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Top issues in S.L. City Council races: Homelessness, assisting local businesses

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SALT LAKE CITY — There will be at least two and as many as three new faces on the Salt Lake City Council in 2016.

Seats in Districts 2 and 4 are up for grabs in the Nov. 3 election, and the incumbent in District 6 is fighting for a second term.

As Election Day approaches, with ballots to be mailed out Oct. 5, the six candidates are speaking out about their priorities and what sets them apart from their opponent.

District 2

Vying to represent the Glendale, Poplar Grove and Fairpark neighborhoods in Salt Lake's southwest corner are former Councilman Van Turner and Andrew Johnston, a social worker with Volunteers of America.

Turner was elected in 1999 and served three terms until Kyle LaMalfa defeated him by 260 votes in the 2011 election. LaMalfa is not running for re-election so he can [continue his personal relationship](#) with Councilwoman Erin Mendenhall.

Turner, vice chairman of the Glendale Community Council, said the City Council's decision to [close the Glendale Golf Course](#) spurred him to run again.

"I thought it was the wrong thing to do," he said. "I want to bring good things into our community and not lose the things we have."

Turner said he would push to improve the west side's infrastructure, advocate for more affordable housing to help reduce homelessness, and attract more businesses through redevelopment.

"I understand business," said Turner, who owns a flower shop, a restaurant and a hair salon. "And I think others don't have roots in the community the way I do."

Johnston, chairman of the Poplar Grove Community Council, said his experience as a social worker would be valuable as the city addresses its homelessness problems, and he hopes to be a fresh, strong voice for the west side.

"Sometimes a new voice is as important as the message," he said. "There's always been a chip on the west side's shoulder, so my plan is to couple motivation with some understanding of the issues to make sure we get the right resources for our neighborhood."

Johnston, who has been endorsed by LaMalfa, said he plans to invest more in affordable housing and focus more Redevelopment Agency dollars on the west side.

He also said he wants to build upon the city's plan to address homelessness by listening to recommendations from the mayor's homelessness committee and funding more support services.

"We can do a lot with the momentum going on right now," he said.

According to the candidates, no District 2 public debates have yet been scheduled for the coming weeks.

District 4

Derek Kitchen, an LGBT activist and owner of Laziz Foods, and Nate Salazar, chairman of the Salt Lake County Democratic Hispanic Caucus, are competing to represent the downtown, Central City and East Central neighborhoods.

City Council Chairman Luke Garrott is vacating the seat after running for mayor but failing to advance in the primary election.

"I'm a small-business owner, so I would bring some real deep insight as to what it means to operate an organization and what it means to try and navigate the city's procedures for opening up businesses in Salt Lake," said Kitchen, who has been endorsed by Sen. Jim Dabakis, D-Salt Lake City, and Salt Lake City Councilmen James Rogers and Charlie Luke.

To address frustrations of small-business owners, Kitchen said he would work to set up a "one-stop shop" to streamline the business permitting process.

"That's one perspective I would bring that no other candidate at the council is currently offering, let alone my opponent," he said.

Kitchen said he also would focus on smart urban growth, walkability and sustainability by building an energetic downtown while preserving neighborhoods' single-family character.

"I think my experience, my energy and my ideas set me apart," he said.

Salazar, who has been endorsed by Garrott and multiple state Democrats and workers' unions, said his political and community experience better qualifies him to represent District 4 on the City Council.

"I know (Kitchen) has his own skill set, but I've been involved in the community for about a decade, working on different campaigns, volunteer projects and things that add a lot more community mindset to social problems," said Salazar, who also serves as vice chairman of the East Central Community Council.

"I know what it takes to be involved in politics and the development of policy," he said, "and I know how

our city works and doesn't work."

Salazar said his top priority is addressing homelessness, which he plans to do through incentivizing affordable housing and focusing on rehabilitation services.

"Business is nice, sustainability is important, but we really need to think about the people," he said.

Kitchen received 36 percent of the vote to Salazar's nearly 18 percent in a five-candidate field in the primary election.

The next [District 4 debate](#) is noon Monday at the University of Utah's Hinkley Institute of Politics.

District 6

Tracey Harty is again fighting incumbent Charlie Luke to represent the east-side district, which encompasses the Bonneville Hills, East Bench, Foothill, Sunnyside, Sugar House, Yalecrest and Wasatch Hollow neighborhoods.

Harty campaigned for the same seat in 2011 but finished third behind Luke and then-incumbent JT Martin in the primary election.

"I feel like our area hasn't had anything significant happen in the last four years," she said, "and I would like to see more attention paid to our infrastructure, parks, congestion and bike lane amenities."

Harty said she wants more traffic and pedestrian safety in the district, criticizing Luke for ending a project proposed in the Sunnyside neighborhood in 2012 to add more bike lanes and aesthetic landscaping.

She also wants to invest more in the area's parks and recreation, add an off-leash dog park, preserve neighborhood character by supporting small, walkable business nodes like 9th and 9th, and fight crime by helping all communities develop neighborhood watch programs.

"I want to represent all six community councils equally," Harty said. "I want to make sure everyone has a voice here, and I don't feel like that's happened."

Luke said he's worked closely with neighborhoods during his term. He cited the recent hire of more police officers and the return of regular beat patrols to increase police presence in the community as examples of that work.

"While I have been able to accomplish quite a bit in the past four years, there's still a lot that needs to be done," he said. "The perception of crime on the east bench is still high. ... I'd like to bring on an additional 30 officers so we can have more officers in the neighborhoods."

Luke said he fought against the plan to narrow Sunnyside Avenue with neighbors who wanted a more efficient street with two lanes in each direction.

"Sunnyside is a better street than it was before, and we see the same thing in our parks," he said, indicating upkeep on Miller Park and Wasatch Hollow.

Among those endorsing Harty are Republican Salt Lake County Councilman Richard Snelgrove and Mary Bishop, former Salt Lake County Democratic Party chairwoman.

Those standing behind Luke include Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams, and numerous state lawmakers and workers' unions.

The next [District 6 debate](#) will be at noon Wednesday, Oct. 7, at the Hinckley Institute.