

TGN Candidate Forum Questions – Austin City Hall - March 25th, 2009

ISSUE	INCUMBENT QUESTIONS	NON-INCUMBENT QUESTIONS (if different)
<p>There is a lot of confusion about what is meant by a green or sustainable business practice. Over 85% of all firms in the Austin MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) which goes from Georgetown to San Marcos are designated as either micro or small business, employing 100,000+ people. The term “small business” is often misused, since the state and federal definitions do not match.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you define a small business? • How do you define a green or sustainable business practice? Please be specific. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>There is a state statute (Vernon’s Civil Statutes Chapter 2006), which requires an impact study of proposed legislation. These studies are intended to help determine economic hardships that might arise if certain laws are passed.</p>	<p>What is your top priority to insure that Austin becomes and remains a leader in terms of green and sustainable business practices?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you first determine the impact on all sizes of business? • How will you direct the City Manager to engage the entire business community in the planning, process to create initiatives that support green business practices? • How will you direct the City Manager to engage the entire business community in reviewing existing ordinances that discourage green business practices and to recommend changes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>Austin’s City Charter gives more powers to the City Manager and less to Council. This imbalance has resulted in past abuses by City Managers, who had potential conflicts of interest with regard to proposed ordinances, especially zoning. This has also resulted at time in the City Manager continuing to direct staff’s action, until this conflict of interest was made public.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will you do differently to insure this does not happen again? • What will you do to insure that the legitimate concerns of businesses and citizens are addressed in a timely manner? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will you do to insure that proper disclosure of conflicts of interest occur in a timely manner? • What will you do to insure that the legitimate concerns of businesses and citizens are addressed in a timely manner?

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<p>Conflicts can occur between efforts to be a “clean” and “green” city and some aspects of development. City Council has the power to change aspects of City Code to mitigate the negative impact of existing zoning that allows development without consideration of neighborhoods and existing small businesses. In addition, the Council has the power to amend the Code to address identified problems and loopholes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you propose and sponsor ordinance changes to mitigate the health, traffic, noise, waste and other impacts of large development near residential areas and IBIZ Districts (Independent Business Investment Zones)? • What would an example of something in the zoning you would like to change? • What accountability or oversight of the current process have you pursued to make sure that approved projects fully comply with City code? • Do you support the continued use of City funds for IBIZ Districts and other initiatives to support locally owned small business? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you consider to be the responsibilities of Council when it comes to large development near residential areas and IBIZ Districts (Independent Business Investment Zones)? • What do you consider to be the responsibilities of Council when it comes to disclosure of their conflicts of interest? • Do you believe the current development review process ensures all approved projects fully comply with City code? If not, how would you change the current process? • Do you support the continued use of City funds for IBIZ Districts and other initiatives to support locally owned small business?
<p>Economic development experts recommend keeping and using the money from the sales of product and services within the community at least seven times. These efforts are thwarted when contracts are bundled together to seek one vendor who can meet diverse needs. By its use, Contract Bundling reduces staff time but it also reduces the number of local businesses who can compete for the contract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you propose and sponsor ordinance changes to encourage more local purchases? • Would you give priority to businesses who follow green or sustainable business practices or are certified by the City • How would you propose to track and report on the City’s ability to keep money working for Austinites as long as possible before leaving the state or the City? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>The City of Austin has several programs to encourage the use of green practices by business. One of these is the SmartWaste program under Solid Waste Services. Unfortunately, it is not well known and staffed by a few dedicated people. The City also has a Small Business Development Program to connect small businesses to information and resources; however, coordination between programs like these is still missing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you propose and sponsor ordinance changes to find and encourage City departments to work together to encourage green certification • Would you fiscally support efforts to create more certified green businesses • Would you propose and direct the City Manager to ensure that certification requirements were meaningful but not too onerous for the smallest of businesses to complete? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>Through zoning, technology purchases and incentives the City could be more supportive of efforts such as “green workers” and to support “coworking” and telecommuting, etc.</p>	<p>What do you think should be Council and City’s role to make the City a leader in green and sustainable business for new and existing businesses of all sizes and revenues?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions

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<p>Projects that may have significant neighborhood impact often work their way through the city review process for many months before a formal application is submitted that triggers notification to surrounding property owners and neighborhood associations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you sponsor a change in the land development code that would require notification of a project when the City Staff is first engaged by the developer in discussion concerning the project? • Would you support changing the code to require a meeting between the neighbors, neighborhood association, local area businesses, the developer and city staff to identify community issues before staff begin reviewing the proposal? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>Growth in Austin has created significant tension between small business interests and large developer interests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions have you initiated to proactively deal with this tension, and what priorities did you base these actions on? • What do you believe the City Council can and should do to handle growth? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What actions would you take to deal with the tension between existing small business and developer interests, and what priorities would you base these actions on? • What do you believe the City Council can and should do to handle growth?
<p>Austin has stated it will be a major force in alternative/solar/renewable energy technologies. This means expanding our research, development, financial, marketing, and manufacturing capabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your plan to bring or attract the high value, leading technology expertise, capital, and companies to the Austin area, so that Austin firms and institutions supply the technologies and support for these renewable energies? • How will insure Austin is at the top of list for companies for these efforts? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>BACK UP QUESTIONS</p>		
<p>Local businesses are a critical component of the local economy and a key contributor to what makes Austin different.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is one key action that you as a City Council member would take to encourage and support locally owned and operated businesses? • What is the biggest mistake you think City Council could make on this matter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions
<p>Local Food / Local Food Policy for Austin/Travis County</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you see the local food situation in Austin - the need for local food, for support of local producers, markets, farms / gardens and what would be your plan/priorities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same questions