

## **CEER and HOME Candidate Questionnaire**

### **Adrian Garcia, candidate for Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2 Response**

#### **Environmental Equity and Resiliency:**

1. *What is your top environmental concern for the County and what role does the office you are seeking play in addressing that concern? (Air pollution, water pollution, trash, flooding, etc.)*

**Response:** My top environmental concern is equity for Precinct 2 residents. All pollution is important. I will actively engage with residents of long-ignored, low-income communities to represent their interests. I will insure that County funds, whether routine budget items or identified by the bond process, are equitably allocated to local projects.

2. *What tools would you utilize as a County official to ensure environmental clean-up of degraded land sites as well as reverse the documented pattern of siting landfills, recycling centers, and industrial facilities in low-income and minority neighborhoods?*

**Response:** I will direct cleanup in Precinct 2 and pressure state and federal agencies to do their jobs and to enforce existing laws and regulations. I will work closely with the County Attorney, as well as with Houston and other municipalities, to take enforcement if the EPA and Texas won't.

3. *What measures within the County's authority and its influence on regional planning agencies could be pursued to reduce air, land and water pollution?*

**Response:** I will encourage the County Health Department to work with organizations like the Episcopal Health Foundation to collect information from residents, in order to measure what actions can best improve human health. I will develop an integrated approach to reduce all pollution by actively engaging with HGAC's RAQPAC and BIG.

4. *Do you think it appropriate to increase the County's budget line item for environmental enforcement?*

**Response:** Yes, both civil and criminal. Harris County should lead the country in environmental penalties and convictions. I was a cop for 23 years and helped put away bad guys. But polluters can hurt hundreds or thousands of people. Hurricane Harvey highlighted our pollution problems—now I want to solve them.

*[Not part of candidate's formal response, but for information only: The DA's office budget is nearly 4X that of County Attorney's, but the County Attorney may pursue penalties from corporations that can put millions of \$\$ in County coffers. Example: San Jacinto Waste Pits litigation. Enhance criminal enforcement, but don't forget benefits of civil enforcement.]*

5. *How should the County respond to the environmental threat of molds and toxins in people's homes in the aftermath of Harvey?*

**Response:** The County Health Department should provide training to residents to remove mold and toxins from their homes. I have also developed a Plan ("Higher Ground") to reduce flooding and address health effects. Long-term solutions to address flooding will also have shorter-term benefits, such as reducing mold and toxins.

6. *Within CEER's 8-point plan, which priority is most meaningful to you and why?*

**Response:** I will have the direct ability to ensure equity and embrace transparency. I will use my office to persuade others, in government and beyond, who have different responsibilities. I will guarantee to spend County funds fairly and equitably, and that my actions will be transparent to the communities I serve.

### **Flooding and Infrastructure:**

1. *How do you propose to protect and expand the riparian corridors and the existing natural flood control ability of the land?*

**Response:** I will work closely with all relevant parties: County Engineer, City Engineer, FEMA, HCFCD, the Army Corps, NGOs, and the vibrant academic community to protect and expand riparian corridors. These areas are valuable to reduce flood impacts to residences, but also enhance the quality of life for residents and wildlife. (50 words)

2. *What are some of the tools you believe could address flooding in the Greens and Brays watershed [sic] beyond those projects identified in the recent bond election?*

**Response:** All Houston's bayous drain to Precinct 2, so our residents can get hit twice as hard as upstream. Both watersheds are also plagued by flooding at bayous and beyond. Greens is dangerous and needs a special technical review to identify critical projects. Input from Brays residents east of I-45 is needed.

3. *Would you prioritize the spending of the Harris County Flood Control District bond money to address past inequities in flooding protection across watersheds?*

**Response:** We can't change history, but we can make a better future. I will focus bond money spent in Precinct 2 on historically-challenged areas. While HCFCD is primarily concerned with the bayou system, much flooding occurs far away from it. County, City, and TxDOT must collaborate to reduce *all* flooding.

### **Affordable Housing:**

1. *In your own words, describe the role the County plays in affordable housing and how you would engage in that role?*

**Response:** HCHA plays lead role to help low income people access quality housing through assistance programs including housing vouchers, senior living centers, intermediary services between quality landlords and tenants and help people with vouchers for rentals and home purchases. I'll become an expert advocate for low income communities and the programs to assure that program goals and financial rules are met.

2. *Will you support Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) applications and other affordable housing in your precinct?*

**Response:** I will support LIHTC application process to provide affordable housing in the precinct by ensuring an appropriate balance between opportunity and investment in revitalizing neighborhoods. The target tenants and their improved lives must be the primary beneficiaries, not the developers. I will engage the process to insure it works better.

3. *Are there approaches to affordable housing siting and development that you will champion or work against?*

**Response:** We must avoid critical issues like Houston's siting that apparently is still an unresolved fair housing violation. We must ensure future affordable housing actually increases economic mobility. Projects should be spread them into low-income areas,

middle income and higher income to provide greater choice based on jobs, amenities, and transportation.

4. *Should the County have an emergency management plan in place, and available beds for longer term rental, for future storms?*

**Response:** Yes, considering our changing climate and increasing number and severity of major rain events, a most resilient approach is to plan ahead, develop emergency management plans, and arrange for beds and accommodations in advance to assure availability, save time and efficiently manage budget resources.

5. *How will your office (if you are elected) ensure that the lowest income people are assisted with the Hurricane Harvey funding process?*

**Response:** I'll ensure lessons learned in initial programs are applied to current and future processes for low income people. County must manage distribution for recovery and mitigation projects equitably and transparent and understandable to the public. Equitable goals need to be set and publicly tracked to identify which communities receive funds.

### **Transparency:**

1. *If you are elected, please describe three discrete actions you will take to ensure transparency in the County's budget process and its priorities in spending?*

**Response:** Public input in planning and budget processes make it easier for residents to participate: I will hold regularly-scheduled town halls to gather input (like CIP). I will insure that County proposals are also available in Spanish and Vietnamese. For those not Internet-connected, use libraries to share paper copies.

Note: I will bring a motion to put the county's checkbook online.

### **Job Creation and Workforce Development:**

1. *Please describe in your own words key elements that are needed to construct a county wide workforce development program and key partnerships you would like to create in order to create a disaster recovery workforce development program if applicable.*

**Response:** A workforce development program should be planned in advance. Partnering with craft, labor unions and progressive construction companies will accelerate training providing real work experience. Adequate funding is necessary for trainers, training wages. For long-term, working with high schools and community colleges will transition students to part-time and full-time positions.

2. *Do you see local hire as a priority for workforce development? Why or why not?*

**Response:** Yes, it is essential to hire locally especially for work funded by public taxpayer dollars. Tax dollars should feed the local economy as much as possible to help reduce the cost of projects by providing economic stimuli and to ensure the training and development value reaches our diverse communities.

### **Responsible Contracting and Preventing Wage Theft:**

1. *What measures, if any, would you propose to protect workers from being victims of wage theft? What consequences would you propose for contractors and subcontractors engaging in wage theft practices?*

**Response:** Ramped-up wage enforcement program with integrated public information outreach must educate workers and potential thieves about laws, enforcement, penalties. Day laborers in low skill jobs need to know their rights and where help is. Our prosecutors must be more pro-active to protect those with limited resources, especially in a disaster.

2. *What role can the County play in ensuring workers are classified properly? Would you support legislation to further penalize these contractors?*

**Response:** Failure to classify works as employees when meet criteria or when their roles are actually more appropriately non-exempt is unfair to workers who would be compensated better with overtime or have better hours as in traditional work situations. Contractor rules and penalties to address these situations should be implemented. (49)

### **Worker Protections:**

1. *Would you support incorporating these standards [Better Builder Program] as minimum requirements on Hurricane Harvey disaster related site in the County? Please explain why or why not.*

**Response:** I value Better Builder programs, including standards for construction work sites, OSHA training, workers compensation, and other identified. These are all important steps to improve the lives of workers and their families. Far too many workers are injured, even die, in work accidents, we must act to protect them.

2. *Many government entities have passed fair contracting (often referred to as responsible bidder ordinances) or best value contracting legislation to level the playing field between construction entities. Explain whether you support legislation like fair contracting or best value and why?*

**Response:** I expect to support fair and best value contracting once proposed legislation is reviewed. Improving cost overruns, inadequate health insurance, low wages and reduced benefits will build a stronger more motivated workforce, improve quality of work product for the contracting organization, and ultimately be the best value to the taxpayer.