

**Candidate:** Morgan Witt

**District:** 7

### **University Democrats Questionnaire - City Council Candidates**

**1) Given what will likely be typical silence from the State of Texas, and the host of other challenges Council must address, how important is it to you that Austin take meaningful action to combat the climate crisis next year? What do you propose the city should do?**

Austin's laid out many bold plans, yet we continue to sprawl, rely on fossil fuels, and see underrepresented communities suffer most from it. As councilmember, I wouldn't fight for one-off enviro-friendly projects — climate change demands much more substantive change. We need to reorient the ways we develop, grow food, create energy, and travel. I'd work to equitably transition away from fossil fuels: 1) Reduce car usage and transport costs and invest in accessible sidewalk/cycle infrastructure and robust public transit; and reduce parking minimum requirements. 2) Direct new development closer to downtown and pursue infill development, which means overhauling the inadequate land development code here in Austin. 3) Increase investments in renewable energy; ensure people have access to healthy food; conserve green spaces and farmland; invest in making old and new buildings more energy-efficient.

**2) The lack of federal leadership on COVID-19 has deepened many pre-existing inequalities. As a city, what do we need to do to ensure we build back better?**

Lack of federal leadership isn't the only reason pre-existing inequities have deepened and there's a lot we can do at the local level to address our long history of economic and social inequity. The City is often passive in community outreach and engagement, leaving out many communities. In the short-term, I'd work to proactively build partnerships with organizations and leaders in underserved communities to improve access to supplies, testing, translated materials, and resources; and also to build trust and rapport with residents.

In the long-term, on top of reimagining public safety, investing in public/active transit, making housing more affordable (and investing in anti-displacement and community resiliency programs), I also plan to focus on things like:

- **Education.** Our schools are the most segregated in the state. I'd partner with AISD to ensure equitable access to quality education and resources like nutritious food, Internet, mental health care, enrichment programs etc. I'd also partner with ACC to bolster the school-to-college pipeline for students.
- **Broadband Infrastructure.** The Internet is a utility, and essential for access to education and job opportunities. I'd like to partner with existing internet companies to subsidize high speed internet for low-income folks, families with students, students, etc.
- **Equitable, Affordable Healthcare.** This means building more healthcare infrastructure in underserved communities, implementing equity-in-medicine training/professional

development for healthcare workers, and prioritizing essential community services like testing, check-ups, and mental health.

**3) If elected to the city council, what will you do to ensure that every Austin resident has access to safe, stable shelter?**

As a renter and a former teacher, I know the struggle of finding affordable housing in Austin — especially for those entering the workforce. UT attracts so many people to Austin who, if we continue on our current trajectory, will have to leave Austin to find affordable housing options.

Others face even steeper challenges. As CM I'd address all facets of Austin's housing shortage. Our land use code (which is older than I am) needs to be updated to ease zoning restrictions and allow for more diverse market rate housing options, especially in Austin's central neighborhoods. We must strengthen renter advocacy programs, provide further incentives for higher density housing construction, and invest in Affordable Housing and permanent supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness. I'd also like to work with UT on building more UT-owned housing to accommodate the thousands of students, staff, and faculty who live here while at UT who need affordable housing and may not be served by West Campus housing.

**4) Recent protests have underscored just how many people don't feel safe when contacting the authorities. What concrete steps does Council need to take to ensure all Austinites are safe in our city? On what timeline?**

To truly eliminate systemic racism and discriminatory practices at every level of APD, the system needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Council first must implement the most urgent of tenets in the recent budget. Specifically, I'd focus on three things: 1) Decouple the 75% of non-crime related functions APD reform and reallocate them to appropriate civilian agencies. Specifically, the 911 Call Center and Traffic Enforcement, if diverted away from sworn and armed officers, would significantly reduce the risk of officer-involved injury/fatality. 2) Rebuild the cadet training program and establish leadership willing to adapt to the community's evolving needs — City Council must push for the removal of Brian Manley. 3) All processes related to internal investigation/prosecution, forensics, and support/victims services should be delegated to independent agencies to ensure accountability and transparency.

There's a lot of change needed and it's going to take a phased approach; the complete reimagining of the system will be a long-term and continuous process with no end date. We must prioritize the measures that invest in community services and reduce risk of harm for the community — through that work we can address the broader questions of public safety and policing to implement long-term, equitable solutions.