

City of San Marcos Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire 2023

Responses from Candidate: Atom Von Arndt

October 2023

1. Please describe your experience, areas of expertise and leadership style and how you feel they make/will make you an effective Councilmember in San Marcos?

I've been in sales for the last 25 years and that skill set is really based around 2 things. Listening and Negotiation. In my opinion that's really not far off from the role of elected officials, but in this case I'll be listening to and negotiating for the residents and the businesses and city hall. I've been talking to people professionally for many years and I feel like I can do a lot of good for our town.

2. What do you see as the biggest challenges our local businesses face? What can you do as a Councilmember to help overcome them?

The biggest challenges we're all facing right now is inflation. That combined with the increase in rent prices and the seasonality of our economy makes it a difficult landscape for local businesses to stay afloat. I'd love to find a way to keep rent prices in check but that's above my pay grade. One thing city hall can do is help manage utility costs when creating the city budget. If we can help stabilize that it should do a little to help stopping businesses from being choked out.

3. How will you balance citywide discussions and bridge the gap between private citizens and the business community when they are at odds on issues that impact the business/economic environment or other vital issues that affect San Marcos?

Community outreach, I've been told by others in this position, can be a difficult thing in this town to organize. My opinion is if there are going to be conflicts between residents and businesses the first thing to do is get them all in a room together. Town Halls are a great tool but it's about making sure enough people know that they're happening, understand how important they are and are motivated to get off the couch and attend. I think there's a huge opportunity for businesses to "sponsor" these town halls by having them take place at their establishments. Have these done monthly and in different neighborhoods, I think it will help citizen and business owner alike feel that they're truly part of a community.

4. What can the City do to encourage existing business growth and new business attraction?

I feel if we can get the businesses that we have to stay afloat, it will attract more of the right kind of investments into our town. A lot of business move into San Marcos and go under within one to two years. Let's find a way to incentivize storefronts staying open, to get more moving in. I'd like to see the city bring in more grocery stores. Whether it's a big chain like Whole Foods or more locally owner markets, there is a need for groceries that go beyond the college diet. Another thing I want to take a close look at is the large number of vacant spaces in our historic downtown. There are multiple examples of prime real estate that have remained unoccupied for years that could be stopping money from coming into our economy.

5. If elected what will you do to further/strengthen the relationship between the City of San Marcos and Texas State University?

The single biggest entity in this town is the college and we really form a symbiotic relationship. It's important that they work closely with city hall to make sure that we're all being stewards of the beautiful patch of land that we call home. I have some questions about the water use of the college compared to the rest of San Marcos but I have some ideas of what they can do, along with the city, to help incentivize businesses that are catered to their students.

6. What improvements do you believe are needed for adequate transportation infrastructure in San Marcos?

Bullet train, anyone? But seriously, I think a bigger push on the visibility of our current Carts system and the busses that the college provides could be huge. We need to promote it, let people know that it's there. In terms of improvements I'd like to see more available hours on the schedule. Having it run into the night and on weekends could encourage more foot traffic downtown and allow a reliable means of travel for those that live outside the city center.

7. A major issue facing the region is housing availability, lack of workforce housing, and housing affordability and diversity, if elected what actions would you take to create more housing choices in San Marcos?

First and foremost the majority of the building in not just the heart of the city but the outside neighborhoods as well, needs to focus on affordable multi family housing. The rent by the room student housing model needs to come to an end. It inflates rent prices in the surrounding areas and is pricing a lot of people out of their homes. There is a lot of opportunity for businesses to pop up along side the development happening in annexed areas, we need to make sure those places are just as focused on affordable housing so people can live close to where they work. All areas of our town should be able to comfortably house people from all walks of life.

8. If you received a \$1 million grant to use for the city any way you wanted, what would you do with it and why?

I'd say a good portion would go to conservation and river clean up. We live in a truly magical place and it's our responsibility to keep it that way. In regards to helping local businesses maybe offer city funded incentive plans for new businesses or after a business has stayed open for a few years. It wouldn't have to be extravagant but any little bit can help a small company stay afloat.

9. Please use this opportunity to provide any additional information you would like members of the San Marcos Area Chamber of Commerce to know.

I'm just a guy raising a family and I hear the concerns of my neighbors. I have some experience talking to people and I'm willing to step up and do what I can to help the city that I love. If I don't win this year I'm gonna run again next. Every time I run I learn more and I meet more of our community. I want people to know their voices will be heard in City Hall.