

2020 marks a critical moment for San Marcos, TX. A sense of urgency underlies many local issues facing the city, as well as the global issues facing our country. To help inform voters and cultivate discussion, Sustainable San Marcos and MoveSM hosted the following questionnaire to provide candidates with the opportunity to speak to some of these difficult problems. Below are the same questions that all candidates were provided and the answers we received. We hope you find them helpful. Many, many thanks to the candidates that took the time to respond and for your willingness to serve our community!*

*Please note that Mayoral and City Council candidates Jane Hughson, Randy Dethrow, Michael Hathaway, Justin Harris, Ed Mihalkinan, Shane Scott, and Mark Gleason did not respond to these questions.

I. Please introduce yourself and briefly explain your relationship to environmentalism and sustainability.

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** *My family has called San Marcos our home for five generations and as a proud product of our San Marcos CISD public schools and hometown university I had the privilege of growing up in our diverse and unique neighborhoods and learned to appreciate and respect our natural environment and spring fed river. It is because of these experiences that I know firsthand how important environmental stewardship and sustainability are for the future of our San Marcos community.*
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** *My name Alyssa Garza and I am running for San Marcos City Council Place 3. My passion about environmentalism and sustainability began at a young age through the conversations I had at the recycling center I visited after collecting aluminum cans around my neighborhood to exchange for money. In high school I wrote a column for the newspaper called "The Green Scene" where I shared tips on how my classmates could "go green". As a college student I participated in community programs aimed at reducing waste such as Pack-It-Up and Pass it On and working TXST Move-In Days collecting cardboard, among others. As a graduate student I studied sustainability through the lens of environmental sociology. Through these experiences I have come to understand that there are many environmental challenges facing our society. Understanding environmental sustainability is critical at a time when our planet is in peril. As a city council member, I will explore all possible pathways for a sustainable earth when engaging in any type of policy change.*
- **Mark Rockeymoore, Place 4:** *My name is Mark Rockeymoore. I have a Bachelors degree in Urban Geography and a Masters degree in Environmental Geography. My thesis was about Environmental Justice issues in Lake County, Indiana, a region with many Superfund and NPR sites. I have taught numerous classes in climatology, meteorology and physical systems of the environment. I am currently a member of the San Marcos City Council Sustainability Committee and have been since it's inception.*
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** *My name is Omar Baca. I have a family household of 7. I am a former fire fighter and EMS provider. I am a community volunteer with experience on committees and boards throughout the county. I am currently working to support platforms such as the Environmental Defense Fund, fighting fracking, and preserving aquifers. I want to work towards bringing depots such as precious plastics and other local recycling measures.*
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** *Hello Sustainable San Marcos, MoveSM, and all of the community of San Marcos. My name is Zach Sambrano, and I am a fourth generation native San Marcan who is running for San Marcos City Council, Place 5. I was born in this beautiful town, was educated in SMCISD schools, graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, and am now looking to purchase my first house in the city that has afforded me all of these opportunities. My platform consists of making affordable housing a reality for low to middle income earners, continuing criminal justice reform, offering COVID-19 relief, and protecting the environment in which we make sure our river and water sources are taken care of. As someone who believes in environmental protections and making sure we preserve and sustain our water resources, I believe that we must make sure we are considering impacts of growth and development in every decision we make. Our river, green spaces, and water resources are precious and unique to this city, so we must make sure we protect, preserve, and sustain these resources at all cost.*



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Sustainable San Marcos 2020 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

Q1. The three E's - Environment, Equity, and Economy - are a way to analyze and measure balanced success of any undertaking. In your assessment, do you think the City is adequately addressing these three areas of concern? If yes, please explain. If no, please share where you see an imbalance and how you will strive to correct this.

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** *I do not believe that the City of San Marcos is adequately addressing through policy and budget environmental stewardship, equity, and creating a just local economy. I am running for Mayor of San Marcos to ensure that our municipal government aligns investments and policies to combat climate change. Our city hall must reprioritize the litany of overlapping revenue streams to ensure capital improvement projects and other large city projects address rampant inequality, urban sprawl, and their effects on our natural environment.*
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** *I believe there is much room for growth regarding decision making through the lens of environment, equity, and the economy. I will strive to address imbalances by using the skills I have developed both through my education and through my professional work. While we do not have the capacity to solve global level issues on our own, as a local government, we can be more intentional in intersecting the Three E's when looking into seemingly isolated issues. Acknowledging that issues such as food insecurity, community health, housing, and civic engagement cannot be fully understood without exploring how they intersect with the environment, equity, and economy is a good first step.*
- **Mark Rockeymoore, Place 4:** *These are issues of environmental justice. Traditionally, poorer people and minorities have been situated in the least valuable parts of town. Here in San Marcos, now, as the city grows and land that wasn't highly valued previously is now being seen as valuable, as is generally the case, efforts are being made to redevelop these areas according to the vision some have for the future of the city of San Marcos. The city has responded accordingly, influenced by visions of the city based upon national models with some nod to neighborhood protections in some neighborhoods, but not all. All of our San Marcos neighborhoods need to be protected and , even more-so, given the kind of incentives to maintain healthy, vibrant micro-communities according to sustainability models peculiar to San Marcos. We will continue to prepare San Marcos for what could potentially be a harsh environmental future by increasing our sustainability standards for city buildings and providing incentives for developers to do the same. We will standardize these measures across the city and limit ETJ development while creating a Greenbelt around our city that can connect to trails and park systems in the region.*
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** *I believe yes, but there are always avenues of improvement. Building a culture of conservation through multiple avenues is an important tool of engagement.*
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** *I do believe that our current council has taken a hardline stance on protecting our environment and our river. I would continue the work that the current council is doing to ensure our city's environment and river protection are of utmost importance in every decision made. I would not say the same for the equity of our city as 51% of our residents make less than \$35,000 a year, yet pricing of housing continues to increase at high rates. As city council continues to say that finding affordable housing solutions is a priority of theirs, the public continues to see otherwise from their inaction. The SMTX Housing 4 All taskforce was comprised of diverse residents of the city in which they made recommendations to help alleviate and solve the housing affordability crisis, yet council chose to not adopt their recommendations. I would vote to adopt these recommendations on day one if I were elected. This is also tied to the economy as people need to have a living wage paying job to be able to afford housing. I believe the city needs to continue partnering with the chamber of commerce and the Greater San Marcos Partnership to attract businesses to our town that can offer good paying jobs.*



Q2. Sprawl is bad for the environment and a long-term liability. In San Marcos, low-density subdivisions at the outskirts are displacing immense areas of natural and agricultural land in both the Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie ecoregions. What do you believe are the barriers to limiting sprawl? What actions will you support to achieve denser infill in the existing city limits while also conserving our unique ecoregions?

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** *A significant amount of San Marcos is currently zoned to make it illegal to build duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, townhouses and/or courtyard apartments. According to the San Marcos Housing Needs Assessment, attached homes in San Marcos sell for lower price points and they sell faster than detached homes on average indicating relatively high demand for these more affordable alternative unit types. Research showed that the median price for attached homes was \$180,500 in 2017-2018, compared to \$259,000 for detached homes and attached homes averaged 25 days on market before sale compared to 74 days for detached. I am a champion of local efforts to reform our municipal zoning code to allow the construction of more affordable, accessible homes in our walkable, transit-connected neighborhoods.*
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** *I am a firm believer that any community wide policies or initiatives are most effective when they are community driven and led. I possess multiple advanced degrees and I have taken courses that dig into topics such as sprawl and its impact on community well-being. However, I acknowledge that this is not common among many of my neighbors. To secure community, buy-in for policy change that will help us limit sprawl, we must be intentional in our engagement and educational outreach among the community. After spending some time studying how housing and development conversations have unfolded historically in SMTX, I have come to the conclusion that there are two dominating narratives or voices: developers or those aiming to preserve their neighborhood. While both voices are important and contribute valuable information and insight it is clear to me that many voices are largely underrepresented. I will aim to bring those perspectives to the table and work with all impacted individuals to create policy changes that will protect our beautiful and rapidly changing city.*
- **Mark Rockeymoore, Place 4:** *We will limit ETJ development by creating a greenbelt environmental region surrounding the city that will connect to park and trail systems. The barriers to limiting sprawl are primarily political and economic in nature. As new developments come in to provide housing resources in a region sorely in need of such, the needs of a burgeoning population weaken the resistance to sprawl. Having a specific plan of development and looking to define the nature of growth in San Marcos are mandatory plans of action moving forward. If we cannot reasonably plan for the urbanized future of the city by taking growth, environmental shift and sustainability needs into account, sprawl and uncontrolled development into the ETJ will continue unabated.*
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** *Applying density on existing neighborhoods creates conflict as well as strain on an infrastructure that cannot bear it. Density in town centers such as the space on Wonder World with medical, retail and apartments with a well built transportation system have been good solutions that do not provoke environmentally fragile assets that should be protected. We must strategically plan for the builds that will come.*
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** *A big part of my platform is to tackle the City of San Marcos' exclusionary zoning codes. We continue to see a focus of single-detached family homes and large multi-family units, yet we don't see other types of housing such as duplexes, condos, cottage-courts, ADUs, etc. If I were elected to the council, then I would tackle the exclusionary zoning codes so that we can offer these additional types of housing in less dense and infill areas. I believe it will take many heads at the table to tackle on this tough issue, because we have to strategically develop growth in our town while at the same time preserving our ecoregions and neighborhoods. I believe three can co-exist, and it will take education and a willingness to work together to get everyone on board with developing infill and non-dense areas while at the same time preserving our ecoregions and neighborhoods.*



Q3. Active and public transit reduces congestion, improves public health, and is a more affordable way to get around the city. Today, however, inadequate pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in San Marcos leaves people of “all ages and abilities” vulnerable and exposed to the dangers of aggressive automobile traffic; and an infrequent bus system promises little more than low ridership. In what specific ways will you make affordable, safe, and sustainable transportation more viable in our city?

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** *We must direct transportation investments toward reducing speeds and rethinking the design of streets to prioritize pedestrians, transit riders, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users. Unsafe streets, bike lanes, and sidewalks disproportionately harm the most marginalized members of our community, as does an over-reliance on traffic enforcement. The majority of our city’s most dangerous roads and intersections are located in low-income neighborhoods in San Marcos. Youth, seniors, differently-abled San Marcans, our unhoused neighbors, and transit-dependent residents living in low-income neighborhoods are among those statistically most susceptible to these unacceptable roadway hazards. San Marcos must respond with action and investments in safe roadway design commensurate with the threat that our streets currently pose to the health and well-being of our community.*
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** *As someone who did not own a car until I was about 22 years old, due to lack of financial resources, I have heavily depended on public transit, walking, and ride-sharing, to make my way to and from work, school, and home. There is absolutely and inadequate pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and problematic bus system in SMTX. I will aim to create a more effective bus system and explore how to best use existing programs and relationships to do so. Many neighborhoods and areas of town where there are higher concentrations of people with low-incomes also happen to be areas where there is a lack of safe walking or biking options. I have lived in these neighborhoods and maintain friendships with past neighbors. I know, first-hand, how barriers to transportation and safe methods for walking, impact the daily lives of many in our community. However, we continue to hear elected officials maintain that this is not an issue. SMTX is a rapidly growing city and our current elected representatives have fallen short in modernizing how they engage with constituents. There is a disconnect between the realities of those currently “representing” our community and those who need the most help.*
- **Mark Rockeymoore, Place 4:** *We need to continue to make San Marcos walkable by building sidewalks. We also need to work with the Texas DoT to make sure all of our streets are cycle-friendly. I will continue to support the agreement between the City of San Marcos and Texas State University to merge their bus systems into one combined entity and provide more routes with more times to encompass the needs of a diverse population and workforce. Continuing to improve the road systems will smooth them out for alternative modes of transportation. Supporting inter-city bus transportation as well as potential light rail passing through San Marcos for commuters will eventually become more feasible as Austin and San Antonio also move toward this end in support of state-wide efforts to provide rail transportation between major urban hubs.*
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** *Safety and availability are obviously the first steps. Strategy and planning will be the root of success with regard to alternative transportation, which I am glad to support.*
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** *I believe that the City of San Marcos has taken a proactive approach to solving transportation issues as our town continues to experience record growth. We have seen the city pursue multi-modal transportation, which is something that I would continue if I am elected to council. I believe the city’s partnerships with the Texas State Trams/Buses and CARTS are a step in the right direction, in which we can continue to build upon. I would advocate to expand transportation out to the new neighborhoods that are not central and core to downtown San Marcos like TRACE, Whisper, and La Cima, so that we can reduce public transit congestion and reduce fuel emissions. I also believe the city should publicize how easy and affordable it is to access these public transit options through a user-friendly app and easily accessible page on Facebook.*



Q4. San Marcos citizens are increasingly reliant upon unstable service jobs and a high carbon-impact flow of supply and goods from outside the city or country. What ideas do you have for how San Marcos can cultivate a more local, circular, and sustainable economy?

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** *We must align strategic partnerships for training, retraining, educational opportunities, and resources to prepare local residents to work for sustainable living wages. I would also advocate for the quickest way to free up private capital within the community is to make quick and lean investments in walking and biking infrastructure. Making it possible for individuals and families to not have to own and operate a motor vehicle. A family that can shift from two vehicles to one saves thousands each year, money they can redirect to more urgent needs. No San Marcan should be stranded more than a single transit ride away from work, school or recreation.*
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** *Cultivating a more local & circular economy has many environmental & social benefits. In a country where current top elected officials denounce science based environmental concerns & in a state where environmental issues are not prioritized within the public education curriculum, it is not surprising that many in the community have not been educated on these matters. As your city council representative, I will find ways to educate the community on the benefits of cultivating a more local & circular economy. I fundamentally believe we can improve the lives of all in our community by navigating with a more asset-based approach to solving issues. Using that lens, many of the goals & advantages of a circular economy align with the cultural belief system largely found within our community. For example, the practice of maximizing life cycle of products and the “leaving nothing to waste” mindset is something largely practiced within the Latinx culture and communities that have limited resources. By helping our community make connections between their current practices and any proposed action plan related to circular economy activities we can ensure success and accountability.*
- **Mark Rockey Moore, Place 4:** *Providing for the incubation of small businesses owned and staffed by local residents is something I have supported as a City Council member. I will continue to support local business development that invigorates our local economy and provides for the increased local circulation of money. It’s important that we create a local economy that is able to operate in an era of instability at the regional or state level. As we have seen during the Covid era, supply lines can be disrupted by health trends in other locals around the nation and world. Looking into detailed ways to increase viable trade relationships between the city and local and regional producers is a necessary safeguard against future essential supply deficits.*
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** *Building a culture of local (with education) that celebrates artisans, craftspeople, and local farm to market is vital to our health and fiscal well-being. I believe the next great boom in culture and economy will see a return to craftsmanship and skills. San Marcos can be and should be a hub to develop this type of local culture, and that requires engagement and support from local government. I would support and champion solutions that would make this happen.*
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** *I believe that San Marcos should strive to be heavily reliant upon the local resident income base rather than having an unstable reliability on the student income base. Although I acknowledge that the students of this town are a big part of our economy and community, I believe that the city must strive to create and cultivate a local, circular, and sustainable economy. A few ways we can do this is through partnerships and a strong local business core. This takes much of the work that the chamber of commerce, MainStreet, the Downtown Association, and the Greater San Marcos Partnership already do, but prioritize it with the small local business community. I truly believe that when we have more heads and local businesses at the table for discussion, then we can truly create a stable local economy that works for all.*



Q5. As our society attempts to solve existential issues like climate change, our elected officials must lead the charge. How will you resolve conflicts when the wishes of some citizens conflict with the interests of the larger environmental, equity, and economic needs of the entire community, region, and even planet?

- **Juan Miguel Arredondo, Mayor:** Now more than ever we need a leader at city hall who will work to address the immediate health, social, economic, and other impacts of this pandemic. My campaign for Mayor is centered on a bold and progressive agenda that prioritizes our collective health and well-being, economic stability, eventual recovery, and our community's long-term resilience. Sometimes that means knocking on doors, or in our case, meeting virtually with key stakeholders and educating them about why we are taking certain steps and enacting policies that might seem unpopular to some.
- **Alyssa Garza, Place 3:** I am a problem solver. I am known for being able to bring diverse perspectives to the table and foster a sense of trust and respect necessary for working together towards solutions. Simply put, I will use the skills I have gained as a grassroots organizer with experience building power among the community to ensure that all voices are heard and that all have access to digestible forms of education and information regarding science-driven best strategies and practices. It is clear to me that for any environmental planning to be sustainable and accepted by the community we must prioritize taking into consideration environmental, social, political, economic, governance, and ethics factors that may influence and determine the relationship between natural systems and human systems. I will strive to prioritize considering and addressing all these factors necessary for rendering well-rounded decision and policies. As your future city council representative, I would not work for one specific group or entity. Any decision made would be with the community's best interest in mind.
- **Mark Rockeymoore, Place 4:** San Marcos is the Jewel of Central Texas. All of my efforts on City Council are designed to highlight this truth. In order to truly be that jewel we have to shine. And in an era when the world itself is changing, we must look to the future rather than to the recent past and the way things have been done. Perhaps by looking at new ways of doing things we will be able to provide for that future in sustainable ways. Perhaps we will be able to implement neighborhood sustainability measures that include the desires of the inhabitants of those neighborhoods in a participatory and holistic manner. Perhaps the conflict doesn't have to be framed as sustainability versus neighborhood conflicts of interest. The thing about environmental change, is that it becomes evident to everyone. The indicators are all around us to see. So by educating a population on what it is they are seeing, reading and hearing, we go a long way toward including those neighbors in the change and not imposing it upon them. Talking to people works much better than talking at them. And there is too much of that going on right now at every level of government and community interaction. We must change that together.
- **Omar Baca, Place 5:** The philosophy of density is a good one; however, a city should not impose upon existing neighborhoods to force them into incompatible neighborhood relationships. I believe our spaces will evolve eventually to accept the idea of density. Imposing or forcing this change on long existing neighborhoods will result in gentrification that pushes out underserved and under represented people. The idea of town centers in new spaces allows for the philosophy of density to take place without the threat on current residents.
- **Zach Sambrano, Place 5:** We must first get people to realize that we, as a community and nation, are indeed facing existential threats like climate change. I believe we can do this through education and one-on-one conversations that we can back up with data. After the education has been provided then we must look at environmental issues from a larger and greater-good scope. I believe we can bring everyone together: pro-neighborhood people, pro-environmentalist people, scientist, and all of those in-between to the table when it comes to resolving conflicts of environmental and neighborhood preservation. Since I do not live in every neighborhood in San Marcos, I can't be naïve or ignorant and act like I know what's best for the neighborhood even if I have an understanding of environment preservation. This is why I believe it will take all of these people coming together and having open discussions on issues to solve such conflicts.

