

UT Democrats

Dr Jennifer Mushtaler

Questions for 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?

The crisis is the global pandemic, the disproportionate impact to the Latin community and the disproportionate fatality rate in the African American community. Our city needs directed medical leadership and coordination to ensure testing, PPE to essential workers, coordinated vaccination plans following medical ethics guidelines. Our council needs a medical steward on the dias who understands and communicate between agencies. Our community needs clear leadership to enable us to open schools safely, get parents back to work and save many businesses. That is the current and very real crisis we all face today.

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

The city has allowed Austin Public Health to languish without funding and adequate infrastructure for years. Government, as its prime directive, must provide for those things collectively that we cannot do individually – public health, public safety, necessary infrastructure. We must adequately fund our public health department to have a modernized, fully staffed and readied agency. In between pandemics, this agency will work on chronic health issues that have disproportionately affected minority populations as well as the public at large.

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

I do not support the current policies for persons experiencing homelessness. The premature withdrawal of ordinances regarding public camping even after council was advised against by multiple agencies has fueled this public health problem during a pandemic. Austin has one of the highest per capita non-profit service organizations serving homeless for a city its size. Homelessness is a complex combination of medical and social issues that requires compassionate multi-disciplinary teams to provide people the opportunities for success. There are many reasonable and economical options for safe shelter provisions and we should partner our resources with proven entities.

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?

I do not support defunding or shaming our law enforcement. However, we must demand a police force that upholds the law and applies equal justice free of racial bias and undue force. These concepts are not mutually exclusive. We must root out violence and discrimination in our police. We must also provide for continuing education and "don't shoot" drills. We must incorporate de-escalation techniques in cadet education. Unfortunately, safer neighborhoods will not exist

without law enforcement so we need law enforcement to partner with us to establish best national standards for community-involved officers. We need to reinstate our cadet classes to have adequate staffing that will allow more senior officers to take up-to-date classes and we need an independent whistle-blower office for investigation of unprofessional conduct.