

**Questionnaire – Austin Candidates 2011**  
**ChangeAustin.org**

1. In 2006, the Texas Association of Appraisal Districts [released a study showing that large-scale commercial properties across Texas enjoy 40%, on average, property tax under-valuations](#). The same study concluded that high-end (\$1M+) residential properties enjoy 25% under-valuations. The result of these under-valuations are a nearly \$60M per year in missed funding for the City of Austin alone. (See details below, based on TAAD's 2006 Study). Meanwhile, Austin's ordinary homeowners are appraised at 98% on average and therefore carry a disproportionate share of the property tax burden. Travis County currently gives a homestead exemption of 20%. **Would you lead a City effort to: 1) Adequately staff the Appraisal District with appraisers, which would more than pay for itself, to properly appraise commercial developments and high end homes, and 2) Institute a homestead exemption for homes under \$1 million to help correct for this inequity in taxation? (Incumbents: Please explain what you have done on this issue since we informed you about it in the summer of 2009. We're going easy on you since this information was made available in 2006 by TAAD.) [Additional back-up can also be viewed here.](#)**

**MILLION DOLLAR HOMES**

AISD 1.227% or \$22.2M tax missed  
CITY OF AUSTIN 0.4571% or \$8.27M missed  
TRAVIS COUNTY 0.4658% or \$8.43M missed  
TRAVIS CO HEALTHCARE DIST 0.0719% or \$1.30M missed  
ACC 0.0951% or \$1.72M missed

**COMMERCIAL**

AISD \$165M missed  
CITY OF AUSTIN \$61.3M missed  
TRAVIS COUNTY \$62.5M missed  
TRAVIS CO HEALTHCARE DIST \$9.65M missed  
ACC \$12.8M missed AISD 1.227% or \$22.2M tax missed  
CITY OF AUSTIN 0.4571% or \$8.27M missed  
TRAVIS COUNTY 0.4658% or \$8.43M missed  
TRAVIS CO HEALTHCARE DIST 0.0719% or \$1.30M missed  
ACC 0.0951% or \$1.72M missed

2. Assistant city managers and city staff communicate vital city business with lobbyists using their private email accounts outside of public view. **Do you agree with this practice?** City Attorney Karen Kennard recently said that there is nothing the council can do to stop this practice because the city charter prohibits the mayor and council from applying personnel policies to city employees. But, the city charter says no such thing and the council has “all powers of the city” and full authority to determine policies and require the manager to execute them. **Will you lead the effort to pass an ordinance to require that all city business be subject to disclosure to the public regardless of the**

**messenger, device or account?**

3. All US rail transit systems are highly subsidized by taxpayers. **If you support the Mayor's rail transit system, how do you propose to pay for it other than using our system of regressive sales or property taxes that disproportionately hurt low and limited income citizens? If not, then will you work to prevent the proposal from being placed on the ballot and to defeat it?** (You are welcome to share your thoughts on an alternative plan to increase mobility in Austin in an affordable way.)
4. **Do you support giving more taxpayer money to subsidize the Formula 1 track or enterprise in any shape, manner or form?** Is yes, please be specific.
5. Existing residents are paying the massive costs of public infrastructure for new developments built to serve the newcomers to Austin in the form of roads, water, wastewater, schools, police, fire, etc.... For example: The city currently charges developers an average of \$2,000 for a water and sewer tap when the city's actual cost is over \$10,000. **Will you work to reduce that burden by charging the true costs of growth allowed by state law to those who benefit, so that growth begins to pay for itself?**
6. **Do you support the right of citizens, community groups and political organizations from across the city and from across the political spectrum to put their own charter amendment for fair geographic representation on the ballot, or do you think this is the purview of the City Council?**