

S.A. Express-News Editorial Board City Council Questionnaire

Name: Arthur M. Thomas IV

Date of Birth: May 2, 1978

Position Sought: City Council District 10

How long have you lived in the district you are seeking to represent?

I was just redistricted into 10 so technically I have lived in this district since the new district map. I have been living at this location for about 4 years and 9 months. I have been a resident of San Antonio since May 2005.

Do you support providing tax abatements or incentives to companies bringing new facilities and jobs to San Antonio as an economic development tool?

Often a government offers direct or indirect incentives to get a new business into the community. However, the incentives too often cost the government more in dollars than local wages and salaries generated by the new company. Keeping taxes competitive and honest, efficient government will welcome sound business investments more than handouts to crony capitalists hustling a buck out of city government. Those incentives often carry a hidden price tag for the long term residents and businesses of a community who pick up the tab via the taxes they pay. Fortune 500 companies have been moving their headquarters to Texas from states such as New York, California and Illinois for the last several decades. The majority of these decisions have been based on lower state taxes and more reasonable regulatory environment. I favor using our available tax dollars to maintain high quality services for all of our community.

How would you rate City Manager Sheryl Sculley's job performance?

As a city council member, I expect Ms. Sculley to help me meeting the concerns of my constituents. My goal as city council representative is to keep city government responsive to the citizens that employ them.

Have you signed or would you sign a pledge not to raise taxes?

While I would not sign a pledge it is not because I have any intention of raising taxes. Pledges such as this are political game. I believe that some measures might be taken that still are seen as 'raising taxes'. For instance if I voted to end

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some sort of subsidy or tax break on an entity then that could be seen as 'raising taxes'. I refuse to participate in that political game. I believe that a flat out tax increase ban is more of a political show more than meaningful discourse. I have no intention of raising taxes though and think that it should be the goal of government to always be in search of a way to restore money to the taxpayers who earned it.

What would be your top priority as a member of City Council?

I would like to work towards a city where citizens can be more involved instead of being like ever other city and waiting on the government to 'do the right thing'. I have seen citizens complain about crime, sidewalks and roads, and mostly local concerns to their area. Overall a city can take care of the basics, but I think citizens should have more say locally in meeting their concerns.

I would like to build a voluntary 'city builder' website on which citizen projects could be started and funded voluntarily. This could be anything from having a stretch of sidewalk built on undeveloped land, helping a firehouse fund new equipment, or paying for police overtime. The possibilities are endless. I think this puts people in direct control of their concerns and they can get their neighbors involved. It encourages communication and involvement with local services as well. The voluntary activity is aggregated over citizens in an area which means people can accomplish goals voluntarily without any specific group having to sacrifice.

Government should get out of the way of people that are committed to improving their areas. Everyone with similar interests can work together to accomplish improvements. The funding would be guaranteed to the project it was donated unless otherwise indicated by the citizen. No money could be directed out of the 'city builder' project. At worst it could only be redirected to another project at the agreement of the donor.

I want people to be in charge of their city and to invest in it. The old style idea of having taxpayer money taken and hoping it comes back in a good way doesn't have to be the only way. We can take care of problems together and in a voluntary way.

Do you support increased pay for council members?

I would be willing to discuss this issue since there is cost to being a council member. I would want this to be a budget neutral proposal. City council members should not be able to vote themselves a pay increase for their present term.

What is your philosophy on balancing economic growth and the environment?

Strong property rights are essential to environmental protections. The environment is best protected by parties with environmental concerns investing in property. If politicians are pushing city growth it often brings in entities eager to be influenced by the economics that come with it. Government with the best intentions can be the greatest destructive force to environment. Natural and steady growth allow communities to adapt and make decisions about their areas better.

If there are to be specific environmental regulations, I would prefer them to be at the state level. I do not want to create a confusing, conflicting, and burdensome bureaucracy.

Do you feel the city should pursue pro-growth policies? Would you support any annexations?

I would need to see a more specific example of a 'pro-growth' policy, but in general I do not think politicians should be pushing or micromanaging city growth. I believe local government is there to take care of the basics and create a fair system for all to work and live in. When politicians get involved in shaping how a city grows it yields to political decisions and not rational ones. Cities can become corrupted in the process and the freedom of individuals is not protected.

San Antonio will naturally grow on its own. Trying to 'force' it to grow more through policy will at best trample on taxpayers and at worst cause growing problems like water and other expansion issues. A natural rate of growth preserves liberty and lets citizens and the city adapt to changes better.

I do not support coercive annexations. Further expanding the city area should be up to the people of that area.

What regulations do you support, if any, to protect the Edwards Aquifer Recharge zone?

There are already many regulations at state and federal level dictating use of the Edwards Aquifer. Another set of regulations imposed by the city is likely to be counter productive.

How would you address the city's future water needs?

Pressure should be put on SAWS to be efficient as possible and lower costs. Good service should be delivered at a reasonable price and profits should not go into marketing or padding paychecks but into maintenance and improvements.

Reducing fees for xeriscaping or other water conservation measures could also be considered.

This also ties into the question of growth. Water concerns often become a fast issue because the city pushes for growth faster than the population and services can adapt. Quality services and future expansion should always be considered over pro growth policies.

Do you think a rail system should be part of the city's public transportation network?

I would have no problem with this being done privately. I like the idea of a rail system if done in such a manner, but I am not for a taxpayer funded rail project. We cannot keep piling higher and higher tax burdens upon people for good intentions.

Rail systems are capital intensive, require large ongoing subsidies of several dollars per ticket purchased, and are inflexible due to their long lead time. Cities such as Portland, Oregon tout their rail systems but their budget has had to make hard decisions about funding the rail system versus police and street maintenance.

Additionally, the bus system is transportation to work for many of our citizens who earn lower wages. The initial rail system seems intended to citizens who can better afford private transportation. Let's improve the bus lines and improve the quality of life for people who are dependent on that mode for their livelihood.

If evaluating providing a cost beneficial service then a modest amount of money on the bus system will help transportation needs more than a large amount of money spent on a rail system which serves a few.

Why are you running for City Council?

I believe at every level of government we need people that start from the basic question: Should government be doing this? Very often government agencies and politicians take that question for granted. There must be people that question government growth and preserve the efforts and freedoms of the people.

Please list noteworthy professional or personal accomplishments.

I have had a pretty steady career as a programmer. I worked after graduation at Texas Life Insurance until 2005 when I moved to San Antonio to work for Arias & Associates. I started getting involved in politics around 2008 and have become heavily involved in that and it takes up much of my time.

Describe your civic activities and community involvement.

Much of my involvement and time is taken up with the Libertarian Party of Texas and LP Bexar county.

Describe your education.

BA in Computer Science from Baylor University 2001.

Do you or your spouse have any business relationships or contracts with the City Of San Antonio?

Not directly. I work for a company that does work for the city, but I am not involved in any of that process as a programmer. I have no influence or say in those contracts.

Have you or your spouse ever filed bankruptcy or has a tax lien ever been placed on you or your spouse?

None

Have you ever been arrested? Have you ever been convicted of a crime other than minor traffic violations? If the answer is yes, please explain.

None