

Q & A for City Council Candidates – Sorted by Question

1. What do you most value about Fredericksburg and why are you running for city council?

Tom Marschall: I value the history. **I am running** because someone asked me to, and I feel as if I need to serve again.

James McDonald: We are limited to 1,000 words for our entire response, so I'll be choosy on which questions get the most attention. I love Fredericksburg, its values, its character, its history, and its people. I love being part of this community. For one reason and another, I have attended a number of City Council meetings over the last few years, and I have come away from those meetings with the sense that there doesn't seem to be much variation of opinion or perspective among the current members of the Council. They seem to lack the ability to ask the hard questions that need to be asked. I think that is unfortunate, and I don't believe it's in the best interests of the city. Competing ideas and different perspectives are the bedrock of good government. If elected, I promise to bring both to the City Council.

Robert Phoenix: What I value the most about Fredericksburg is its intangibles and its promise. The intangibles are people that understand what makes this town, Texas and America great. People that have indisputable values that honor respect, tradition, individualism, family, hard work and freedom. While these values and attributes are not always on display, it's my experience that they are the immutable undercurrent that runs through our lives. The promise, in a home rule city is that the people understand this and can take advantage of being able to amend the city charter and place key issues on a ballot for a vote, that the entire city and not just the city council or the city manager can have a say in.

Polly Rickert: We have 175 years of history, a very successful community that others envy. Most of our success comes from a lineage of mostly organic activity, combined with some key leadership decisions along the way. What community assets contribute to our success and great quality of life? Not all of these assets are tangible. Many are intangible components of a small town. I don't want to see these die of benign neglect; rather I want to see our community consciously encourage and support these attributes. **I am running** to make decisions that conserve these assets for future generations, to approve investments that provide a reasonable return on investment for our taxpayers, and to improve community involvement and engagement with our City government.

Kathy Sanford: Fredericksburg is a small town with a big city vibe. We have the amenities of a large city: hospital and health centers, university center, museums, great shopping, art galleries, wonderful parks, restaurants and beautiful neighborhoods. The City is special because of its history and its historic character and where it is located in Texas, in the hill country near our beloved Enchanted Rock. I love these things about Fredericksburg. **I am running** for City Council to help maintain our historic character and help plan for the future while the City inevitably grows.

Bobby Watson: What I value most about Fredericksburg are the citizens of Fredericksburg! I have never seen a community with such a wonderful "giving attitude", whether it is the giving of their time or giving financially. It is absolutely amazing how our community volunteers to events, organizations or to help a fellow citizen in their time of need. And what's even more amazing to me, they volunteer without looking for anything in return. It is pure giving! It's the people of this community that make Fredericksburg the very special place it is to work and live! **I am running** for re-election to the city council because I would love to continue serving the Fredericksburg community.

2. What is the role of City Council for a Home Rule city (Fredericksburg) compared to a General Rule city?

Tom Marschall: The city council sets the rules in home rule. In general rule, the state sets the rules.

James McDonald: First, it's important to explain the basic difference between the two forms of governance. In basic terms, a Home Rule city may do anything authorized by its charter, as long as it doesn't violate the Texas Constitution, Texas state law, or federal law. General Rule cities do not have a charter and may only exercise those powers specifically granted by statute. In essence, Home Rule cities are self-governing entities, with the people holding the power to amend the charter (which includes governance, ordinances, etc.) through citizen initiative and referendum (meaning the citizens can and should, bring about a vote on items they want changed, whereas, General Rule cities must rely solely on their Council members to make changes). Therefore, under a Home Rule charter, citizens govern themselves, and the City Council act as representatives of the people, NOT representatives of the government. While this distinction may seem obvious, it is my observation that some of the current Fredericksburg City Councilmembers believe that they are the government and seem to represent its interests rather than citizens interests. In summary, it is the responsibility of our City Council to represent the people of Fredericksburg, all of them.

Robert Phoenix: Speaking of Home Rule. the city council's role is to be able to honor home rule, which is governing by the city charter wherein the citizens can exercise their right to amend the city charter by getting the requisite number of verified signatures to get a measure on the ballot and allow the citizens to vote on it and amend the city charter unlike General Rule which is essentially following the law of the state.

Polly Rickert: In a Home Rule city, City Council members may be recalled, and term limits may be imposed. In General Law cities, this is not the case.

Kathy Sanford: We are a Home Rule city governed by the City Charter. Among other things, the Council adopts ordinances and makes broad policy decisions. The city manager carries out those policies and proffers a budget each year for consideration and adoption by the Council.

Bobby Watson: According to the Fredericksburg's Home Rule Charter, the role of the city council is as follows: "The municipal government provided by this charter shall be known as the "council-manager government." Pursuant to its provision and subject only to the limitation imposed by the State Constitution and by this charter, all powers of the city shall be vested in an elective council, hereinafter referred to as the "city council" which shall enact local legislation, adopt budgets, determine policies, and employ the city manager, who shall execute the laws and administer the government of the city. All powers of the city shall be exercised in the manner prescribed by this charter, or if the manner be not prescribed by ordinance, the State Constitution or the laws of the State of Texas." Under the General Law type of local government, the city can only do what the legislature of the State of Texas, through law, allows them to do.

3. How do your qualifications match up with the job responsibilities of a City Council member?

Tom Marschall: Eleven years as a commissioned officer in the US Army serving as a logistics officer is excellent preparation for serving on city council. Few get exposure to the leadership and management training I have received.

James McDonald: My qualifications align with City Council responsibilities. I've led large, complex organizations, as well as managed multi-million-dollar budgets. I am, at heart, a person who likes to solve problems—especially problems that look to be impossible to solve. Like any city or town, Fredericksburg, special place that it is, is not without problems and challenges that need to be addressed and solved.

Robert Phoenix: Well, I'll show up sober, clear and alert for every meeting. I'll listen intently during those meetings.

Polly Rickert: I have over 25 years of experience in strategic planning and implementation, process redesign and innovation, organizational change management, financial analysis and management, contract negotiation, and business operations management. As a business owner, I focus on how our city government generates a return on investment for our taxpayers from its operations. Not every opportunity or investment is a good one for the taxpayer, and actions that lead to unnecessary costs to the taxpayer should be avoided. I think strategically, and rely on data to support decisions. While I am empathetic to the emotional impact of decisions on city matters, I want to understand how a decision affects future options - what do we give up? What future options do we gain or lose? I want to understand the full context when making decisions, not just looking at what is directly in front of us. I believe in the robust engagement of the community, especially on major decisions. Sometimes to go fast, you must go slow. We have a very diverse, diffused mix of perspectives in our community, and therefore it takes time to take into account all of the input required to reach a level of consent to move forward, especially on major decisions.

Kathy Sanford: They match up perfectly. I was elected to the Council in 2012. Having served on the Council I know how the City works and appreciate the responsibilities of the Council. I'm a lawyer and former Administrative Law Judge for the State of Texas. The work of a judge and a city council member is similar. Both listen to the evidence and arguments of interested parties, weigh all of that in conjunction with laws and ordinances to reach a well-reasoned decision. The Council's job is to act in the best interests of the City. In addition, I know Fredericksburg. I have lived here for 18 years. During that time, in order to meet people and learn about the city, I spent a lot of time volunteering here, including six years on the Appraisal Review Board and a stint on the Zoning Board of Adjustment. For several years I was a special advocate for children in foster care in Gillespie County and I also sat on the board of Hill Country CASA, as well as the Gillespie County Child Services Board. I have volunteered at Oktoberfest and the Farmers Market. I served as an election judge for the City during many elections. It is important to have experienced the City through volunteering and working with city leaders and city staff in order to competently function as a Council Member. If elected, I would represent business interests and interests of residents equally. I will try, as a consequence of my upbringing, education and experience, to make smart common sense decisions on behalf of the City.

Bobby Watson: I believe that my 40 plus years of experience as a successful businessman and business owner, as well as my 15 years of continuous involvement in the Fredericksburg community, gives me the background and the qualifications needed to continue to serve on the Fredericksburg City Council. My community involvement includes leadership roles in Leadership Gillespie County, Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce as well as positions on the Fredericksburg Charter Review Committee, Fredericksburg Convention & Visitors Bureau, Fredericksburg Planning&Zoning Board, Gillespie County Economic Development Commission, Gillespie County Airport Advisory Board, Relief Route Task Force and 3 terms as a Fredericksburg City Council Member.

4. Why do you believe you will have sufficient time to devote to city council responsibilities and public interactions?

Tom Marschall: Time management was one of the topics upon which I received much training while in the army.

James McDonald: I will devote ample time to representing the citizens of Fredericksburg because it's immensely important to us all. Based on my observations at City Council meetings, it appears that some of the current Council members do little, or no preparation prior to the meetings. Rest assured, I will take the time, study the issues, and ask the questions no one else will.

Robert Phoenix: Yes.

Polly Rickert: I own two businesses in Fredericksburg, and have a dedicated staff who handle the daily operations. This frees me to devote time to my duties.

Kathy Sanford: I am retired and have no family obligations; I am free to devote as much time as necessary to the City Council.

Bobby Watson: In my previous terms I have always taken time to devote to my city council responsibilities. Now that I have retired earlier this year, I will absolutely have more than sufficient time to devote to the needs of our community and the responsibilities of the city council.

5. Describe your familiarity and experience with the city, county and state organizations, issues, ordinances and laws.

Tom Marschall: Having lived here for the past 30 years I feel as if I am quite familiar with the operations of our city council, and most importantly how it effects the citizens of this city. 30 years ago I was paying \$1,500 in taxes, now I am paying over \$4,000.

James McDonald: Skipped – word count.

Robert Phoenix: My experience with the city and the Home Rule process took place two years ago when Clean Water Fred, a group that I helped found with Jeanette Hormuth, followed the home rules to get a ballot measure on a special election to remove the fluoride from the cities water supply. I learned a tremendous amount about the process and the city itself as a result. I witnessed major incongruities with not only the vote itself, but the conditions around early voting and the vote count. It was an educational process to say the least.

Polly Rickert: I served on the Community Visioning Committee, in the Business Committee and the Government Committee, and as Planning & Zoning Commissioner prior to appointment to the City Council in 2020.

Kathy Sanford: Having been a council member, I am familiar with city issues, organizations, ordinances. The City and County share certain responsibilities and costs. Among them are the fire department, emergency management, and the dispatch office. They work jointly on issues related to the Courthouse Square and Marktplatz and others. I have been on the Council when we met with County Commissioners, so I am aware of that relationship. I have some familiarity with TXDot through helping organize and working on the relief route task force. It doesn't matter that a council member knows every law, rule, or ordinance. It matters that she has the ability and desire to learn, research, listen and apply them to issues she will face on the Council.

Bobby Watson: In addition to the experience listed in my response to Question #3, I was on the City Council in Addison, TX for one year before moving to Fredericksburg in 2000. Having 7 years of experience on city councils, I believe I am familiar with the issues, ordinances and laws of Fredericksburg, Gillespie County and the State of Texas.

6. What improvements would you like to see in the city council operations and city management/operations?

Tom Marschall: I would like the council to be responsive to the people of the city, not just certain entities. I would hope this would improve the voter turnout for all city elections.

James McDonald: Item six (6) of the typical City Council meeting has allegedly been referred to as “The Dreaded Public Comment Period” by one current member of the Council. If true, that’s appalling, and a sentiment every citizen of this community should find shocking and offensive. It has been my observation that the current practice of the Council is to listen to citizen comments in what appears to me to be a perfunctory manner, and then immediately move on to other business or agenda items. While there are rules that prevent the City Council from engaging in conversation with the speaker, there are no rules preventing Council from assigning action items and/or follow-up assignments to city staff. This is, in my view, not only a mistake on the Council’s part, but a lost opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the concerns of the community. I believe the Public Comment Period should be embraced by the City Council as a means of staying connected to the people the Council is charged with representing, and that it should be a starting point to showing residents the respect and consideration.

Robert Phoenix: I'd love to see more transparency when it comes to city council meetings. While I understand that the council cannot answer questions during the open comments section, I would encourage citizens to make presentations and support them, so that we can have a more interactive connection and contact in real space and real time. I'd like to see the city council use more push back when it comes to the budget and the spending.

Polly Rickert: A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), a strategic plan, and a 5 year budget. This will assist City Council members in having more context for the bi-weekly decisions that come before this body. Improved engagement with the various community constituencies, providing helpful information on how the City operates and delivers services, so that when issues arise, the public is better informed and can more easily follow along while City Council deliberates and takes action. A focus on contract management, particularly for agreements with performance requirements and clawback provisions.

Kathy Sanford: The City Council is limited by the City Charter and interpretations on leadership by the Texas Municipal League. Should I be elected and learn that Council is exceeding its authority, in particular as related to City Staff, or not living up to its mandate, that would be a time to consider this question.

Bobby Watson: I believe the most important improvement we can make is communication between city council and city management as well as communication between the city and the citizens of Fredericksburg. We have made improvements over the last couple of years but we need to do continually improve how we communication with each other.

7. Have you read Fredericksburg's "Comprehensive Plan" and "A Path to the Future"? What changes would you make?

Tom Marschall: The change I would make is in how the plan is put into effect. We need a council responsive to the people who live here now. The "keeping up with the Jones's" aspects of the plan need some moderation.

James McDonald: Yes, I have reviewed them both. The current Comprehensive Plan, which is up for a refresh, is primarily an imaging plan. That is to say, it focuses on the design elements of how Fredericksburg looks and feels to visitors and tourists (signage, landscaping, historic district guidelines, etc.) but doesn't necessarily address items that I believe most citizens find important. In contrast, "The Path to the Future" document is almost entirely devoted to the residents of Fredericksburg and the things they find important. This report was created for the people of Fredericksburg, by the people of Fredericksburg. Some 200 citizens were involved in its creation. To be clear, Fredericksburg would not be Fredericksburg without tourists. Tourists and tourism are not only important contributors to the city's economic activity and its tax base, but an essential part of the city's identity. But Fredericksburg would also not be Fredericksburg without its permanent residents. The City Council, consequently, has a balancing act to perform, between the needs and wants of the tourism industry, and the often-competing needs and wants of the people who call Fredericksburg home. I appreciate how difficult that balancing act must be. But I am also of the opinion that a good amount of rebalancing is needed, that currently the Council puts too much emphasis on the quality of the visitor experience, and not enough emphasis on the quality of life for the city's permanent residents. I believe we can do better. The "Path to the Future" document was created by the citizens of Fredericksburg with the intent of giving our City leadership a clear development plan. It's my observation that the City Council should focus on what the citizens have asked for and I believe we should use the "Path to the Future" document as a framework of progress, rather than simply a placeholder on a shelf.

Robert Phoenix: The city's web page and subsequent PDF for the Comprehensive Plan isn't downloadable. I'm requesting a hard copy sent to me my home so that I can review it.

Polly Rickert: I have, and have used the Comprehensive Plan as a Planning & Zoning Commissioner and City Council member. The Comprehensive Plan is 15 years old, and is overdue for a major overhaul. Many small cities are realizing that they have copied large city solutions to their detriment. I want to see small city solutions brought back to the Comprehensive Plan, with actions that are more appropriate to a small city and address the issues we face for the next 20 years. On "A Path to the Future", I was involved in the creation of the report. Unfortunately, it ended up as more of a wish list than a Vision. Additionally, the City government did not immediately outline its limited responsibilities in implementation of the report recommendations, and there is continued confusion on roles and responsibilities for implementation.

Kathy Sanford: Yes, I have read them. Too many changes and updates to list here. The Comprehensive Plan is obviously out of date. This year and next the Council will be reviewing the entire Plan and working with the community and consultants to create an update that focuses on the future. Any updates should be done with "A Path to the Future" as a reference document and guide.

Bobby Watson: I have read the "Comprehensive Plan" and while on the city council, I have been involved in implementing numerous items listed in the Plan. I think it is time to update the plan and the city council will be discussing during the next several meetings what the cost and schedule will be to update the Comprehensive Plan. Also, I was on the council when the community came together to form the committee to develop "A Path to the Future". It's been almost three years since this document was completed and I would like to see a progress report of what's been accomplished to date.

8. Is there a problem with government infringement on city sovereignty or your own liberties as guaranteed in the U.S. and Texas Constitution? Why or Why not?

Tom Marschall: Absolutely there is infringement. The closing or restriction on any business is clearly unconstitutional. Anyone can research OSHA standards on masks and realize the dangers that mask wearing can be. Mask wearing is a medical issue that needs individual evaluation, not any level of government mandate. The signs advertising covid testing are an abomination.

James McDonald: In my view, there is certainly a problem with our city infringing on the rights of its citizens. People ought to have the freedom to wear a mask (or not), open their business (or close it). I also stand against the recent expansion of the historic district.

Robert Phoenix: Cities are not sovereign. Cities are incorporated and cannot therefore be sovereign. Citizens cannot be sovereign either. One can be a citizen or a sovereign. We are not having our rights infringed upon, not by the government itself, since we are supposedly the government, but its medical intervention into the governing process which is infringing on our rights. The hospital has determined policy over the past year, and no one voted for the hospital to govern us. It's not DC, Austin or even city hall that's crossing the lines of freedom, it's Hill Country Memorial and that's an issue, a big issue.

Polly Rickert: 2020 was instructive, not just because of the virus, but because of the government response to the virus. We addressed an initially unknown public health threat, using draconian measures intended to reduce the burden on our hospitalization systems. As more data emerged, and the virus and its treatment was better understood, however, our Public Health community did not adapt to the reduced, more focused threat the virus posed, and our elected officials were put in an untenable situation. Public Health outcomes varied by state, and eventually it was becoming more clear that states that kept severe measures were not faring better than states that did not. These measures infringed on liberties. What will happen when the next inevitable crisis occurs? I only can say that I would favor the least intrusive option of what is presented at the time, and be prepared to change as facts change. My concern with the state actions against home rule cities is the unintended consequences for a small city's long term viability. Examples are unfunded mandates, restrictions on which revenues are allowed to be raised, which types of debt are allowed to be used.

Kathy Sanford: The City is working with other municipalities to fight state legislation that would limit our capacity to control our revenues, our borders, and other legislative constrictions.

Bobby Watson: It is my opinion that there is not a problem in Fredericksburg with government infringement on city sovereignty or individual liberties as guaranteed in the U.S. and Texas Constitutions. In the oath of office as a city council member, each member has to solemnly swear that they will faithfully execute the duties of the office and will to the best of their ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State, so help me God. Every policy, ordinance or law the city council adopts is reviewed and approved by our city attorney prior to the city council's discussion and vote. I believe that during the city council's discussions and actions, individual liberties are always taken into account as well as the health and well-being of the community, all individuals living and working in Fredericksburg. I believe this is the most important and most difficult aspect of every city council member's decisions while in office.

9. What do you believe are the 3 most important Near-Term Issues for Fredericksburg?

Tom Marschall:

- * Vote integrity,
- * Adherence to sworn oath of office,
- * Repair the government overreach damage of the last year.

James McDonald: Skipped – word count.

Robert Phoenix:

- * Declare all businesses essential so that if there is another lockdown it won't be just Wal-Mart or HEB that stays open.
- * Make a clear declaration that Fredericksburg will be a vaccine passport free city.
- * Make Fredericksburg a 2nd Amendment sanctuary.

Polly Rickert:

- * Improve broadband and cellular quality and access. We need to be able to support remote workers and our local businesses with internet and cellular access that is available and at speeds they require. Improve traffic flow around the City.
- * We need more ways to get around, especially getting across Main Street during the weekends. Growth is inevitable, as we are an attractive location. However, not all growth is good for our community.
- * I believe we can and should update our plans and strategies to facilitate growth that is good for our community, and avoid poor quality growth to the extent possible.

Kathy Sanford:

- * Complete the annexation process as represented on the Annexation Map and develop a comprehensive land use plan for newly annexed areas and the expanded ETJ.
- * Address and resolve Short Term Rental issues in residential neighborhoods, including adopting and enforcing relevant ordinances and regulations.
- * Emphasize completion and connection of sidewalks, such as along North Llano, in the central business district and elsewhere, to accommodate pedestrian mobility.

Bobby Watson:

- * Expand the city's communication efforts to keep our community inform. As well as encourage more community involvement to find solutions to our issues.
- * Continue to explore all possible solutions to the affordable housing needs of our young families, professionals and our workforce.
- * To find the balance between managing Fredericksburg's continued grow and maintaining the quality of life for Fredericksburg's residents.

10. What do you believe are the 3 most important Long-Term Issues for Fredericksburg?

Tom Marschall:

- * Drug addiction,
- * Affordable housing,
- * Growth not exceeding resources

James McDonald: Skipped – word count.

Robert Phoenix:

- * Affordable housing.
- * Promote individual solar power (home power) as an antidote to future issues of the power grid.
- * Introduce game changing technologies like 3D printing that can do everything from manufacturing parts, to building small houses.

Polly Rickert:

- * Address factors affecting the demographic trend that will result in the loss of middle class families in our community.
- * Ensure our water supply is protected, as it is the foundation of our community. How will we manage this precious resource and ensure that residents, businesses, and agriculture have an adequate supply?
- * How to retain our small town character and culture with the growth pressure we face? Will we still recognize our small town features when the City celebrates its 200th anniversary?

Kathy Sanford:

- * Become a sustainable community by using renewable resources in electric generation and vehicles and use green building techniques (achieve LEED certification) for all public facilities. See Comp Plan at Goals 21 and 22.
- * Continue working on the relief route and focus on mobility within and around the City, whether vehicle, pedestrian or biking.
- * Implement planning objectives and zoning regulations that include, among others: Zoning districts in both the City and the expanded ETJ potentially including the implementation of cluster development while addressing affordable and attainable housing for both low income and middle income people; and protecting the livability and desirability of residential neighborhoods, the viability of businesses on Main Street and the expanding downtown areas, for example expansion south of Main Street between Rte 87 and Rte 16 within the City, because we must never lose our historic town center.

Bobby Watson:

- * Continue our long-range planning to ensure that Fredericksburg is prepared for our future financial, safety and infrastructure needs as we grow.
- * Continue to explore all possible solutions to the affordable housing needs of our young families, professionals and our workforce.
- * Continue to ensure that we honor and preserve Fredericksburg's rich German heritage.