

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name

Linda O'Neal

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

I have so many favorite parks. I love Pease Park, Red Bud, Lady Bird, Zilker, but the park my dog and I enjoy best is Stacy Park. We start our journey at the baseball field. Often there is a kid's party with pinatas and balloons, and it fills my heart when I see dad's play catch with their sons. My dog, Birdie, and I, then go down to the creek. Sometimes we find some teenagers smoking doobies under the cliffs or we see little ones with their parents examining rocks. Birdie and I then go under a bridge, and when there is water, Birdie splashes her feet in the water and then sprints up the hill. We then go visit the dog statue, there was a Buddha statue, but the city removed it. We sit on the bench and rest. We then go across the street and continue our journey through Stacy Park. We walk over to the exercise bars, while Birdie sniffs around, I try to do a pull-up. We often come across so many people and we have a chat. I love Stacy Park because it reminds me of Old Austin.

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?

We need to make sure that our parks are safe for children and women. Dirty, unkempt, and unlit parks are dangerous. As a woman who was almost attacked in a park, safety is a major issue. We need emergency call boxes and we need energy efficient light. We also need access to our parks and that means better bus service. Capital Metro does is not user-friendly. The wait time for a bus is too long and there isn't adequate shelter at the bus stop. It's terrible that we have our most vulnerable populations cooking in the sun or getting drenched in the rain, simply because the City or Cap Met did not put up four posts and a roof.

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 COA really can make this a great city if we stopped catering to tech companies and other for-profits by giving them subsidies. I know everyone loves soccer, but the Precourt Soccer deal will cost Austin \$400 million dollars over a 25 year period. Austin is STILL in the running for Amazon. I know that our Mayor has said that no deals will be made with Amazon, but then why are we NUMBER 3 on Amazon's list? What deals are being made in the Austin Chamber of Commerce? We need more transparency. Dr. Jenson, an economics Professor at U.T. wrote a book about how subsidies only help politicians because it gives politicians a way to brag about how many jobs they've created. Another problem is accountability. I support everything in the bond package, but just like every other voter who has passed bond after bond, people want to start seeing improvements. The city would rather raise the cap on property taxes and give tax breaks to for-profits. People are tired of paying and I fear that this bond will not pass because of how the city has treated the residents and their money. I support this bond, but we need to stop subsidizing for-profits and we need to stop raising property taxes.

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?

Austin's parks, in the seventies and eighties, were a place where people gathered. People don't talk to their neighbors anymore. While canvassing, I met a young man who moved here from San Francisco three years ago. His next door neighbor is also a young man you moved here from San Francisco three years ago. I asked if him if he knew his neighbor. He has lived there for three years and he has not talked to anyone. The Hill, a church on Woodland, hosted a Fourth of July Party on their lawn. Everyone was invited. Neighbors talked to other neighbors. Dogs were running, children were giggling. Sparklers and glow necklaces were lit. I felt connected. We need to encourage our Meet-Ups, neighborhood organizations, and other groups to utilize our beautiful parks to celebrate, have meetings, the more we use our parks, the more people will see the value of them.

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 don't know. I'm not sure that this relationship works, and I don't know enough about it to comment on it. Sometimes I worry that this is a way for the city to pass the buck. For example, a few years ago, the city could not afford to put on the Trail of Lights. They found a private business to fund it (I don't remember, maybe H.E.B.), and if memory serves me, the following year we did not have a Trail of Lights. Private partnerships can be fickle. I would need to do more research.

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?

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Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Absolutely. Great parks are so beneficial. Kids play, people exercise, and families come together and celebrate. Parks are equitable. People of every race and income level enjoy their parks. The city has a responsibility to make sure that every park is maintained and safe in every community.
