



Denton City Council Candidate Questionnaire

BUILDING COMMUNITY
Joining Together for Mutual Growth

This Questionnaire is a Word document which allows you to respond without regard to space limitations.

Candidate information

Name of candidate: Connie D. Baker

Office sought / party: City Council City of Denton, District 2

Date of interview: Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Candidate Mailing address: 3613 Fallmeadow St., Denton, TX 76207

Candidate Phone number: 940-390-7189

Candidate E-mail address: conway45@yahoo.com

Why are you running? For the exercise I am running to help giveback to the city/community I grew up in and to inspire future generations.

What are your three top priority issues?

1. To help keep tax rates low.
2. To promote economic growth in jobs and businesses.
3. To help keep the neighborhoods safe for the Denton residents

What is your prior or professional or community engagement with local REALTORS?

I know several of the realtors, but currently, I do not have any engagements with them.

Campaign Information

How much do you expect to spend in this race? Not sure, as this is my first big campaign.

How much have you raised so far? I have enough to work with currently.

Campaign treasurer: Torrance B Baker

Campaign consultant(s) if any: Justin Epker

Anything else you'd like us to know?

If the GDWCAR decides to support your campaign, would you accept funds from our Texas Association of REALTORS® Political Action Committee (TREPAC)? These funds have been contributed by local REALTORS as well as persons in the community.

REALTORS® are committed to our communities, our clients, and the public. We work to ensure private property rights are protected, and that Texans can buy, sell, lease, and enjoy real property. To accomplish those goals, we monitor and advocate on a wide variety of local, state, and federal policy issues. The following questions seek to understand your position as a candidate and potential lawmaker on issues that will impact housing and real estate within your jurisdiction.

Issue: Rental Registration

Background: Several cities across Texas have undertaken excessively restrictive 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.

Candidate Question 1: *Would you support or oppose proposals to enact a rental registration and/or rental property inspection fee? No*

Please Explain your Position in Some Detail:

I generally oppose rental registrations or creating fees or new bureaucracy unless there is a clear, vital need (such as for safety). Unless some compelling need is shown, rental unit inspections should occur when a citizen complaint is received by the City.

Issue: Short-term Rentals

Background: Short-term rentals, or vacation rentals, are typically defined as those rented for less than 30 consecutive days. These are typically single-family homes in neighborhoods of cities that are desirable to visitors.

Some cities have banned short-term rental use in their local development or zoning codes and others have limited the use under specific parameters or guidelines. Registration programs may be required for all short-term-rental owners or may be limited to those owners who exclusively rent their properties as an investment.

Candidate Question 2: *Would you support or oppose banning short-term rental use in your city?*

Oppose

Please Explain Your Position: I oppose an outright ban. However, short-term rentals need to play by the same general rules for safety, quality control, etc. that local hotels must abide by.

Issue: Eminent Domain

Background

Texas has ambiguous eminent domain laws that many believe are at odds with the state's philosophical support of private-property rights. The Texas Constitution limits the scope of eminent domain power and requires "adequate" compensation for the land on which eminent domain is used. However, there is a lack of consensus about the term "adequate" and the law does not address several matters related to eminent domain.

A few examples that may not be considered in determining "adequate" compensation could be:

- 1) Requiring fractional division of property that may impact the value of the remaining portion adversely.
- 2) Destroying (acres) significant stands of trees.
- 3) Creating a traffic pattern that impacts the value of a remaining portion of property.

Candidate Question 3 *Please share your thoughts on eminent domain, including property-owner rights and what constitutes an "adequate" offer.*

Please Explain Your Position: After Senator Craig Estes' Bill several years ago changed the eminent domain process to force government to show its appraisal up front and offer that to the owner, it helped this situation. If negotiations fail, the system of having citizen panels mediate settlements works well in balancing between what the two appraisers present as fair or "adequate". I feel that allowing for flexibility in coming up with fair value is critical because every property has unique traits to be taken into account, and creating more and more rules, tends to eliminate that flexibility.

Issue: Tax of Professional Services

Background

As long as policymakers look for ways to restructure the tax system, Texas REALTORS® will actively participate to ensure the buyers, sellers, and owners of real estate, and real estate professionals, have representation. Texas REALTORS® is committed to working with the Texas Legislature to create a tax policy that is just and fair to all Texans.

During previous legislative sessions, there have been various proposals advocating new taxes. These taxes range from a state income tax, expansion of the sales-tax base, additional taxes on business, and "sin" taxes, among others. In recent years, the Texas Legislature has debated proposals to expand the sales-tax base to include professional services, which currently have certain exclusions.

Candidate Question 4:

Would you support a tax on professional services, such as commissions paid to a real estate broker or fees paid to an accountant or architect?

Yes No

Please Explain Your Position: Too many taxes tend to negatively impact real estate sales, which is bad for our economy.

Issue: Property Taxes and the Appraisal Process

Background:

Creating a budget and adopting a property tax rate to support that budget are major functions of locally elected officials in Texas.

In simple terms, the Texas property tax system is based on an equation that multiplies a property's appraised value by locally adopted tax rates. In recent years, Texans have seen skyrocketing property tax bills due to rapid increases in appraised value and little or no change in their tax rates. In addition, over the last decade, many local taxing jurisdictions have seen their budgets increase over 60%, far outpacing the rate of inflation and population growth.

When appraisal values increase, taxing jurisdictions can hold the line by adopting a tax rate that guarantees no new revenue will be realized from existing properties, instead relying on new or improved properties to generate new revenue. (Formerly known as the "effective tax rate," new property tax laws resulting from Senate Bill 2 from the 86th Texas Legislature will rename this the "no-new-revenue maintenance and operations rate.")

Some taxing entities assert that if they do not change or even lower tax rates, but taxpayers' overall bills go up due to an increase in the appraised value of the property, this does not constitute a property tax increase.

Candidate Question 5: *If a property owner's tax bill goes up, does that constitute a tax increase?*

Yes No

Please Explain Your Position: It is generally a tax increase. Of course, appraised value increases are far better than erosion of value and demonstrate that the local economy is doing well. With recent legislative changes, taxes are frozen for over 65 year old homeowners and local governments are effectively prevented from significant increases in tax (adjusted for increased), even for inflation.

Candidate Question 6: *Do you support increased transparency measures, including (but not limited to) better notifications and explanations of terms, to ensure property owners fully understand why their property tax bill increases or decreases, and would you work to implement such changes in your city?*

Yes No

Please Explain Your Position: Giving taxpayers the fullest disclosure of tax bills is critical to fair government.

Candidate Question 6: *While considering the relationship between local taxing jurisdictions (city, county, or school district) and the Central Appraisal District, what role do you feel the Chief Appraiser/Central Appraisal District should play in the budgeting process for your city?*

Please Explain Your Position: The Chief Appraiser/Central Appraisal District must set the value of all properties each year which fund the appraisal district according to a formula that is based on taxes.

Candidate Question 7:

The State of Texas does not require the disclosure of sales prices for real property transactions. However, for many years, many local governments and central appraisal districts (CADs) have argued in favor of mandating such disclosure.

Would you be in favor of any proposed legislation to mandate the disclosure of the sales price of commercial and residential real estate transactions?

Yes No

Please Explain Your Position: This is a State issue and has some merit either way. The appraisal system in Texas is based on true, fair, and accurate market value, which can only be best determined by disclosing actual sales prices. However, I am against new regulations unless a compelling need is shown. I have not seen that need at this time.

Background

State law allows for an Agriculture Special Valuation (often mistakenly referred to an ag exemption) on certain lands, which can lower the property's tax liability. The tax savings a property owner receives depends on the current market value of the property and the type of Ag Valuation the landowner holds.

However, the law also enables local governments to collect substantial "rollback" taxes on agricultural land when the owner stops using it for agriculture. This penalty is commonly called a rollback (or lookback) tax because it recaptures the taxes the owner would have paid had the property been taxed at full market value in previous years.

A law passed by the 86th Texas Legislature reduces the lookback period from five to three years and reduces the interest from 7% to 5%.

Candidate Question 8:

Although modified in recently, state law allows local governments to collect a "rollback" tax on agriculture land when the owner stops using it for agriculture as a disincentive for taking the land out of agricultural production.

Do you favor repealing the rollback tax applied to agriculture land when the owner stops using it for agriculture?

Yes No

Please Explain Your Position: This is also a State issue. As I understand it, the only reason rollback taxes exist is to recapture true market value that everyone else must pay on land. "Ag use" designation is a program to assist primarily farmers, which in turn benefits everyone by keeping food prices low. I support this incentive program, and support the new rollback reductions by the State to make it fairer.

Issue: Infrastructure Overview

Recent State and Local Background

Water – Since the passage of Proposition 6 in 2013, a ballot measure that created a long-term fund for water and water infrastructure projects, Texas REALTORS®' water policy has focused on removing statutory and regulatory barriers to implementation of the nationally renowned Texas Water Plan.

Transportation – As a general philosophy, Texas REALTORS® believe in a return to the pay-as-you-go system for public access (non-tolled) roads, which served this state so well for so long. Recently, lawmakers have been reluctant to increase registration fees or the gasoline tax, so the state moved toward a system of bonding and toll roads. That unsustainable system is ending, as the state's bonding capacity is essentially exhausted and there is a general distaste for creating more toll roads.

The resulting problem is significant: In 2013, the Texas Department of Transportation suggested it would need an additional \$5 billion annually to maintain current roadway conditions. In 2014, Texas voters approved Proposition 1, a measure designed to take advantage of the state's oil and natural gas boom by providing a portion of the oil and gas severance tax to the State Highway Fund (Fund 6). In 2019, lawmakers extended those provisions to ensure no interruption of funding for 10 years.

In 2015, voters approved Proposition 7, a referendum that, among other things, dedicated \$2.5 billion of existing sales tax revenue to the credit of the State Highway Fund for the maintenance, construction, and expansion of non-tolled roadways.

Energy – Texas companies, competing in the global marketplace, also need adequate, reliable, and reasonably priced energy to keep Texas a business-friendly environment. Without access to such energy, the economic prosperity of Texas and its citizens is threatened.

Candidate Question 9:

The Metroplex, including Denton and Collin County is expected to approach 20 million people by the year 2050. Additionally, the A&M Real Estate Center predicts Denton County's population in 2050 will be over 3,000,000 people. This growth will balloon infrastructure needs for the entire area, including the city of Denton, exponentially.

Local Infrastructure will also be a critical issue as time progresses, maybe even more than it has been in the past. Do you feel that we are keeping up with infrastructure development for the city of Denton

now? What, if anything, do you think is needed to prepare the city and this general area for the growth that has begun?

Please Explain Your Position: In some respects, Denton seems to have stayed on top of infrastructure issues, while in others it may be slipping. We have done well in public transit for the long-term population growth. We have received major highway improvements recently as well. We are trying to maintain local roads; however, we need to require new approaches for sustainable funding. Denton has been a leader locally and nationally regarding developing future water services/conservation. Also, having DME is a critical asset for local control over, energy efficiency, cost to rate payers, and to plan for growth DME must plan for the long-term growth of the community.

We appreciate your time and look forward to seeing you on March 23rd, and a continuing relationship! Please share any additional comments or questions you may have.