



Questions for Candidates for City Council from the Conservative Coalition of Harris County

This questionnaire will be posted onto the Conservative Coalition of Harris County website for public viewing (www.cchc-pac.org).

Candidate Name	Position that Candidate is Running For
Leah Wolfthal	City of Houston At Large 1

Candidates please give your answer to each of the following questions and include your rationale with each answer. Please be concise and clear.

1. Why are you running for City Council? If elected, what will be your priorities?

Answer: I'm running because I believe in the Houston dream: that everyone, from any background, should be able to build a full life, and thrive! My own family has felt the impact that politics, and a divided society, can have on peoples' lives. My father's side of the family fled Poland escaping Nazis. My mother's side of the family was also from Eastern Europe, and came to the U.S. because of World War I. Both sides had many garment factory workers after these wars. My parents became educators, and raised me to understand that if we come together, and get active in politics and in community work, we can make things better.

The City is facing a lot of challenges. Some of my priorities are:

Fixing the budget deficit:
We have a significant annual budget deficit. We've had recurring structural deficits of let's say \$160M-200M, but this will increase over the next few years due to that recent raises were paid for with one-time federal stimulus money. Coupled with what we owe to firefighters and gaps we may need to plug in funding toward the EPA \$2B consent decree for our sewage systems, the deficit will balloon into the range of a third to half billion dollar annual gap.

Infrastructure:
Our infrastructure is aging and we need to invest more in it. Whether for our water and sewage systems, for drainage and disaster mitigation, and roads/transportation, we need to work collaboratively with our Congressional delegation and neighboring jurisdictions to acquire more funding. There is currently significant federal funding available that we can go out there and get!

Public Safety (see Question 5 below)

Corruption, conflicts of interest, transparency:

Too many times in recent news Houston politicians or people close to them have been connected to corruption scandals or allegations thereof. And, it is frequently very difficult to obtain public information requested to the City government. There is more we can do to increase transparency and decrease conflicts of interest, for example:

- Fully implement the Controller’s proposed “Checkbook” website initiative for easier search and analysis of the City’s contracts and finances. I’d like a search tool to *easily* show us who’s getting contracts, what were the bid scores, who were the reviewers, what are the objectives of the contracts, where those objectives achieved, how much money was paid, etc.
- Publish in a searchable format online the personal financial disclosures of City elected officials, lobbyists, department heads, senior aides.
- Disallow the practice that the companies of those serving on public boards and commissions can receive contracts through those same boards and commissions, while serving.

2. What experience or skills have prepared you to serve as a city council member? What differentiates you from the other candidates and/or council members?

Answer: I’ve dedicated my career to public service, working in a variety of fields that impact Houstonians’ lives. Most recently, I served as the Executive Director of the Center for Urban Transformation, addressing root causes of criminal justice involvement in the Fifth Ward. I’ve done the hard work on-the-ground, but also successfully collaboratively designed and executed big-picture strategy to improve communities. I’m trained and certified as a mediator, and have built agreements with people from different cultures, different parts of the city, and different political persuasions – to move things forward.

3. What is the effectiveness of the current system for City of Houston residents to report issues/file complaints? How can this system be improved to better serve residents?

Answer: What I hear from community leaders is that the revised 311 app is an improvement from what we have had in the past, but our system as a whole (including the app) still has a ways to go to serve Houstonians optimally. In brief, some ideas I’ve heard:

- Send City representatives who can explain the current tools and how to use them out into more community meetings, and host more workshops in the community at times convenient to community members, to spread access to this information
- Host more community meetings with law enforcement, to build trust
- Make sure the 311 app is in languages accessible to more Houstonians
- Address concerns that 311 operators have that are unresolved with management and impacting workflow and morale.

4. How would you characterize the funding of the following items; Please rank selections, check funding boxes below and provide a short explanation of your reasoning in answer section box:

	Over-Funded / Adequate / Under-Funded		
____ Solid Waste Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Parks and Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Houston Police Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Houston Fire Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Houston Health Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Municipal Courts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Public Works	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
____ Conventions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Answer: A recent article in the Chronicle noted that 40 staff were laid off when the City was unable to perform contractual obligations and spend \$60M in post-Harvey federal funds for a single-family affordable housing program. This program was initially run by 4-5 staff; I'm concerned about why that number ballooned to 40 and why leadership was unable to find a way to use that funding productively. We need to take a hard look at our processes and functioning; but that doesn't mean that we're *over-funded* for programs to help keep housing affordable for Houstonians, for example; in fact, that \$60M could have been critical in helping close the gap of housing that we need for Houstonians. My analysis is similar to that for Public Works – we are in need of significantly more funding for infrastructure (as mentioned above), to fix water breaks, sewer leaks, to mitigate against flooding, and more. This doesn't preclude us *also* working hard to improve our operations, timelines, and communications with internal and external stakeholders.

We have a serious budget deficit (see above), and many of our core city services are not functioning optimally. My approach to fixing any problem is to bring impacted stakeholders together, take a deep look at what the status quo is compared to where we want to be, and generate solutions from there. This includes looking at both cost and revenue sides of the equation, conducting thorough analyses of our departmental processes, talking with both management and front-line staff, and not pre-empting with a broad brush stroke of thumbs up / thumbs down. Our severe budget deficit is going to take a bucket of solutions to address.

5. Crime problem in Houston--can the police force be increased? Immigration impact--should Houston be a sanctuary city?

Answer: The Houston Police Officer's Union President Doug Griffith stated recently that "Our problem isn't that we don't have enough officers in patrol – we don't have enough running calls for service in patrol." He said "You have specialized units, you have crime suppression teams. Those are guys that do not run calls for service."(1) So part of the solution may be re-allocation of personnel. Relatedly, some current public safety -related expenses may be more impactfully spent in other ways; for example, the City recently purchased another \$350K military-grade SWAT vehicle(3); the analysis I've received from military officers I know is that those funds might have been better spent on personnel, for instance. Additionally, we actually already have budget

allocated for positions that are empty, resulting in a staffing shortage. Lastly, former Chief McClelland said, "Police didn't invent crime and they're not going to do away with it..There are too many socioeconomic factors"(2). So let's also address the underlying causes for some of these crimes for long-term solutions, like connecting Houstonians with workforce training and certification, and mental health and trauma counseling. We need a comprehensive approach to safety.

On the question of immigration – I've spoken with a range of stakeholders on this issue, including construction contractors who do work with the City and hire immigrants (who are here legally), as well as recent immigrants here both legally and not. Everyone agrees that our immigration system needs to be fixed. Many of these fixes are at the federal level, not at the City level. Immigrants are a critical part of our workforce and community locally. It's also critical that we have a functional system to make sure that those entering our city are part of keeping it safe. I support removing people from our community who are engaged in violent enterprises, but I don't support deporting people who have committed no other illegal act than to enter the country in pursuit of a better life. We need an overhaul of our system to acknowledge the reality of thousands of people seeking to work and live here.

(1),(2)<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/houston-police-response-times-18091539.php>

(3)<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/houston/article/houston-police-swat-vehicle-militarization-18168213.php>

6. Do you support amending the City Charter to allow council members to add items to the meeting agendas?

Answer: Yes.

7. Do you support the proposed Hospital Bond issue for \$2.5 billion dollars?

Answer: Yes.

BY RETURNING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE, THE CANDIDATE ASSUMES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ANSWERS TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. THE ANSWERS ON THE FOREGOING REFLECT THE CANDIDATE'S BEST EFFORTS TO ANSWER THIS QUESTIONNAIRE HONESTLY AND DIRECTLY.

Once this questionnaire has been completed, please email it to: alex@cchc-pac.org.

Please note: You ***must*** return your questionnaire from the email address to which it was sent. Questionnaires returned from any other email address will be considered fraudulent and will ***not*** be recorded and no answers will be published in the voter's guide. CCHC deems a return from the proper email address as authentication of the correct respondent.