

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name	Mariana Salazar
What's your favorite park in Austin? Why?	My favorite park is the Davis White Northeast District Park, because it's the one closest to my house. As a mother of two young children, I value having a park that I can go to regularly with my children. We value that it's close enough that we can get to it biking. I would love for additional resources, activities, and planting to occur within this one and many other District 1 parks so they can become pillars of recreation and community building for our neighborhoods as well as active transportation options.

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?

If one looks at this PARD map for parks (<https://tinyurl.com/y7aj6yu2>), there appear to be a reasonable distribution of green spaces across the city. Yet, many of the green spaces marked on this map in District 1 are cemeteries. West Austin has Zilker, the green belt and botanical gardens. District 1 does not boast access to such big and well-maintained parks. We have some parks in District 1, which are a great resource for the community, but we can do better.

In Central Texas, with rising temperatures, we need access to parks and recreational water like pools, clean creeks or springs. I think that a great deal is being done but also a great deal should be done to increase our access to good quality, well maintained parks in District 1.

I want to see more parks in East Austin as well as stronger programming for community members, children and families in local parks facilities. For me, access to parks is a critical quality of life issue that affects everyone in Austin.

Unfortunately, the City's investment in East Austin parks and parks based programming does not meet the growing needs of our communities. Parks offer children safe places to play and provide families and communities spaces to connect with nature and gather as groups. Our parks should offer robust programming to people of all ages. Parks can also provide additional opportunities for active transportation by connecting bike lanes and sidewalks to streets.

I will work with the Austin Parks and Recreation Department and local nonprofit organizations, like Austin Parks Foundation, to ensure that park space is preserved. I would also like to see park space expanded and improved when it is feasible, especially in East Austin. The work Austin Parks Foundation has done in Colony District Park in partnership with St. Davids Foundation and the East Link project are the type of park development projects I would like to see happening all over District 1 and Austin. I would also like to see more inclusive play spaces for children of all abilities to enjoy in Austin.

I believe that with additional resources, activities, and planting, parks in East Austin can become pillars of recreation and community building for our neighborhoods as well as active transportation options. I will work to build public-private partnerships to support ongoing improvements in our parks, especially in District 1 and East Austin.

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?

As our city grows, it is critical that City Council is monitoring and planning for the rising costs of maintenance and improvement of parks and other vital city needs. The parks in East Austin, in particular, need improvements and modernization. In order to meet these ongoing and growing needs of our communities, we need to balance city revenue generation with maintaining affordability for our community members.

With this in mind, I feel that parks offer an opportunity for substantial public-private partnerships and leveraging the resources of major companies that are moving to Austin or have made Austin their home. As we are offering incentives for businesses to come to Austin, we need to also be thinking about how to help these companies become good stewards of our community and invest in the development and maintenance of parks and other quality of life services.

The same applies to real estate developers- developing properties for housing or mixed use should also take into consideration creating public spaces for people to enjoy natural settings and gather as a community. Our economic development as a city cannot overshadow our commitment to the development and maintenance of our local culture and natural spaces.

All economic development and land development within the City should also be seen as an opportunity to develop park spaces, preserve natural habitats for native species, and emphasize the connection of businesses or development to the community.

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 Engagement is a major part of how I hope to be effective as a City Council Member. Throughout my campaign, I have worked to get out to all of the areas of District 1, including those that are often outer lying and disengaged from City decision-making processes.

I feel strongly that engaging people about how to strengthen and build their own communities is critical for addressing inequities and making smart decisions for the future of our city.

My plan for engagement as a City Council Member includes getting out into the community regularly to learn more about the issues that impact District 1 most significantly and working with those most affected by issues to fully understand their needs and interests. This strategy includes hearing from community members about the parks and other city facilities needs and desires. My hope is to connect community leaders with those working within the city as well as nonprofit and other non-governmental partners to ensure a collaborative approach to planning and decision making around issues that are most relevant to the community.

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 can be a key pillar in building, improving and maintaining public parks. City Departments are often being asked to do more with less and make their resources stretch further. The only way this is possible is through partnerships with private organizations that can bring in additional resources and supports into the work of the City. These partners do not face many of the restrictions that local government agencies do and therefore can supplement the work of the city in important ways.

Private agencies can support community engagement, planning, construction and development, improvement initiatives and much more. I will work closely with many local stakeholders, from community members to the Parks and Recreation Board and private partners to encourage collaboration and identify opportunities for partnership in decision making. I will also work closely with these stakeholders to inform my own decision making around all parks related issues.

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 would like to do more research on the fee process and ordinance. From what I understand, there are some issues with the current Parkland Dedication Ordinance and I would like learn more from key stakeholders, like Austin Parks Foundation, about what can be done to improve this process in the future land development code updating process.

In general, I feel it is important to consider taxes and fees from the perspective of maintaining necessary revenue for the City of Austin to operate, while also considering the larger impacts of these taxes and fees to community members, key city partner organizations, and other stakeholders. We must search for a balance between maintaining a sustainable city budget and ensuring we are not creating overly burdensome ordinances that prohibit growth and improvement in our city.

Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Parks are an essential asset in any community, but especially in District 1 and in Austin. As our city grows, it becomes increasingly important that we preserve natural spaces and wildlife habitats, that we provide community gathering spaces for events, and that children, families and adults have spaces for playing and recreation.

The resources provided by our parks help build and strengthen the bonds of our community. Parks in Austin often offer the most accessible and affordable recreation for many people that might not otherwise have recreation options.

Parks can also be critical connection points for active transportation to help alleviate our increasingly congested roadways. Finally, parks and the trees and plants that make them so wonderful help improve our air quality and make this city healthier by offering free exercise spaces. There is substantial community benefit from having a strong parks infrastructure across our city.

Austin is fortunate to have so many beautiful park spaces. These assets attract people to our city, the events held in the park help build community, and the recreation opportunities they create are why many Austinites love to live here.
