



Austin City Council Candidate Questionnaire Responses  
District 8

October 9, 2018

Question 1	Why are you seeking this public office? (Please be brief)
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>I am running for City Council because I love my community, have the professional experience, and through over a decade's worth of community advocacy in District 8 - I understand my community's diverse perspectives and needs. I am also running because we currently have a council member who has divided our community and represented SW Austin as individuals who are afraid of immigrants and that do not support spending on important programs like senior transportation or HIV support services. Under the new single member district system, our community is still often ignored and deemed "good enough," when decisions are made on where to spend our limited tax dollars and so our seniors and kids do have have any resources except one pool.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>I didn't agree with my representation on Austin City Council, and I wanted something done about it. To be blunt: I'm running because I got tired of expecting someone else to fix it for me. I believe in inclusion, equality, opportunity, and empowerment of underrepresented communities. I believe in an Austin for all of us.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>I am the only candidate in the race with experience working at City Hall on a day-to-day basis. I have worked as a policy advisor for three different City Council Members. I know the job, I know what it requires, and I have reached a point in my life where I feel ready to take this next step. I have been pushing for progressive policies at the City level for over a decade. We've been able to achieve a lot, but I am excited for the opportunity to push further.</p>

Question 2	Please tell us why you are seeking the endorsement of SDA. Do you consider yourself to be a Democrat? Do you have a history of involvement in Democratic politics and/or LGBTQ issues? If so please briefly describe this history.
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>I am seeking the endorsement because I am a lifelong Democrat running to represent ALL of the people and voices of every age, gender, and economic status. In my twenties and early thirties I lived in San Francisco and Oakland where I was a member of the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club in order to show my solidarity. In 2004, when then San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom directed the city-county clerk to issue marriage licenses, I celebrated on the steps of San Francisco City Hall. In 2015, when Gay Marriage became legal, I celebrated on W. 4th with the Mayor and my friend Jimmy Flannigan. Here is my record of democratic campaigns that I have volunteered on in some capacity: 1994 - Eddie Basha for (Arizona) Governor Campaign, volunteer; 2000 - Johnnie Carter, Jr. for San Francisco City College Board, Campaign Manager; 2000 - John Kerry for President, Volunteer; 2004 - Patricia Kernighan for Oakland City Council, Volunteer; 2004 - Alberto Torrico for California Assembly, Volunteer; 2008 - Barack Obama for President, Volunteer; 2008 - Re-elect Valinda Bolton Campaign, Volunteer; 2009 - Perla Cavazos for City Council, Volunteer; 2010 - Re-elect Valinda Bolton Campaign, Volunteer; 2012 - Sally Hernandez for Constable, Volunteer; 2012 - Re-elect President Obama, Volunteer; 2014 and 2016 - Greg Casar for City Council, Volunteer; 2014 - Mandy Dealey for City Council, Volunteer; 2014 - Chris Riley for City Council, Volunteer; 2014 - Jimmy Flannigan for City Council, Volunteer; 2016 - Sally Hernandez for Sheriff, Volunteer; 2016 - Jimmy Flannigan for City Council, Volunteer; 2016 - Move Austin Forward Transportation Mobility Bond, Volunteer; 2017 - AISD School Bond, Campaign Finance Committee and Volunteer.</p>



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<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>I am a life-long Democrat and was a delegate to the Texas Democratic Party convention in 2018, attended the 2016 and 2014 conventions, and am a member of six Democratic clubs. I support LGBTQ equality in every way. I rallied at the Texas Capitol against SB6, I believe that the city of Houston was wrong to deny benefits to same-sex spouses, and I believe that we have to look out for LGBT youth.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>As an openly gay man, I have done my best to be a leader on LGBTQ+ issues at the City of Austin since I got involved in 2005 ( see list of accomplishments in bio). I believe I have been a member of the Stonewall Democrats for over a decade; I have served as a Democratic precinct chair; and I am a member of several other Democratic organizations.</p>

<p><b>Question 3</b></p>	<p><b>Do you believe LGBTQ individuals should be protected against discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>Yes. I believe LGBTQIA individuals should be protected from discrimination in both the public and private sector and will support any ordinance to effect change in Austin in spite of barriers at the State level.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>Absolutely.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>contractors to prove to the City that their corporate non-discrimination policies match the City's policies (incl. sexual orientation and gender identity) prior to being eligible to bid.</p>

<p><b>Question 4</b></p>	<p><b>If elected would you commit to appointing LGBTQ individuals to City Boards and Commissions.</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>Yes. I commit to diversity in my appointments and selecting the best person for the role based on knowledge or skill set.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>Yes, definitely.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>Yes. Over the years, I have consistently recommended LGBTQ persons to City Boards and Commissions from the Ethics Review Commission to the Planning Commission.</p>

<p><b>Question 5</b></p>	<p><b>Do you think that the Austin Police Department is doing everything it can to make its officers aware of and sensitive to the rights and dignity of Austin's LGBTQ citizens?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>No. It does a lot, and much more sensitive to the LGBTQIA community than many other cities, however I believe that there is always more than can be done in regards to sensitivity, bias, and mental health training.</p>



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<b>Paige Ellis</b>	I don't know enough about APD's practices on this particular issue, however, I would like to know how our police interact with the LGBT community before and after arrest, and if someone is arrested what is the policy for determining where that person goes – to a female or male holding cell and what restrooms they have access to.
<b>Bobby Levinski</b>	I have appreciated the openness of the Austin Police Department for dialogue every time an issue within our community has arisen, and I believe they have made significant progress in improving its policies and practices as they relate to interactions with LGBTQ individuals. APD, including the Austin Lesbian and Gay Police Officers Association, were great partners in the Hate Crimes Task Force, including the development of policies to better manage and respond to incidents of hate-bias affecting our community and the appointment of an LGBTQ community liaison. All that said, there is always room for improvement, especially with interactions with transgender individuals; training and education will continue to be important to prioritize as we move forward to ensure everyone is treated with equal dignity and respect.

<b>Question 6</b>	<b>If elected, would you act to increase recruitment of LGBTQ employees for the police, fire, and emergency medical services? What proposals would you suggest to make coming out on the job safer for LGBTQ employees?</b>
<b>Rich DePalma</b>	We need to maintain a diverse public safety sector that is representative of the community that they serve. I will support any initiatives to promote diversity in hiring and is inclusive of the LGBTQIA community.
<b>Paige Ellis</b>	Yes, an inclusive workforce starts with a representative one. My proposals would start by consulting with groups like Stonewall, Equality Texas, the Human Rights Campaign, and individuals with experience to implement best practices.
<b>Bobby Levinski</b>	Yes; focusing on recruitment practices is key, such as targeting LGBTQ career fairs and ensuring that we have employment policies and services that are attractive to prospective employees that are LGBTQ. With regard to coming out on the job, it is my hope that the appointment of the first openly gay City Manager sets a tone from the top down that diversity is not only desired but appreciated. In the cases where problems occur, we need to ensure our Human Resources Department is equipped to receive, handle and investigate complaints (and we have made improvements in this regard).

<b>Question 7</b>	<b>Do you think the City of Austin is doing enough to ensure equality for its LGBTQ employees? For example, how would you address organizational issues such as transgender employees transitioning on the job?</b>
<b>Rich DePalma</b>	I believe a lot of progress has been made, however, we must ensure tht training opportunities are ongoing and harassment is not accepted in any way or form. In addition, our Human Resources department needs to be consistently engaged and survey workplace climate and employee satisfaction. Additionally, I would ensure that there are safe paths to report grievances or violations either through Human Resources or our Ombudsperson.



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<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>Being an outsider from City Hall, I am not familiar enough with how the City of Austin currently treats its employees. However, I do believe that Austin (and all cities in Texas, for that matter) should have a non-discrimination policy that employs best practices for employees who are transitioning. Working with groups such as Stonewall, Equality Texas, and corporations that have observed or created successful policies.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>Whether we have adequately equipped our departments to make transitioning employees feel welcome likely varies by department, and I would welcome any discussion on problems that have been experienced. I believe we have addressed bathroom and changing room policies so employees may use whichever restroom they feel most comfortable using, in addition to de-genderizing single-stall restrooms. Persons undergoing transition are often dealing with a tremendous amount of stress, so it would be important to me that the City is not adding to that stress by making transition of pronouns, names and other details as easy as possible.</p>

<p><b>Question 8</b></p>	<p><b>If elected, would you continue to uphold the current requirement that a company that receives economic incentives from the City not discriminate against its LGBTQ employees?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>Yes, and I helped add to that by requiring domestic partner benefits, as well. Given the recent Texas Supreme Court ruling making gay marriages again second-class, I believe this is still an important requirement to ensure the jobs we are recruiting are available to all of Austin's families.</p>

<p><b>Question 9</b></p>	<p><b>How familiar are you with organizations, such as Out Youth, the Austin Gay &amp; Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, and AIDS Services of Austin that serve the LGBTQ community? If elected, would you support increased funding for the services organizations like these provide? What services do you think are crucial for LGBTQ residents?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>I am familiar with these organizations and would support preserving their funding. I believe that we could be doing more as a City Council and community to promote inclusivity for all ages. Programs like OutYouth are critical for Austin but limited in it's reach. I believe that with partnerships, we could expand programming through parks and recreation so that there is greater geographic accessibility and reach.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>I am familiar with most of these groups, in particular the Austin Gay &amp; Lesbian Chamber of Commerce and AIDS Services of Austin. I am very supportive of the role these groups play in our community and of course would consider an increase in funding for services provided.</p>



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<b>Bobby Levinski</b>	I am very familiar with these organizations. I have donated to OutYouth and ASA, and over the years, I have already helped direct City funding to the Chamber and ASA. I will continue to support these organizations and their funding. For the most part, the services provided to all residents are the same as those that are crucial to LGBTQ residents (from traffic relief to health services)--but the emphasis needs to be on equal access and opportunity.
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<b>Question 10</b>	<b>Describe a step you would take, or have taken, or a proposal you would make, or have made as a member of Austin’s City Council that would <u>specifically</u> benefit Austin’s LGBTQ community.</b>
<b>Rich DePalma</b>	I would support a comprehensive equity study or survey on our community resources and benefits program to ensure that there are no discriminatory practices employed anywhere from public health to public schools to public housing.
<b>Paige Ellis</b>	I would meet with leaders from Stonewall Democrats of Austin, Equality Texas, the Austin Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Human Rights Campaign, and the ACLU to better understand the experiences you have had with Austin City Council in recent years. This meeting can build relationships and inform my work from day one. I would then make sure that my appointments to boards and commissions are representative of our entire city, including the LGBTQ community.
<b>Bobby Levinski</b>	Please see my bio for my LGBTQ+ accomplishments. On my short list of things to do, I would like the City to adopt a true “Getting to Zero” plan to prevent HIV infections. Creating affordable access to PrEP will be key.

<b>Question 11</b>	<b>In the 85<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session, legislation was filed that would prohibit people from using bathrooms based on their preferred gender identity. Similar legislation is certain to be filed in the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislative Session. Would you be</b>
<b>Rich DePalma</b>	Yes. I support protections for our LGBTQIA residents and will certainly be willing to testify on behalf of any of my constituents. I am used to testifying against the state's grab for local control and would be proud to lend my voice for our LGBTQIA residents.
<b>Paige Ellis</b>	Yes. Bathroom bills – and any bills that target the transgender community – are completely unwarranted and ridiculous. Hopefully Dan Patrick will not be re-elected, but if we have the unfortunate situation to deal with him again, I will gladly stand up for the community and testify.
<b>Bobby Levinski</b>	Yes, and I lobbied legislators against this bill during the last session.



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<p><b>Question 12</b></p>	<p><b>In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the case of <i>Obergefell vs. Hodges</i>, ruled that all marriages be treated equally. In 2017, the Texas Supreme Court threw out a lower court ruling that said spouses of gay and lesbian public employees are entitled to government-subsidized same-sex marriage benefits. Do you agree or disagree with this ruling and would you maintain the City of Austin’s policy to provide employee benefits to all married employees?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p> <p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p> <p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>I believe that love means love and will absolutely support maintaining equal employee benefits to all married employees.</p> <p>The ruling against same-sex benefits was ridiculous and, in my opinion, unconstitutional. Yes, I agree with the City of Austin’s policy to provide employee benefits to all married employees.</p> <p>I strongly disagree with the Texas Supreme Court’s ruling, and I will fight vociferously to protect employee benefits for all married employees.</p>
<p><b>Question 13</b></p>	<p><b>Do you believe that public schools should institute rules and policies to prohibit harassment and discrimination against LGBTQ students?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p> <p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p> <p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>I believe that public schools should offer protections and policies that prohibit ANY harassment or discrimination to anyone and to be clear - that absolutely includes LGBTQIA students.</p> <p>Yes, absolutely. Especially considering that LGBT youth are extremely vulnerable and at risk to many factors, the Austin community needs to do everything we can to provide support for LGBTQ students.</p> <p>Yes.</p>
<p><b>Question 14</b></p>	<p><b>If elected, how would you stay informed of the concerns and interests of your LGBTQ constituents?</b></p>
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p> <p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p> <p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>I have a diverse group of friends that include many active LGBTQIA community members that help keep me informed but will always have an open door policy to all my constituents.</p> <p>I closely follow Equality Texas and the Human Rights Campaign, but as a Councilmember I would find it necessary to also be engaged with the LGBT Chamber of Commerce as well as city health services that impact the community.</p> <p>I talk to myself all the time. But seriously, I will continue to be engaged and active within the LGBTQ community, in addition to appointing individuals that can serve on boards and commissions to ensure concerns and interests are embedded into the City’s policy development.</p>



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Question 15	Have you attended functions in Austin's LGBTQ community and, if so, which?
<p><b>Rich DePalma</b></p>	<p>Most recently, I marched with the Travis County Democratic Party at Austin Pride Parade in August.</p>
<p><b>Paige Ellis</b></p>	<p>I marched in the Pride Parade in 2018, I attend the HRC gala in 2017, I attended the Progress Texas holiday party honoring Chuck Smith of Equality Texas in 2016, and I proudly celebrated at Rain on 4th Street after the Obergefell ruling in 2015. There have been many more events, but these are the major ones that immediately come to mind!</p>
<p><b>Bobby Levinski</b></p>	<p>Far too many to list...PRIDE, QueerBomb, AIDS Walk, summits, forums, conventions, protests, vigils, brunches, Sunday Fundays, Wigs &amp; Heels parties, all of the gay sporting events (I play for the Goldstars)...</p>