategies for managing and maintaining our pools. I led the initiative to establish the Parks Events Task Force, which involved stakeholders in determining how to balance use of our parks alongside the physical capacity of those spaces and the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. I have also been an advocate for specific actions to make City efforts more accessible for our residents, from supporting improvements to our language access programs to supporting the ability for residents to participate in citizens communications remotely.

I believe that community engagement is not a program or an individual activity, but is instead a value that serves as the foundation of every effort we undertake at the City - and I will continue to explore new opportunities for getting our residents involved in City decision-making going forward.

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?

I believe that private partners such as the Austin Parks Foundation serve a crucial role in supporting the City's parks policies and efforts and in organizing and activating our parks community.

During my time as a Council Member, I have worked with our partners in the parks community to help make real progress on our city policies. Parks advocates have been crucial to efforts that I have led to update our Parkland Dedication Ordinance and to increase our parks funding in the City budget, among others. Parks partners - from local neighborhood associations all the way up to the Austin Parks Foundation - have also been crucial to leveraging private resources and volunteers to ensure City investments can go even further. Finally, parks organizations also help enhance the City's community engagement efforts by organizing and educating residents and amplifying awareness of parks issues and opportunities.

Going forward, I will continue to work closely with our parks organizations and advocates to make progress on our parks policies, leverage our resources, and engage with 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 am a strong supporter of our Parkland Dedication Ordinance and believe it a critical strategy for acquiring and improving our parkland.

As a Council Member, I co-sponsored the resolution to update our Parkland Dedication rules, which successfully increased the City's ability to fund our parks. Going forward, I will continue to support our Parkland Dedication Ordinance and advocate for policies that strengthen our ability to acquire and improve our parks, including by exploring new proposals that the Parks and Recreation Department has put forward on "Civic Space" requirements that complement the existing Parkland Dedication requirements.

Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Yes. I believe that parks are a crucial part of our City, both at an individual level as well as at a community level.

Our parks are key communal assets where our residents can meet, stay active, hold community events, and enjoy the access that many of them provide to open, natural spaces. Research backs this up: park usage is linked to a number of benefits, including physical and mental well-being. These benefits make it especially important for the City to continue to adopt strong parks policies as we grow, so that current and future residents can access these key community assets.
