

2025 Brentwood City Commissioner Candidate Questionnaire and Responses

This survey was shared with each of this year's Commissioner candidates. We thank each candidate for taking the time to consider our questions and each response is documented below.

1. Where would you rank the preservation of green space in Brentwood compared to other priorities facing the City? Please share your top priorities for the City of Brentwood in order of importance?

JANET L. DONAHUE	<p>1. Communication: enhance old and enact new ways for the commissioners and citizens of Brentwood to share information- allowing the commissioners to share information with the citizens and to respectfully hear and respond to the opinions of the citizens, use of referendums and other mechanisms to allow citizens to approve or disapprove of contentious or high-cost projects</p> <p>2. Transportation: improve intersections and roads to decrease congestion and increase safety; build additional bike and pedestrian pathways and bike lanes to connect the city, decrease vehicle traffic, and increase recreation</p> <p>3. Safety: continue fully funding fire and police departments so they can be fully staffed and have all appropriate equipment and space needed to perform their best</p> <p>4. finance: make prudent budget decisions valuing the input of all department leaders and the finance director and in alignment with the vision for Brentwood from past and present citizens, keep taxes low</p> <p>5. Zoning: continue 1-acre density for residential and height limits on commercial and residential, keep commercial and business separate, use existing zoning classifications to preserve green space and the residential feel to our city;</p> <p>6. Amenities: Maintain funding and zoning for amenities such as parks, green space, and the library; improve/update older facilities as needed, consider new parks outside in areas of new residential communities</p> <p>7. Special Needs: as identified by citizens and staff, such as improved cellular coverage in certain areas of the city</p>
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	<p>Top priorities for the City- First, finishing the bike/walk path connecting Franklin Road to Concord Rd. This is actually tied with another top priority with 'finding ways to help ease traffic' (which needless to say, more bike & walk ways would help improve traffic flow).</p> <p>Second, preserving & supporting one-acre density and no rezoning of commercial, absolutely no high density or multi-family housing. I would also like to find more park acreage, and parks that are linked to the bike/walk trails. Acquiring more parkland is a smart way to prevent more residential development. Every acre we preserve helps protect Brentwood's character.</p> <p>Also, connectivity to the parks is essential. All of this coupled with maintaining & supporting our police and fire departments because safety is paramount.</p>
MARK GORMAN	<p>The preservation of green space is and has always been an important consideration for the City Commission in Brentwood. In terms of priorities, the residents I have spoken with view the acquisition, improvement and expansion of green space and park land as mostly beneficial, while at the same time, there are some that feel there may be other priority issues that include traffic, safety and security, overcrowding of schools, keeping taxes low, and managing growth that should be prioritized.</p>
RHEA E. LITTLE III	<p>1. <u>Maintaining Fiscal Responsibility and Limited Government:</u> Brentwood has always valued limited government, fiscal responsibility, and listening to citizens. We stay with Core responsibilities of government: Police and Fire, Public Works, Water and Sewer, Parks</p> <p>2. <u>Traffic Improvements:</u> Brentwood faces heavy traffic due to its proximity to Nashville, which has become a much larger city than it was 25 years ago, surrounding development and population growth over the years. Improving intersections, signalization, and partnering with state and federal governments for better infrastructure and regional goals are key to managing traffic flow.</p> <p>3. <u>Acquiring Green Space:</u> Acquiring green space helps limit population growth, reduce traffic, and protect infrastructure. It also enhances physical and mental health, property values, and the overall beauty of Brentwood. Green space purchases should be financially wise and supported by the majority of citizens.</p>
ALLISON SPEARS	<p>Residential zoning at 1-acre density is the very best way to preserve Green Space in the City of Brentwood. The most important issue for the residents of Brentwood is to keep our current residential and commercial zoning right where it is. I have vowed to keep residential and commercial zoning right where it is so that we can keep our infrastructure as strong as possible as well as maintaining our Green Space.</p>

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2. What role should the City of Brentwood play in acquiring parkland and dedicated green space? Should Brentwood actively seek opportunities to acquire such land, or should it respond only to offers from property owners and developers?

JANET L. DONAHUE	<p>As the population grows, and building of neighborhoods occurs towards the urban growth boundaries, there will be need for new parks and green space. This would be to decrease overall traffic, i.e. parks closer to where people live, as well as to provide increased recreational opportunities. The city should be looking for land both in established areas and in the areas of new growth. Partnering with land owners, conservationists, builders, and non-profit groups to acquire the land while determining the needs of the residents should occur.</p>
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	<p>The City of Brentwood should take an active role in seeking opportunities in acquiring parkland and dedicated green space. Waiting for offers alone will take too long, and risks missing key opportunities to preserve areas rather, we should be actively looking and planning. We should be proactively identifying specific & strategic places, especially those that can connect to existing parks or trails—and pursue them. This coupled with regularly studying & budgeting to ensure the funding can support it. I think we should explore as many possibilities as we can.</p> <p>I believe in thinking 'outside the box'- meaning, we should consider working with property owners, developers and working on our own as a city to acquire land for parks and green space. Protecting green space is an investment in our community's quality of life, traffic relief, and long-term character.</p>
MARK GORMAN	<p>It depends on the specific circumstances and the actual needs as to which role City officials should play. In Brentwood, historically the acquisition of parkland and dedicated green space has come from a wide range of opportunities and in my role as City Commissioner I pledge to thoroughly evaluate the options and seek the input of residents in order to make the best decision.</p>
RHEA E. LITTLE III	<p>The City of Brentwood does know our large tracts and have them identified and is always open to opportunities to acquire land for parks and green space; however, we only do it in a way that it is a good value to the citizens and makes sense financially. Many times, we do wait for the landowner to approach us because we don't know ahead of time that a certain property may become available. It is known to property owners that Brentwood is interested in land but I don't feel we need to aggressively seek the land, that approach often leads to the landowners inflating the price because the demand has gone up for the property. With developers, they often will work with the City and give green space for a park; such as Powell Park near Tractor Supply.</p>
ALLISON SPEARS	<p>We are very fortunate we have 1,000 acres of parks and green spaces in Brentwood. I will continue to be open to learning about future opportunities as they arise. As opportunities arise, we must ask all pertinent questions to determine how we could best incorporate additional greenspace into our City.</p>

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3. Do you believe Brentwood currently has sufficient parkland and green space, or would you advocate for more acquisitions? How would you propose to advocate for more acquisitions?

JANET L. DONAHUE	<p>Ditto - As the population grows, and building of neighborhoods occurs towards the urban growth boundaries, there will be need for new parks and green space. This would be to decrease overall traffic, i.e. parks closer to where people live, as well as to provide increased recreational opportunities. The city should be looking for land both in established areas and in the areas of new growth. Partnering with landowners, conservationists, builders, and non-profit groups to acquire the land while determining the needs of the residents should occur.</p>
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	<p>I think we have a nice amount of green space & parks but I don't believe there's ever too much. Ideally, it would be a dream to connect the parks with pathways to all the different parks, making the connectivity city-wide and increasing the green spaces. It seems like a dream, but I believe in the old saying that aiming for the moon and hitting the stars is still a nice achievement.</p> <p>For more acquisitions, I'd push for the city to be more proactive—not just waiting around for land to become available but actually keeping an eye out for spots that make sense to acquire & protect, especially ones that could connect to existing trails or parks. We should have money set aside in the budget for land buys when the right opportunity comes up. I would also look at working with landowners and even nonprofits to find creative ways to preserve green space without putting extra pressure on taxpayers. Trying to stay ahead of the growth and make smart moves with a plan, while we still can.</p>
MARK GORMAN	<p>I support the addition of parkland and green space when it is fiscally responsible, beneficial to Brentwood residents, and complementary to the City's existing park system. The merits of each opportunity should be considered as it is very important to understand and evaluate the costs associated with acquiring green space and ongoing maintenance costs. For instance, as Mayor, I fully supported the conservation of parkland and green space for the establishment of the Windy Hill Park because it was supported by the residents. The Sensing family has been an excellent partner with the City throughout the process by establishing a generous conservation easement, which assisted with the establishment of the approximately 92-acre Windy Hill Park on Old Smyrna Road.</p>
RHEA E. LITTLE III	<p>Brentwood has done a great job of acquiring Park land and greenspace through the years, but I feel in the future all opportunities should be evaluated to see if they are of great value for our citizens and their City. Green Space acquisition is a very useful tool in Brentwood for limiting the number of people in Brentwood, protecting our infrastructure and limiting vehicles from our own citizens on the road. When the City acquired Smith Park for an average of less than \$30,000 per acre, we also limited 350 or so houses from being built on that property, which probably limited 900-1200 vehicles on our roads and the water and sewer uses of many toilets, showers, pools, etc.</p> <p>Sometimes when we purchase land, like Windy Hill Park, we prevent roads like Jones Parkway from becoming a large collector thoroughfare through Brentmeade and the 60-80 or so houses that would have been built on the Sensing property and Annandale. This would have been used as an artery street from Concord Road to Old Hickory Blvd. and from experience, would have attracted many vehicles from Davidson, Rutherford and Wilson County. So, acquiring Green Space is very important for limiting population, limiting development, traffic mitigation, and protecting Brentwood's infrastructure.</p> <p>Green Space is also very beneficial to Brentwood's physical health for all ages of our citizens. A physically healthy populace leads to a higher quality of life for all of Brentwood. Brentwood's property values are greatly enhanced because of all of our wonderful parks, greenways and open spaces. Green Space helps with all citizen's mental health as it provides areas of tranquility and peace to minds that can often be overloaded by the frenetic pace of our modern world. Lots of plants and grasses in green space provide us with much higher overall air quality. The aesthetic beauty of Brentwood is breathtaking, God expresses his glory in all our beautiful hills, meadows and forested areas through all the seasons of the year.</p> <p>As with everything we do, we need to acquire green space when we can partner with landowners who want to sell large tracts, but we always need to be very wise in how we purchase these tracts and only do it when it is a good value for the citizen's tax dollars. It needs to be a property that will be used by many citizens and is a purchase that Brentwood citizens are strongly in favor of. Green Space is important and needs to be done with fiscal responsibility and be done where the green space is stewarded in a way that it is a blessing and never a burden on the City of Brentwood. These actions need to always be done by first listening to the Brentwood citizens and having their support! As I have done for 16 years as your Commissioner, it is to be very wise in the acquisition of green space, always looking for opportunities but only with the overwhelming support of the citizens, when it is wise financially and when it will be a great asset to all of Brentwood!</p>
ALLISON SPEARS	<p>Again, we are very fortunate to have 1,000 acres of parkland and greenspace in Brentwood. The value of land in Brentwood is very high. If land was offered to the City at a price well below the market rate, I would consider learning more about the option to see if we are interested in investing into this type of capital outlay. In Brentwood, we are proud to be well above the national average (and local average) of per capita park land.</p>

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4. Surrounding communities such as Nashville and Franklin have adopted Open Space Master Plans. Would you support commissioning an updated study to assess Brentwood’s remaining open space, guide acquisition decisions, and establish funding strategies?

JANET L. DONAHUE	I would first look at the information we already have as prepared by city staff and previous studies (2020, 2030) and look at what the current needs are. Then I would suggest using existing resources along with citizen input (town halls, focus groups, etc.) to answer these questions. A separate committee would only be needed if the existing mechanisms and departments/processes were not adequate
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	Yes! It's important to plan... and this includes supporting an updated study to the open spaces & funding strategies. Especially with consideration to the surrounding cities and areas that we border us and including Williamson County. We need to learn what they are planning and see if there are ways to collaborate and work together to maximize trails and open/green space. I think we need to continually update and consider all the options. Especially to update an Open Space Master Plan based on the current actual & projected growth and the needs of the residents. Twenty years ago, residents had different lifestyles & priorities than people and families today. We must have our city adapt to these current needs of the residents. Green space must be preserved with forward thinking and planning - being proactive as a city is essential. This protects our quality-of-life additional planning also helps our property values. As they say, 'Plan to Play' ahead of the growth and make smart moves with a plan, while we still can.
MARK GORMAN	The City of Brentwood currently has numerous mechanisms in place to preserve the area’s history and unique character. In Brentwood we do an excellent job of incorporating open space into the City’s planning and development. For over 20 years I have actively worked with many Brentwood residents, and some of my fellow commissioners, to dependably protect Brentwood’s one acre zoning residential requirements. I would be supportive of an update/development of a parks and recreation plan similar to the plans that have been developed relative to other City park and green space properties in the past.
RHEA E. LITTLE III	Brentwood is unique and special and has done a great job of acquiring green space and park land and I do not feel we need to follow other communities in how they approach things. Though we are constantly on the lookout for opportunities, it has been my experience that "Master Plans" can have the opposite effect than is desired. Sometimes too much planning on land use can be detrimental by raising prices and can sometimes create missed opportunities by locking the vision into a rigid frame.
ALLISON SPEARS	Currently, we have City policies in place for any new residential developments for 1 acre density and bike/ped path connectivity. With the use of our GIS technology, we already have access to much of this information about “where and how” we could connect, if property was to come available. I have not studied Nashville and Franklin’s Open Space Master Plans and would want to do that before commenting on them.

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5. The Brentwood 2030 Plan prioritizes preserving the Cal Turner property’s visual character. Would you support the City purchasing this property if it became available? What is your vision for this property if the City of Brentwood were to acquire it? Would you support increasing taxes or a bond initiative to finance this purchase beyond maintaining only publicly visible open space?

JANET L. DONAHUE	The price for this property may be too high to reasonably expect the city to pay. Partnering with non-profits and grants may make it affordable. I would prefer it to be passive park space: playgrounds, picnic areas, bike/pedestrian paths, open grassy fields for play, no ball fields
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	YES! I would consider the City purchasing, even part of the property if that's all we could acquire. I would most definitely consider a bond initiative or a referendum... IF the residents wanted this. Personally, I would support trying to acquire the Turner Property, in a dream world, I would love for the property to stay exactly as it is. Actually, I would alter one thing- I would create the pathway to connect Tower Park and the Turner property, where the tunnel for the river-way is currently located. Since it's a flood plain, we could make it a bike/walk/green pathway through the property and connect with Franklin Road... and realize the dream of connecting East/West sides of Brentwood. If they are not willing to sell/donate it to the City, I would NOT allow any rezoning or commercial.
MARK GORMAN	First and foremost, it is important to share that I, along with the citizens of Brentwood, sincerely appreciate the Turner family being such good stewards of the land. In response to the question above, I don't think it is appropriate for me as a City Commissioner to speculate publicly on someone's personal property other than to say if and when a reasonable opportunity becomes available, I would seek input from citizens and fellow commissioners in order to make the best recommendation. Most citizens are also aware there are a range of mechanisms to consider that do not require property taxes or a bond initiative. Further, any zoning changes would have to be voted on by the City Commission.
RHEA E. LITTLE III	<p>The Turner property is a beautiful piece of land and gives the view of Brentwood that I had from childhood to young adulthood, all around our beautiful community. It would be a wonderful opportunity, if through a land conservator agreement or if there is a way that the city could acquire a portion of this land at a great value to the citizens of Brentwood. The property is somewhat complicated because a section of it is in the floodway and the floodway fringe. The portion you see with the barn and gorgeous tradition of the nativity scene heralding the Christmas season in Brentwood and Farmer Luther, that large meadow is in the floodway.</p> <p>In my 16 years as a Commissioner, I have not raised taxes and I do not plan on raising taxes. It would be imperative to me to Listen To The Citizens on a bond issue, the amount of money we would be speaking of on this type of purchase would be placed on a bond referendum and voted on by the citizens of Brentwood since the tax dollars possibly used is their money. Obviously, the Turner property is something I've studied and listened to citizens discussions for years before I became a commissioner and the full 16 years of being a Commissioner. This subject and property is very complex with many possibilities. If the opportunity happens that we can purchase a portion, I will look at the opportunity and possibilities but will depend most on the citizen's input on the course of action we should take concerning the Turner property.</p>
ALLISON SPEARS	The Turner Farm is a beautiful farm, and it is currently privately owned. If the Turner Farm was to become available, the City would likely need to issue a bond for the possible purchase of this property. If a bond was required for the purchase of the Turner Farm, I would recommend a bond referendum (as was done in 2004 for this same piece of land) for the residents to consider if they would be willing to take on debt (or not) to pay for the amenity. As a part of that discussion, residents could have input on whether the land, if acquired, would be a passive park, an active park, or a combination of the two options. It may not be in the City's best interest to buy the Turner Farm, if it became available. We need to make decisions based on information and cannot do that until the information becomes available.

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6. As Brentwood continues to grow, how do you view the importance of expanding the walking and biking infrastructure? Would you support a small property tax increase to fund new trail development, sidewalk improvements, and an East-West pedestrian and bike connector across I-65?

JANET L. DONAHUE	I think biking and walking (multi-modal) paths are critical infrastructure for many reasons (see above). I would hope that the improvements you list could be funded in CIPs and inter-municipality agreements rather than a tax hike
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	I value and think it's important to expand our walk and bike trails. It's not just safety, it is a great way to help traffic flow easier. So, I will consider it- and study it- and most of all, I support asking the residents if they support any tax increase for these things. I have a great desire to figure out some way of connecting the north/south (it SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE BY NOW!) and east/west sides of Brentwood.
MARK GORMAN	In my role as City Commissioner, I have not supported, nor do I plan to support any additional tax increases in Brentwood. If there is an opportunity to incorporate some walking and biking improvements as part of a sensible development and a limited impact on the traffic flow, and safety and security of Brentwood citizens then that should be evaluated by the City Commission with input from residents directly affected by the prospective trails.
RHEA E. LITTLE III	Continuing to find ways to improve pedestrian and bike infrastructure has always been a priority to me in my 16 years as a Commissioner, as I have shown repeatedly through my votes and actions. As stated earlier, I will not be for any type of tax increase as shown by my actions in the last 16 years as a Commissioner. However, we do search for projects that improve bike/ped connectivity throughout the city and in our park systems. Concerning the I-65 connector, if you are speaking of a connector over 65 at Concord Road in the form of a wing to the bridge, this we studied intensely and discovered for expense and for safety reasons, that it would not be feasible. Let me explain, on the north side of that bridge you have extremely busy one side cloverleaf entrances and exits and the federal government, I'm certain, would never allow it. On the south side, if you could get the federal government to allow an addition to the bridge, it would be incredibly dangerous to enter and exit this structure for pedestrians or bikers because of the intersections of Concord, General MacArthur and I-65, and the intersection of Concord, Lipscomb and I-65, whether you would be traveling east or west, there will be NO SAFE ENTRY OR EXIT. There are other possibilities of connecting across I-65 but they are very complex and are dependent on factors that are not in place at present, such as the disposition of the Turner property, etc. As always, if the projects are of any type of substantial amount of money, as a Commissioner, I would listen to the Citizens and would allow the citizens to vote on a bond referendum since it is their money that would be spent. As opportunities come along, we must be wise in how we pursue them.
ALLISON SPEARS	<p>The City of Brentwood has a wonderful trail system. We have higher connectivity on the East side than we do on the West side of I-65. When the Concord Road interchange with I-65 is reconstructed the State and Federal Governments in the future, that will be the best time to consider "East-West" connectivity on that corridor. I would be opposed to a tax increase to fund a separate pedestrian and bike bridge over I-65, railroad tracks, and water drainage areas.</p> <p>Over the next 5 years, the City of Brentwood is planning to invest \$5,000,000 in new and improved sidewalks and multi-use paths for walkers and bikers. (Ragsdale, Split Log, Sunset, McEwen, and other areas around the City.)</p>

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7. Which city (other than Brentwood) do you admire for its outdoor living infrastructure, and what elements would you like to see incorporated into Brentwood's future development? Can you share an example of what you admire about your stated city?

JANET L. DONAHUE	I have seen admirable multi-modal paths in Summit counties in Utah and Colorado that are safe and well used. In Omaha Nebraska there is a nice city center area with space for concerts, built in play equipment, walking, biking, and river views. Brentwood does not have the topography for those exact things but could use them as models
KIM SMITHSON GAWRYS	I visited Kansas City about 8 years ago and was blown away with how they have turned the old railroads into walk/bike trails. We went for many miles and were impressed with how they worked with the neighborhoods and commercial areas where the old railways traveled through to connect everything. There were parks connected to the railways; it was amazing. It left an impression of great admiration- again this was years ago, and I can't speak for the entire city, just the areas we explored. I am also greatly impressed with Chattanooga. And again, it's been years, but I love how they have parks and walk/bike paths that connect to the different areas in the downtown area. My husband & I used to do a lot of triathlons in Chattanooga and loved our time in the city because of trails and open spaces all connected and the ability to walk to parks, great food, the baseball park, museums and city attractions. Both cities have such distinctive traits that I love but the common trait is how the trails/pathways link to the parks, commercial, neighborhoods and throughout the city. One difference, these cities were faced with 'rebuilding' where Brentwood could be proactive to incorporate the green spaces and pathways as we grow and build-out for the future. This requires our city to plan and work together with the commission and the residents, to problem-solve and figure out what will serve our community best, connecting us, and continue to make Brentwood exceptional.
MARK GORMAN	Since Brentwood is one of the top ranked cities in the United States for overall quality of life, with over 1,000 acres of City parkland, it is difficult to think of any one city that we would want to try and emulate. In the over 20 years of living in Brentwood, I have not found anywhere else that I would rather live in the United States. There are minor elements of other cities that might be nice to incorporate but they are few and far between, which is why so many are moving to Brentwood.
RHEA E. LITTLE III	Brentwood is a special place to live and raise a family. We are unique among other communities I have visited because we are 90 percent residential, 5 percent service institutional and 5 percent residential. Our commercial areas are on the north and south ends of our community and provide 55 to 70 percent of our income, that is a blessing since it has provided us the ability to not raise taxes in 34 years. Yet, we have provided great green space and many bike/ped trails and paths throughout Brentwood. We don't desire to be another community or copy another community. If we have wise commissioners, we will continue to look for opportunities and look for ways to provide green space and bike/ped amenities to our citizens, if done in a fiscally responsible method and by always listening to our citizens on any project and expenditure we make in this regard. There is no place that is like Brentwood, and I name Brentwood as my most admired city because of how we provide green space and bike/ped amenities in a way that is fair to all. Brentwood is a premier city in the world because of Brentwood's aesthetic beauty and our outstanding citizens! be spent. As opportunities come along, we must be wise in how we pursue them.
ALLISON SPEARS	I have visited cities in over 40 states. Brentwood, TN is my favorite city.



About Citizens for Brentwood Green Space, Inc. - The Citizens for Brentwood Green Space, Inc. is a volunteer citizens group organized as a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation. Our mission is to preserve open space in the form of parks, trails, historic sites, and flood plains while being sensitive to the rights of landowners and developers. CBGS desires to assure that ongoing development of land resources is accomplished in a way that is beneficial to landowners, to existing citizens of the city, and to future generations of Brentwood residents. For more information, please visit www.brentwoodgreenspace.org, our Facebook site "[Brentwood Green Space](https://www.facebook.com/BrentwoodGreenSpace)" and Twitter [@BrentwoodGreenS](https://twitter.com/BrentwoodGreenS).