

City of San Marcos Mayoral Candidate Questionnaire 2024

Jane Hughson

1. Please describe your experience, areas of expertise and leadership style and how you feel they make/will make you an effective Mayor for the City of San Marcos Council.

I have almost 6 years of experience as Mayor, navigating through some of the most interesting agendas I've seen in my years in San Marcos politics. As Mayor, I approach solving issues by collecting data, listening, asking questions, and collaborating with others. I seek compromise whenever possible whether it is with the applicants, the public, or council members. I ask council members and staff for their opinions and expertise on various topics in committee and council meetings. I meet with developers who plan to bring investment to our community through commercial uses or various types of housing. I have served on several city boards, commissions, and committees. I have also served on many community service boards and as president of five local organizations. In addition, I am also a member of multiple regional governmental boards regarding transportation, water, and emergency services.

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

Businesses, especially small businesses, need cash and customers. The city can assist through building a climate for businesses and providing several grant and business support programs.

We have an Economic & Business Development Manager and a Downtown Manager who administer our grant programs which include: Business Improvement & Growth (BIG) Grant Program, Facade Improvements BIG Grant, Minority Business Stabilization Fund, and the new Legacy Business Program.

We promote tourism that benefits hotels, restaurants, and other businesses through our Main Street and Convention and Visitors Bureau.

We are now doing the Business, Retention, and Expansion visits previously done by Greater San Marcos Partnership staff.

Through a unique partnership with BCL of Texas, the ThinkBIG Business Investment + Growth program offers no-cost, one-on-one customized business and financial coaching and classes.

I would continue the successful promotions and grant programs.

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?

I listen to residents and the business community who want to talk about making our city better. I review their suggestions to see how it may fit into our city's goals and plans. Often, there is a concept on which we can agree, then we can

continue the conversation. Our staff does an excellent job of outreach to the public for large projects such as the Comprehensive Plan, Area Plans, Historic preservation, etc. to obtain as many suggestions and opinions as possible. I read them to see what can work for us. I reach out in some cases to better understand the suggestions. I bring amendments that can make the project better.

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

Our membership in the Greater San Marcos Partnership, is a good start with outreach and response to those who want to develop in our city. We have an Economic & Business Development Manager who assists local businesses and those who want to come to our city. We offer tax abatements depending on the jobs created and/or sales tax generated. In 2023 we zoned about 150 acres for industrial and commercial use and much of that included annexation. Planning and Engineering each offer one-on-one pre-development meetings to explain the process and answer questions from prospective businesses at no cost

To address lags in permitting and plan approval last spring we hired several contractors to help us be on time with our responses.

We also partner with Austin Community College for workforce training in city facilities.

We should continue doing what is working today.

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

The relationship is very good now. Our City Manager and staff meet with university officials on a regular basis. We are ready to assist when needed such as planning for the Presidential Debate. The debate was cancelled but the work planning to handle the large crowds and security is beneficial for future events. We assist with planning and traffic management for August move-in to residence halls and football games. Dr. Kelly Damphousse and I chat informally in addition to scheduled meetings. City Manager Stephanie Reyes and I are included in the university Master Plan process and they have accepted input from us. In addition, the university is part of our youth plan, the Core Four. These are just a few examples of cooperation between us. I would continue the conversations and planning efforts.

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

We address a number of various transportation needs in our city every year. We have our Transportation Plan which includes the Thoroughfare Plan that specifies future roads throughout our city and beyond. Developers build the streets needed to serve the houses and/or businesses they build. Of course, there are existing streets to improve, repair, or widen every year. We have installed miles of sidewalks in recent years and our five-year plan is full of future projects. We expanded the Spin scooter program to areas east of IH-35 now that we have a

good way to get across IH-35. In some areas we have converted vehicle lanes to bicycle lanes to provide more safety to bike riders without adverse effects for vehicles. We continue to work with the university to coordinate their bus system with ours. We will continue all of those efforts in the future.

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?

This is a major issue across the United States and Texas is no exception. Texas is short 300,000 housing units according to one news source. Actions I have taken includes supporting changes to our Land Development Code (2018) to allow for more diverse housing types, smaller lots, new zoning districts, and accessory dwelling units to promote home ownership and affordability. We also have our first-time homeowner assistance funding.

In addition we are spending federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan and Community Development Block Grant programs to provide for housing repair and rehabilitation to keep homes livable.

We have approved over 3,000 apartments for low-income residents in the last few years.

We work with Workforce Solutions, Rural Capital area and we support workforce training through some funding and classes taught in city facilities.

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 would use it to assist businesses and residents in the same manner as we have over the past few years. The City received almost \$3 million in Corona Relief Funds and over \$18 million through the American Rescue Plan.

We provided funding to help individuals and businesses. The Chamber assisted with distributing the Small Business Assistance funding of \$200,000. In addition, we increased our usual Human Services funding of \$500,000 to \$1 million for one year. Funds were also allocated to help our social service agencies assist residents with food, housing, and utility bills. In addition, we provided funding for the Convention and Visitor Bureau for advertising to support the hotels during/after Covid along with our restaurants and others who benefit from tourism. We continue to provide funding to assist small businesses and we are also addressing homelessness by funding case management services.

9. Please review the San Marcos Chamber's "Government Relations & Advocacy Guiding Principles" document. Do you agree with all of these statements? Please describe below any statements you do not agree with.

I agree with the concepts and find that they coordinate with the City's Strategic Plan Goals which include Quality of Life & Sense of Place; Economic Vitality; Public Safety, Core Services, & Fiscal Excellence; Mobility & Connectivity; and Environmental Protection. In my years as a councilmember/mayor I have supported incentives for businesses; workforce education; public safety; flood

prevention; transportation in multiple forms; various housing options and ways to make housing more affordable through the Land Development Code; housing rehabilitation; acquisition of water (I am on the Alliance Regional Water Authority Board) and conservation methods such as making reuse water available for industrial use. Regarding inclusiveness in planning, I ensured that the Comprehensive Plan committee was appointed by the city council with membership consisting of residents and business people. I also support incentives for businesses and I supported becoming a Film Friendly city.

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

I have been an individual member and strong supporter of the Chamber for over 30 years. When the Chamber applied for the permit to expand the building, it was discovered that the Chamber should have been paying rent since the time their lease to use city property was signed. The city did not send any notices, and the Chamber did not know payment was due. The funds owed, including penalties, would have consumed much of the funding raised. I convinced the council that we should zero out the amount owed, and council agreed.

I chaired the Governmental Affairs and Natural Resources committees and have served on others. Before I was elected, the council wanted to heavily restrict signage for businesses. I conferred with the sign businesses in the Chamber, learned the state and city rules and presented changes to the council. I was successful on most of them.

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