

2018 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name	Mayor Steve Adler
What's your favorite park in Austin? Why?	Zilker Park. It's got Barton Springs, where I swam within minutes of first getting to Austin in 1978. It's got the Great Lawn, which hosts so many iconic events like the Austin City Limits Festival and the Kite Festival. It's got the amphitheater, which presents so many great productions like the summer musical series. It's got the Zilker Zephyr and excellent picnic grounds. I tell every visitor to our city to go there. It's really the heart of 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?	The city is making great strides on accessibility and key support comes from groups like the Austin Parks Foundation. Many of the projects on It's My Park Day are geared toward access, and it's a huge gift for our city to have that help. We also need city funds and I'm proud to have helped put together the bond package in November that will specifically benefit park ADA accessibility and safety. I'm also proud to have led in passing the 2016 mobility bond which, while improving access all around the city, contained historic levels of new funding for sidewalk, urban trail, pedestrian and bike network improvements that will improve equitable access to our parks.
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?	For too long, we've focused on the magnitude of the challenge, rather than concentrating on doing many meaningful things that can materially add up over time. We need to be more disciplined about timely doing maintenance and systematically catching up on deferred maintenance. I'm proud this Council just passed a budget that, for the first time in a while, fully funds maintenance and which designated \$1 Million of these funds for application in our parks. We need to continue the expansion of conservancies to help with park support and maintenance. I insisted upon and we were able to get on-going maintenance costs to be part of the initial finance and funding plan for the Waller Creek linear parks so as to not increase demands on the on-going parks budgets and that is a model we need to make routine. I'm also open to partnering agreements that would lead to more revenue for parks, if the right opportunity is identified and has community and stakeholder support. And we need to utilize finance options, as this Council just did as part of the recent budget just approved, to fund recycling bins with contractual obligations.

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 is great at community engagement, and my personal philosophy is that we should do more engagement in more ways. When this council first took office in early 2015, we had some groundbreaking community engagement exercises and taskforce work, some built around council meetings, and I would love to see more people get engaged. The key is going to where people are and not asking them to come to us. That means going to grocery stores and other places where people routinely are, more online communication and more solicitation of responses instead of just hosting meetings. Some of the city's innovative approaches involve knocking on doors, holding online forums, and calling residents to pre-arrange opportunities for them to give telephone feedback during tele-town halls by calling during broadcast meetings.

As to parks specifically, we should go where the people are -- the parks.

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?

Due to the crisis level of funding shortfalls that our park system currently experiences, I think that private partners can be crucial to building and maintaining a beautiful park system. There are several good examples that come to mind - Waller Creek and Republic Square. Thanks to those partnerships, the parkland will be much more vibrant than it would have been without the private and philanthropic investment. See answer to no. 3, above.

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 support them and would maintain them. Our community prioritizes parks and I do, too.

Do you consider parks an important community asset? Why?

Yes. In Austin, parkland is one of our most important assets, a core value, part of our culture, and part of our city's brand. Spending time in parks for exercise, activities, recreation, education, and leisure is about who we are. There are intangible and mental health benefits. Parks and preserved open space help protect water quality, air quality, and certain species. Parks and trees help us reduce the urban heat island effect. Parks support community and neighborhood building and cohesion by providing a gathering place and community center. Importantly, parks provide a place for children to be outside and for our pets to play.
