



2009 Houston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

On behalf of the Houston Association of REALTORS®, we commend you on seeking public office and for your candidacy to serve in Houston City Council.

Please complete the attached questionnaire and return it in Microsoft Word format via e-mail to anna@har.com by Thursday, July 23. Governmental Affairs Coordinator Anna Kong will contact you to schedule your interview after receiving it.

REALTOR® volunteers serving on HAR's Political Affairs Advisory Group (PAAG) will conduct candidate interviews for Mayor on August 5, At-Large, Positions 1 and 4 on August 6 and Districts A, F and G on August 10. Please note that these dates may change. Your completed questionnaire will be shared with the volunteers before and during your interview. It is our policy to request our volunteers to keep the information you provide confidential.

The PAAG's recommendations for candidate and TREPAC support will be presented to HAR's Board of Directors for their approval. Following the Board's approval, a TREPAC contribution request will be forwarded to the Texas Association of REALTORS®. HAR's recommended candidate will be notified of their TREPAC contribution and arrangements will be made for a TREPAC contribution presentation.

Due to the time constraints of the interview, PAAG volunteers will not be able to discuss all of the issues covered in the questionnaire. Please answer each question as you would in the interview, best reflecting your position on all of the issues. If need be, the volunteers will consult the questionnaire for your response to an issue that they were unable to cover.

We look forward to meeting you and working together with you to make the greater Houston area a great place to call home.

Sincerely,
Ray Holtzapple
Political Affairs Advisory Group Chairman
Dana Kervin
Chief Political Strategist

Please complete the following information.

Candidate's Name _____
Office Sought _____
Mailing Address _____
City, State, Zip Code _____
Phone Number _____ Fax Number _____
Email Address _____
Occupation _____

Have you ever sought previous elected office(s)? _____
If so, which office(s)? _____
Current/former elected official? _____
If so, which? _____

Campaign Website _____
Campaign Manager _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip Code _____
Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Campaign Fundraiser/Consultant Address _____
City, State, Zip Code _____
Phone Number _____
Email Address _____

How much has been raised? _____
What do you expect to spend? General _____ Run-off _____
Does candidate accept PAC funds? _____
Explain. _____

What are the demographics of the district you are seeking to fulfill?

Please provide most recent polling information with the results, when the poll was taken, and who conducted the poll.

Of all the issues that inspired you to seek public office, what is the one issue you feel is most important?

What major endorsements have you received?

What previous relationship have you had with the REALTOR® Association?

Have any REALTORS® endorsed your campaign? If so, who?

Private Property Rights

The respect for private property rights is paramount for our REALTOR® organization. The city utilizes deed restrictions for neighborhood protection. There are some groups that argue Houston needs a cohesive land use plan to further protect neighborhoods and subdivisions. Others feel that controlling density and historic preservation will also help to protect the character of the neighborhood.

What is your opinion on these issues and how they relate to an individual's private property rights?

What is your opinion of Houston's current methods of controlling development within neighborhoods?

In an attempt to create more housing opportunities in the urban area, the city is increasing density. What are your recommendations to manage the density?

Eminent Domain

Currently, the Texas Constitution permits condemnation of land for public use. Before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Kelo vs. New London*, public use was understood to be for parks, roads and other infrastructure. In light of this ruling allowing the taking of private property for economic development purposes, the scope of public use needed to be redefined. Legislation passed in 2005 attempts to protect private property from local governmental entities taking private property through the power of eminent domain for purposes of economic development. However, the bill is full of exceptions. This November, Texans will vote on a constitutional amendment to limit the public taking of private property.

Do you support the taking of private property through the powers of eminent domain for the purpose of

economic development?

Do you support a local government's taking of private property through powers of eminent domain and conveying that condemned property to another private sector entity or owner?

Rental Registration

Several cities across Texas have undertaken measures on rental property in their communities in an effort to monitor landlords and generate local fee driven revenues through rental property. Some of these actions are registration of rental property and the inspection of rental property with permitting and other subsequent fees associated with these measures.

Would you oppose such proposals to enact a rental registration or rental property inspection fee?

Local Real Estate Transfer Fees

As local officials look for new ways to fund city and county services, other states have developed proposals to enact new local taxes, including a proposal that places a flat fee or percentage sales tax on all real estate transactions (a.k.a., "real estate transfer tax").

Would you support a transfer tax on real estate transactions of any dollar amount or percentage either locally or on the state level?

Recently, local title companies and REALTORS® have encountered a new form of real estate transfer fee whereby developers or property owners place a deed restriction on property which requires a transfer fee to be paid to a designated entity or individual. HAR and the Texas Association of REALTORS® (TAR) were successful during the 80th Legislature in prohibiting these deed restrictions for private gain. However, homeowner's associations and non-profits entities were not addressed.

Would you support HAR and TAR in opposing a developer or non-profit's attempt at enacting such transfer fees established via a deed restriction?

Local Homestead Exemption

Currently, local taxing jurisdictions have the ability to grant local property owners an exemption for their homesteads of up to \$15,000.

Do you favor the \$15,000 local homestead exemption for your taxing jurisdiction as a way of providing property tax relief?

If the legislature gave local taxing jurisdictions the option of increasing the \$15,000 local homestead exemption, would you support such an increase?

Affordable Housing & Home Ownership

According to data provided by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2003, Texas ranks 45th out of the 50 states in homeownership. Houston's homeownership rate of 58% places it at 71st out of the 75 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. San Antonio is 43rd, Ft. Worth/Arlington 52nd, Dallas 60th, and Austin-San Marcos is ranked 63rd. Mayor Bill White has initiated Project Houston Hope, which will build affordable housing in six Houston neighborhoods that have previously seen hardship. Project Houston Hope is a partnership between the public and private sectors.

What, in your opinion, is the city's role informing, encouraging or providing affordable homeownership opportunities such as homebuyer education, homebuyer assistance programs, availability of affordable housing within the city?

Do you support Project Houston Hope? _____
How would you improve it? _____
What role can city government take to increase the rate of homeownership in Houston? _____

Where have you seen the city succeed and fail in this endeavor throughout the past several years? _____

What is your solution to back taxes owed on properties within the city? Tell us what you know about the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority. _____

Are you familiar with the City of Houston's Homebuyer Assistance Program? How would you make the program more effective? _____

Area Flooding and Drainage Issues

How would you as a City Council Member facilitate cooperation among agencies responsible for flooding and drainage issues in the greater Houston area?

The City of Houston currently has a water utility fee and wastewater fee. What is your opinion about how these fees are being used? Are they being administered in the most effective manner?

What are your recommendations to fund much needed flooding and drainage improvements? _____

Permits and Inspections

Even though efforts have been made to streamline permitting and inspection processes, there is still frustration in the builder and developer community regarding existing inefficiencies.

How do you think this situation can be resolved? _____

Appraisal Caps

Currently, Texas has a 10% cap on the increase in Assessed Values for residential homesteads. Several proposals in the Texas Legislature would artificially cap property appraisals at 3% or 5% annually.

Do you support an artificial lowering the cap on appraisals? _____

Further, some of these proposals would allow local-option elections that would allow for appraisal caps on a local level. Would you support efforts to lower the appraisal cap at the local level? _____

City Budget

Property owners are commonly targeted to subsidize budget deficits.

What is your opinion of the city's budget and budget process? _____

Are there any alternatives other than property taxes to raise revenue? _____

Effective Tax Rate

Currently, when a taxing jurisdiction other than a school district, increases its tax rate by more than 8%, the taxpayers' only recourse is through a burdensome petitioning process.

Would you support increased accountability to the public through an automatic referendum on tax rates that increase by greater than 5%?

Community Development Activities

Many community development programs have existed since the early 1990's. These groups such as the Avenue Community Development Corporation (CDC), Fifth Ward CDC, and Midtown Redevelopment Authority/TIRZ and other area management districts are neighborhood goal oriented. Over the last few years, these organizations have been active on issues affecting real property and public improvements in their respective communities.

What is your knowledge of or experience with CDCs and what is your opinion of their effectiveness?

What is your knowledge of or experience with Redevelopment Authorities/Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ) and Management Districts and what is your opinion of their effectiveness?

Economic Development

What will you do to constructively work with other elected officials, who may be from a different political persuasion to support the area's continued economic growth?

Transportation & Mobility

Multiple expansion transportation projects are underway and still an issue the City faces. METRO has begun to implement their 2025 Mobility Plan. TXDOT and the Harris County Toll Road Authority are operating separately on their own projects. There are many roadblocks in place for each of these initiatives.

How can you as a City Council Member facilitate/implement a transportation plan that will be most effective?

Energy Efficiency Standards

Some City Councils have proposed to mandate certain energy efficiency upgrades in residential properties which must be completed and certified prior to the sale of the property. These mandates would require all properties to be retrofitted to meet the standards of the mandates costing sellers thousands of dollars.

Would you support efforts to impose mandatory energy efficiency upgrades in existing housing?

REALTOR® Involvement

HAR's belief that REALTORS® should be involved in city government is reflected in the commitment of REALTORS® currently serving on the City of Houston's various boards and commissions such as the Archeological and Historical Commission, Houston Housing Finance Corporation, Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones and the Buildings & Standards Commission.

How would you support the placement or candidacy of REALTORS® to vacant positions?
