

At forum, council hopefuls differ on how to boost southeastern Austin

LOCAL GOVT & POLITICS

By Elizabeth Findell - American-Statesman Staff

0

Posted: 10:07 p.m. Friday, Sept. 23, 2016

Highlights

Wesley Faulker and Casey Ramos are challenging Council Member Delia Garza in the race for District 2.

At a Friday forum, they discussed taxes, the city's CodeNEXT program and home buyouts in flood-affected areas.

Garza is one of five council members running for re-election in November.

Questions about Southeast Austin's place in the city anchored a District 2 City Council candidate forum Friday, where Council Member Delia Garza touted progress during her two years in office and two challengers questioned whether it was enough.

"We're not looking at all of Austin," contender Wesley Faulkner said of city government, arguing that city policies don't help the whole city.

Faulkner, 39, a social media manager, and 27-year-old Casey Ramos, a boxer, are both political newcomers looking to unseat Garza, 40, an attorney and former firefighter. She was elected in 2014 as the first Latina on Austin's City Council.

"It has been a neglected community, but I have elevated the voice of this community," she said.

Faulkner and Ramos said the city hadn't done enough to help families affected by flooding near the Onion and Williamson creeks, and that those who received buyouts hadn't received enough to stay in the city. Garza said the first meetings she took as a council member were on flooding and she was grateful the city had moved quickly to buy out homes.



Candidates Casey Ramos, left, Wesley Faulker, center, and incumbent Delia Garza participate in a City Council candidate forum for District 2 ... [Read More](#)

“Everybody did see an increase on their utility bills because it was important to get those families out of harm’s way,” she said.

Other highlights of the discussion included:

- On the issue of rising taxes and fees, Faulkner argued the city is not adequately charging for the cost of growth and should charge new developments more for infrastructure. Ramos said he would make utility companies operate more efficiently, but did not specify how. Garza reiterated her opposition to a homestead exemption, which she said reduces homeowner taxes but disproportionately helps wealthier residents.



Austin District 2.

- Both Garza and Faulkner described provisions in the city's ongoing CodeNEXT program that allow for more types of development in the city's core as instrumental to increasing housing supply. Ramos — who kicked off the forum by saying he wrote a college paper on CodeNEXT — argued that “Austin has unlimited demand” for housing and the city should instead subsidize owning and renting homes.
- To a question on economic segregation and food deserts, Faulkner argued that Austin spends too much money incentivizing businesses to move to the city, but not enough to draw businesses to locate in areas like District 2. Ramos suggested creating a database of local workers to boost their ability to find jobs. Garza spoke of funding that's been added to bring healthy food to the area and a partnership to bring farmers' markets to Del Valle.

Garza was among five council members who drew an initial two-year term when the new 11-member council took office in 2015. The winners of the Nov. 8 election will serve four-year terms. Early voting begins Oct. 24.