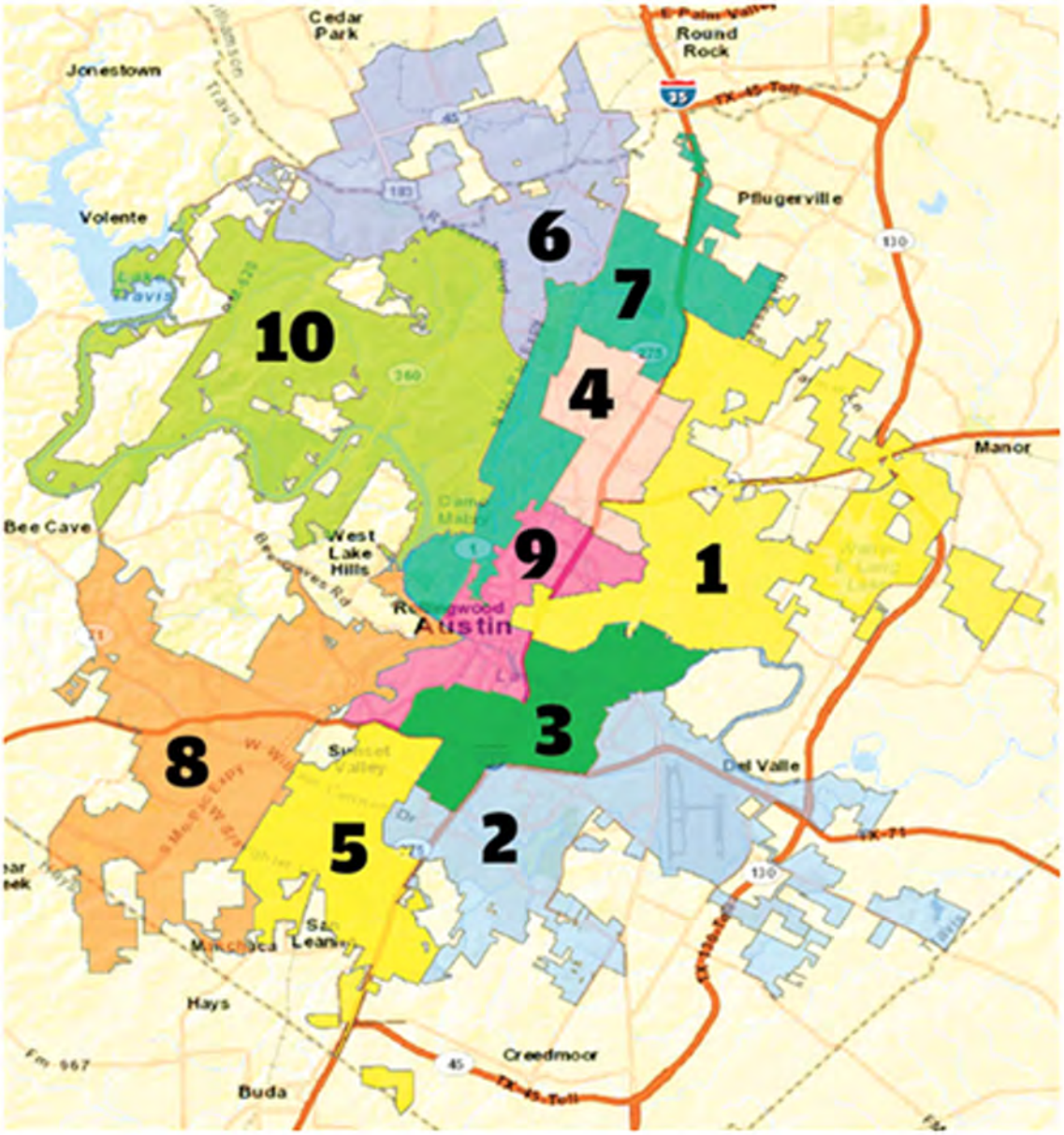
Task Force on Community Engagement
Member Profile Book



Created by Diane Miller, Pat Korbus and Juli Fellows
Civic Collaboration
7/17/15

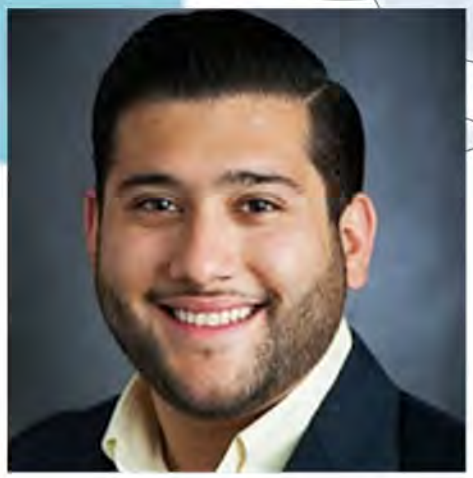
Personal Background

- Community involvement is a way of life for me.
- I started in 7th grade on Youth Advisory Committee in Pasadena, Texas.

Personal Goals

- I want to see more tactical ways to create public/private partnerships that make our City run.
- I also want us to build trust with all stakeholders so they know our processes are open and transparent.

Celso Baez III



Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- My personal background allows me to empathize with working class people.
- My parents were immigrants and started working at young ages.
- My years of involvement as an actively-engaged citizen give me a perspective that is practical and real.

I'd like you to know about District 5

- I rent in District 5 and recognize that I will never be able to afford to buy a home in that district.
- Working class people are being priced out of neighborhoods and perhaps even Austin.
- Regarding Austin as a whole, the conversations are now about trade-offs. It's hard to build consensus but we must forge and maintain relationships with different entities.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- I have focused on public engagement projects for Capital Metro for three years.
- Participated in Austin's Conversation Corps and continue to work with residents in Austin and surrounding communities regarding transit development plans.

Personal Background

- Passion for giving back to the community, do a lot of volunteer work.
- Help coach sports for my 3 sons
- Support HOA's sponsorship cub scout pack
- United Way volunteer through 3M
- My parents were active volunteers, it's how I was raised.

Personal Goals

- Make it easier for average citizen to understand what the city council is considering and doing. They should have their input heard without having to take personal time away from work and families to attend Council meetings.

Jason Bram

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Able to bring people together.
- Good listener
- Can pull lots of data together and drill down to find causes, and then help find solutions.

I'd like you to know about District 8

- The vocal groups don't always represent the citizens' multiple perspectives.
- My district may be an affluent area but we are also frequently neglected by city services -- roads needing repair, streetlights not functioning.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Longest serving member of Circle C HOA Board. Have actively worked to engage the neighborhood since moving here.
- Strongly connected in my district and experienced in bringing people together toward a common goal, including in my professional role as project manager with 3M.

Personal Background

- Socialogist, community activist since '70s, organizer for United Farm Workers with Cesar Chavez.
- Daughter of immigrant farm workers, lived in Ca.
- Organizing Latino & African American communities in East Austin around diabetes & obesity.
- Live in Colony Park.

Personal Goals

- Understand how others are dealing with challenges and strategies for changes.
- Develop a holistic model.
- Look at accountability & how to monitor what we want to change. How are City and County participating in change?

Margarita Decierdo

I'd like you to know about District 1

- Weakest employment opportunities
- Some communities lack basic amenities like transportation, quality schools, police security, developed parks and recreation opportunities, a clinic or hospital.
- Riddled with an oversaturation of low income housing.

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Understand how history of neglect & disinvestment impacts communities.
- Passion for being an agent of change to benefit others.
- Skilled at helping others understand the history of diverse cultures & how people have been denied human rights.
- Know that people doing engagement have to be willing to learn & be compassionate.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Significant experience as organizer working with different cultures to bridge gaps.
- Use engagement models to understand each community's culture, history, ethnicity and race and how we've gotten to where we are today.
- Developed engagement model for Colony Park to understand the area & engage diverse voices of the community.

Personal Background

- Came to Austin from Chicago area in 1997, seen Austin change into major metro area.
- Second generation American, strong believer in education as path to opportunity.
- President of ACC 1997-2004.
- Village trustee in Palantine, Ill.
- Active member of Austin Area Research Organization
- Previously served on Austin Chamber of Commerce Board.

Personal Goals

- Increase civic engagement & "non-elite" participation.
- Help average people participate without going to City Hall.
- Have city not feel distant & unresponsive
- Improve City's web site
- Develop actionable recommendations that don't sit on a shelf.

Richard Fonte

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Ability to convene and host meetings
- Listening and contributing to decision-making processes
- Dealt with many groups that have conflicting objectives.

I'd like you to know about District 10

- People are as concerned about affordability as others in the City, also about traffic.
- Many seniors concerned about property taxes and utility bills.
- Mix of levels of housing, not all high-end.
- Middle class area where not everyone is wealthy.
- Many people have lived here a long time and are seeing changes with new families coming in.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Knowledgeable about Austin demographics, future planning and education issues.
- Background in public relations.
- Experienced in outreach and engagement, particularly through Austin Community
- College referendum processes.

Personal Background

- Real estate development experience
- Nonprofit communications & fundraising experience
- Native Austinite
- University of Texas at Austin graduate

Personal Goals

- Facilitate a productive dialogue between "old and new" Austin.
- Make local politics feel relevant to a new population.
- Highlight the best parts of our community & work together to improve where needed.

Andrea Hamilton

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Represent city's emerging leaders & next generation of political advocacy.
- Communications background will help with messaging for public presentations by Task Force.
- Experience leading board discussions and helping people stay on track.

I'd like you to know about District 10

- The district is more diverse than people think.
- People hold a variety of views about not only how best to preserve our character but how best to shape the way Austin grows.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Founding member of EngageATX, a new regional nonprofit foucused on encouraging emerging leaders to engage in their local political process.
- Coordinating city-wide volunteer efforts for environmental nonprofits to raise awareness and participation.

Personal Background

- Been involved in grassroots activism/networking since 2007 with a focus on government accountability and the securing of individual rights.

Personal Goals

- Citizen involvement in government is of the utmost importance for a free and prosperous society.
- Relationship building and community engagement will inevitably lead to a better run city.

Chris Howe

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- I am committed to working to bring citizen participation to an all-time high through education and ease of access.
- Our country, with its faults, has an excellent framework - designed to protect individual rights and ensure that the people are sufficiently represented. Most, if not all, of our government's failings result from a lack of participation at the local level.

I'd like you to know about my community

- I don't live within the Austin city limits but do spend most of my time in the city for work and play.
- We who live in Manor face the same engagement issues and primary issues (except zoning) as those who live in Austin.
- A major concern is that people are being priced out of Austin.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Have a technical background that will be helpful in utilizing City resources to make citizen participation as functional and reasonable as possible.
- I do database work and have programming skills.

Personal Background

- Passion to build inclusive, equitable communities in our city.
- My roots are Mexican-American, I'm a visual artist & musician.
- Want Austin to be as inclusive as it could be, see those who are marginalized & neglected be recognized & included.

Personal Goals

- Ensure the City maximizes its reach & sense of community.
- Challenge and rethink our biases.
- Think about how all people can be engaged through forms of social/digital media.

Christopher Ledesma

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- As a graphic designer, I'm very interested in how we communicate better with the multilingual neighborhoods.
- Clear messages in the appropriate multiple languages are important.

I'd like you to know about District 4

- We have the highest concentration of immigrants in Austin - from Mexico, Central America and Asian countries.
- District is very diverse and truly multi-lingual.
- Also have highest concentration of ineligible voters and undocumented residents.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- I'm very involved in social justice and community work, most recently in the East Cesar Chavez area.
- As a musician, I see Austin as a cultural city, under threat.

Personal Background

- Spent a lot of time working in Austin public life.
- Writer and editor with Austin Chronicle for 15 years.
- Past 10 years have been with Hahn Public Communications where I'm the VP of Public Policy and Research.

Personal Goals

- I have institutional memory and insights to share.
- I want to help make sure this effort is worthwhile. The new Council is asking for help so they can step into new roles. I want to support that.

Mike Clark Madison

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Calm guy, good listener
- Good facilitator of discussions
- I find civic engagement fascinating and have a lot of patience for what others might see as arduous.
- I want to help the Task Force members feel that the time is well spent.

I'd like you to know about District 7

- Long tradition of being civically involved at multiple levels - from urban farming to working with Austin police.
- We may already have useful models for community-informed decision making.
- Folks on the East Side don't need to be told the challenges - they are living them. They don't want to just be "informed", they want to know what they can DO - what they can do to help or how to get help.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Have been member of Urban Renewal Board, Congress for the New Urbanism (Austin Chapter), Central East Austin Neighborhood Planning Team.
- Combination of experience as participant, observer and occasional designer of public processes.
- As a professional communicator, I can help put information together that is understandable and can equip people to be informed citizens.

Personal Background

- Product manager with Athena Health. Was with Austin Regional Clinic before that.
- Bachelor's degree in Biology & Chemistry- Tx State
- Part-time grad student at John Hopkins.

Personal Goals

- I want to help make Austin the best it can be. I've been in Austin since middle school & have seen this great city grow at an exponential rate.
- I want to make a difference. I feel a sense of responsibility to my city.

Irfan Syed

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Deep understanding of how to use social media.
- As Product Manager, I can help TF come up with ideas and map our project's life cycle.
- This is my first foray into city politics and I'm enthusiastic about contributing.
- I'm here to listen, learn and contribute to the best of my abilities.

I'd like you to know about District 6

- I've been told we have the largest population of Asian-Americans in Austin.
- It's a growing district because of the tech jobs in the area.
- We continue to have an influx of immigrants coming for those jobs and it will be important they are also engaged in city politics.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- Deeply involved in multi-cultural events and communities in Austin.
- Board member of India-American Coalition of Texas and other organizations
- I'm a "millennial" and have grown up using social media & technology. Hope to leverage that knowledge to help the Task Force come up with innovative solutions.

Personal Background

- Grew up in Austin, lived here most of my life - East, North, West and now South Austin.
- A parent, architect.
- A member of Baha'i faith

Personal Goals

- Give people an opportunity to have their voice heard
- Serve Austin, meet new people
- Do something a little outside my usual comfort zone.

Navvab Taylor

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Good listener
- Like working with others
- Like looking for creative solutions
- I see tasks through to the end.
- Experience with Neighborhood Plan, getting people involved and getting City to reach out to those who often are not heard.

I'd like you to know about District 5

- We are very varied.
- The district goes from Lady Bird Lake past Slaughter Lane.
- We have different issues, focuses, economic status.
- One common concern is water. We have many creeks and watershed issues.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- As an architect, I try to take a wholistic view and bring all the views to the table.
- I work with many and varied stakeholders - both public and private.
- In projects I try not only to serve the best interests of the direct stakeholders but of the larger community as well.
- I've done grassroots outreach as well, from knocking on doors to social media outreach.
- I spent 18 months working on our Neighborhood Plan, getting people involved.

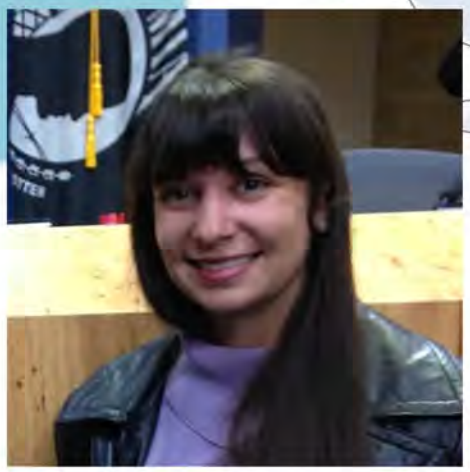
Personal Background

- A mother, an accountant
- Been very actively involved with the Southeast Austin community for the past 4 years.

Personal Goals

- I like to make things better.
- Best way for District 2 to get fair share of City services is to engage the community to ask for what they need.

Sara Torres



I'd like you to know about District 2

- We have a high percentage of Spanish-speakers.
- In early Nov 2014 we had fewer than 5,000 registered voters who had ever voted in any election.
- We are traditionally under-served, for a variety of reasons.
- It's a beautiful district.

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

- Good writing skills
- Computer skills
- I show up on time.
- Skills in crunching numbers
- All of the community meetings I've attended have taught me a lot about how the city operates and about my district.

Background Helpful to Task Force

- I've been a member of the Southeast Combined Neighborhood Contact Team since 2012.
- The Team is a bridge between the City and residents of three southeast Austin planning areas for implementation of the Neighborhood Plans and other community engagement efforts.

Personal Background

Personal Goals

Jose Velasquez

Knowledge, skills or qualities to contribute to the Task Force

I'd like you to know about District 3

Background Helpful to Task Force