

City of San Marcos Councilmember Candidate Questionnaire 2026

Jane Hughson Candidate for City Council, Place 3

1. Tell us about the experience, strengths and leadership style you would bring to City Council, and what you would most like to accomplish during your term?

I have ten years of experience as a councilmember working alongside the mayor and other councilmembers. I have experience as Mayor and previously Planning and Zoning Commission and the Ethics Commission.

I have also been president of five local organizations.

I listen to all sides, consider the applicable data, ask questions of those who have answers, and collaborate with others to determine the best path forward. I will change my mind if the information available supports a different conclusion than I held previously. Other times I may find a compromise.

For example, regarding the recent data center proposal, I met with both the developer and with those in opposition. I learned from both sides, conducted my own research, and concluded that the massive scale of the proposed data raised too many questions and there were too many unknowns. Based on that information, I voted no.

2. San Marcos continues to grow, but the City also faces difficult budget decisions. Where do you think the greatest opportunities are to control costs, improve efficiency, or better prioritize spending while maintaining quality city services?

The City Manager and her team have already done a great deal already to control costs and improve efficiencies, so finding additional significant savings will be difficult without detrimentally affecting services for our residents.

Some costs cannot be reduced because of safety regulations, legal, and other requirements.

Department maintenance and operations budgets will be flat for the third year. With rising costs, that effectively means fewer dollars are available to provide the same level of services. We have already reduced payroll by leaving some positions unfilled, including positions vacated through the retirement incentive.

Technology has helped us provide some services more efficiently and, in some cases, accomplish more with fewer employees. However, technology comes with a significant cost of its own.

We will continue to analyze programs and services for our residents against our Strategic Initiatives and identify efficiencies to ensure we are prioritizing our limited resources effectively.

3. If the City received a one-time \$10 million grant with no restrictions, what would be your top priority for investing those funds and why?

A one-time \$10 million grant should provide lasting benefits to our community. I would begin by paying down some of the city's debt, helping reduce future costs, and potentially lowering taxes for residents.

I would also invest in new neighborhood parks, especially where children have little or no access to park facilities.

I would establish a housing foundation to build homes available for purchase to low-income families. Payments would go into the foundation.

Supporting our local economy is very important. I would create a fund to assist small businesses with start-up costs and on-going business counseling, while expanding workforce programs with Austin Community College and other education providers for technical licenses and certificates.

We could also provide one-time funding to social service agencies for essential purchases, such as vehicles, and support those agencies providing case management to those who are experiencing homelessness so they can rebuild independent lives.

4. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing local businesses today? What can the City do to help existing businesses succeed and attract new employers and investment?

I believe that new and expanding businesses can benefit from both funding and expertise. We offer grants through our Economic and Local Business Development Department and our Main Street program, including: Business Improvement & Growth (BIG) Grant Program, Main Street Façade Grant, Design Assistance Program, and the new Legacy Business Program.

We also offer Business Retention and Expansion Services, Business Location Services, Downtown New Business Onboarding, and Social Media Promotion and Education.

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

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

We also offer training for employees through a variety of programs and partnerships to help employees develop new skills and upgrade existing skills.

I would continue the successful promotions while working to support existing business to be successful.

5. Growth continues throughout San Marcos, but infrastructure does not always keep pace. What infrastructure investment should be the City's highest priority over the next five years? How would the City pay for it?

Our highest priority must be maintaining and improving the systems, streets, sidewalks, electric lines and pipes that are already in place plus planning for future maintenance of the infrastructure installed by developers. We have a 10-year Capital Improvements Plan that has identified and prioritized existing and future needs and projects.

Utility improvements are funded through utility rates. Streets, sidewalks, parks, and other public facilities are funded through the general fund which is sourced by primarily by property and sales taxes.

Infrastructure is more than pavement and pipes. Our residents also expect excellence in our library, parks, and greenspaces. These are important investments in our quality of life and will remain priorities as we manage growth.

Funding is always a difficult choice when the council adopts a budget and sets the tax and utility rates to support it.

6. Housing affordability and availability continue to be challenges in San Marcos. What actions would you support to increase housing choices while balancing infrastructure, neighborhood and community concerns?

I support expanding housing choices as evidenced by my vote for the new Development Code in 2018. It includes smaller lots, diversity in housing, and new zoning districts to make housing more affordable. I am willing to consider these options in new housing developments. However, for changes to existing neighborhoods, I take residents' concerns seriously if the new development would not fit into the character of the neighborhood.

We must remember that developers build infrastructure, but the city must maintain it using general fund dollars.

Another approach to the issue of affordable housing is workforce development. Through a partnership with Community Action Inc. providing funding, Austin Community College teaching the classes, and the city providing the facilities, more than 50 people now qualify for a career that can provide a living wage. We cannot afford to provide 50 houses, but we can provide training for a better job.

7. Residents and businesses do not always agree on issues before City Council. How would you listen to competing viewpoints, weigh the broader impact of a decision, and determine what is best for San Marcos as a whole?

Recently, we raised our Impact Fees, which are needed to help pay for the impact on the entire water and wastewater systems.

When we expand or enhance our water treatment plant and the wastewater treatment plant, should those costs be paid by our current ratepayers or by the new users who create the need for additional capacity?

One viewpoint is that the full impact fee should be paid by the developer. However, higher impact fees will likely be passed on to the homebuyer through the price of a new home. We must consider how that affects housing affordability and future home sales.

I listened to several builders and a major concern was the fee and its effective date. They felt they needed additional time to prepare for the increase and adjust projects already in the development process. The council had varying opinions on this and a compromise was reached.

8. Tell us about a position you held strongly but later changed your mind about. What caused you to reconsider your viewpoint, and what did you learn from that experience?

Flock cameras read license plate numbers from our streets and IH35 and record them.

For a suspected crime committed here, we can search for a plate number in another city or county, and vice versa for other law enforcement agencies. In 2022, we approved this technology to help solve crimes in SMTX, and it did.

Last year we were asked to increase the number of cameras. We learned disturbing information about who was using the data nationwide. In addition, residents from across the political spectrum asked us to vote no. I talked to experts and reviewed which agencies had access to our cameras.

If everyone were using the system properly, this could be acceptable, but some outside our police department were not. I voted with the majority not to add more cameras and we no longer allow other agencies to access our data.

Do the research; things can change.

9. Texas State University is one of our community's greatest economic assets. What is one new or expanded partnership between the City and Texas State that you would like to see, and how would you help make it happen?

We have a very good working relationship. Our City Manager and staff regularly meet with university officials, and we are ready to assist when needed such as planning for August move-in.

I would like to see the University contribute directly to the services that they receive, tax-free, from the City of San Marcos. While the university does not pay property taxes, I recognize that the housing and businesses here due to the students and staff do pay taxes.

I appreciate the funding they provide for our downtown police presence on weekends. However, I would like to see some support for the expense of our Fire Department. While

there may not be many fires on university property, we provide training to their dormitory Resident Assistant staff which helps to prevent fires and improve safety.

I believe continued cooperation, along with support for the city services, benefit the University and our community.

10. What is one decision made by the current or a previous City Council that you believe was the right decision, and one you would have handled differently? Why?

Council members Garza and Rodriguez placed an item for discussion on the April 15, 2025 agenda which read: "Hold a discussion regarding a possible resolution calling for the immediate and permanent ceasefire in occupied Palestine, an arms embargo on Israel, recognition of Palestinian sovereignty, and the protection of constitutional rights for all people under national and international law." Four council members wanted this on the next agenda for action.

On May 6, council held a robust discussion after hearing 100+ speakers over 6+ hours. Ultimately the item was not passed which I think was the right decision.

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In 2024 there was a rezoning request to allow for student housing a few blocks from downtown. I felt that the standard height of five stories provided more than enough density for the area, but the majority of council voted for seven stories.

11. If you had the authority to rewrite one City ordinance tomorrow, what would it be, why would you change it, and what unintended consequences would you anticipate?

Change the Development Code to be more specific about residential and commercial uses. We have residential- and commercial-only zoning districts while CD-5 is intended to provide a mix of residential, retail, and commercial uses to promote walkability.

One advantage of CD-5 for developers is that they do not have to specify in advance where or how large the commercial section will be. When Council considers the request, the space for housing and commercial uses such as restaurants is unknown.

Most of our new apartment developments have been zoned CD-5, yet most do not have significant commercial areas.

With the number of residents living in apartments, we to ensure CD-5 zoning will provide access to groceries, services, and other everyday necessities to ensure walkable neighborhoods. I do not see unintended consequences for this change; the unintended consequence our current code is not delivering the walkability CD-5 was intended to provide.

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

I generally agree and find that they align 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.

I have supported airport growth, businesses incentives; infrastructure upgrades; workforce education; public safety; flood prevention; multi-modal transportation; diverse housing options, and ways to make housing more affordable.

I have also supported water acquisition and conservation methods including reuse water for industrial use.

I ensured that the Comprehensive Plan committee was appointed by the council and included residents and business representatives.

I believe we can play a large part in the film, digital media, music, and design industry.

Several years ago, council added police and fire positions after staffing reports showed a deficit for our population. However, population growth has created staffing needs that we must address as our city and budget grow.

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