Cecilia Roberts, Candidate for Block House MUD Board of Directors

Responses to Questions offered by Block House OA Candidate Forum | October 22, 2016

I am qualified to serve on Block House MUD board of directors by these words: “accountability, honesty, experience, integrity, knowledge, and credibility.”

My background and experience are: working in the legal field for litigation with named partner firm attorneys for 17+ years, and currently, I manage a real estate office for a national brand, Coldwell Banker United, REALTORS. Today, my current work field allows me to stay on top of the real estate market and monitor the trends for property values. Preserving and protecting the property values and infrastructure that provides water, wastewater, and park/pool amenities are top of mind for me!

In 1983, we called Block House Creek home! The interest rates were 13.5% and the housing market was troubled. We were the sixth family to move into this new subdivision north of Austin. The second developer of BHC was about to set a tax rate of $1.00 per $100, and I was taking notes to learn more about a MUD and its taxing authority. So, when a vacancy became available, the developer reached out to me asking me to fill the vacancy on the MUD board of directors, and I accepted. From that date to today, I proudly serve the taxpayers and residents of Block House Creek. We had a choice and we chose to make Block House Creek our home.

I am fortunate to have built some strong relationships with the cities of Cedar Park and Leander officials; Williamson County officials and county commissioners; and other associated business contacts that enhance Block House Creek.

My vision: I helped bring the CapMetro Quad Gates crossing to enforce a whistle ban; creation of Block House Creek Tidal Waves; work with the developer on the first decomposed granite walking/jogging trails; renovation of Tumlinson playscape; I was instrumental in assisting with the inter local government contracts with Williamson County that include the off-duty law enforcement patrols, as well as the license to maintain the Right-of-Way landscape improvements along Block House and Creek Run; renovations to Apache and Tumlinson Pool; bike trail; above-ground ground storage tank; successful negotiation of wholesale water and regional wastewater contracts with City of Cedar Park; and placement of the US Flag pole at the front entry on Apache Park; and successful legislation to allow a MUD to choose the ETJ of its choice.

I am blessed to call Block House Creek home. As a licensed real estate agent, I see multiple communities and housing, and today, I still want to call Block House Creek my home! I love its namesake – BLOCK HOUSE CREEK! I enjoy watching the residents using all the amenities and especially enjoy my walks with Gus and chatting with so many residents.
Questions/Responses:

1. If, during a MUD Board meeting, your position on an issue was opposed by a fellow board member or the residents in attendance, how would you go about discussing that issue and reaching a resolution?

   Most important would be to listen and hear the issue or matter brought before the full board of directors. Ask questions of concern to gather all the information on the details of matter. Because the MUD is a governmental entity and it is subject to the Open Meetings Act, a director must call the item by a presenting a motion, then a second must be recorded to engage discussion, then action. Bring resolve to the whole community is a priority.

   It’s always more effective when respect and time is given by each board member to allow for the matters before the board to be considered. Sometimes, a board member may need to agree to disagree and respect the outcome.

2. Do you support eventual annexation of Block House Creek by the City of Cedar Park, and what would you think are the benefits and disadvantages of being annexed?

   That’s a mixed reaction to yes and no. A MUD is created with the anticipation of annexation by the city within its ETJ. That has always been the purpose of its creation by the developer. I have always said that the MUD must plan on a future annexation. At this time, there are no immediate rumors of annexation; however, the City of Cedar Park could start discussions whenever it decides now is the time.

   When a buyer purchases a property to call home in BHC, before entering a contract and at the closing a document is signed called Notice to Purchaser that notifies the buyer that the property is in a MUD stating the bond indebtedness and effective tax rate.

   Currently, the benefits are a few, as the board was successful in negotiating the wholesale water contract with Cedar Park to negotiate the usage of the City of Cedar Park’s library and pools at a resident use fee. Also, the district contracts and has an inter local agreement with Williamson County Sheriff’s Office for off-duty patrols, which gives a more visible presence of law enforcement in the community, as well as the regular patrols do drive in and around on a frequent basis.

3. How important do you feel the relationship is between the MUD Board and the HOA Board to the Block House community, and what specific ways would you want to partner with the HOA to improve our community?
It is very important. The most important thing to remember is that the MUD is the grass roots government which was created to provide the water and wastewater to the entire Block House Creek development. The OA is a portion of Block House Creek that was created by the developer with a PUD, mandatory OA. My vision would be to encourage the OA to work with the MUD on projects that enhance the community parks and amenities.

4. What do you believe is the most significant issue facing Block House Creek residents in the next 2 years, and in the next 10 years?

Management of Block House MUD. It is time to hire and employ a full-time general manager. A GM that focuses on Block House MUD and its daily operations and cost efficiencies and operates and maintains the parks, pools and amenities, as well as oversight of the third-party contracts (landscape, pool operations). This would allow for improvement to the relationships with the consultants and the board. Also, this could eliminate the multiple subcommittee meetings that would save the taxpayer money. Bottom line: the district is mature and it is time for a full-time general manager with park personnel to operate and focus on the fiduciary responsibility and needs of the MUD’s infrastructure as well as its creek and amenities and pools.

I will address the enforcement of minor infractions of the restrictive covenants. Several residents feel that they are being harassed and concerned that residents are leaving Block House Creek because of the minor infractions. This needs to be addressed as well as preserving the property values.

The values of Block House Creek properties have risen in the past three years, and I think that maintenance of the aging infrastructure is always a priority (Water and Wastewater), so setting a budget to continue to operate and maintain these systems is always a priority.

The next 10-years is an unknown, as with my experience, there are constant changes in the economy that could create a hardship that could change ownership…there is no crystal ball. I try to hope for the best and always be responsible to preserve and protect the systems, amenities and greenbelt.

5. What do you believe are the most valuable attributes and amenities of Block House Creek and how would you work to protect them as a MUD Director?

Its namesake is the Block House Creek and this is the most precious and valuable attribute of Block House Creek. This creek is a tributary of the U.S. waterways. The Upper Brushy Creek WCID assesses a .02 tax rate to maintain the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers dams along these tributaries. In the 2008 implementation of the MS4 permit began. The District has the responsibility to maintain and clear the debris along Block House Creek to prevent flooding and has a MS4 permit for the environmental side of the storm water discharge requiring the district to monitor,
maintain, and mark the inlets and outlets along the BH creek (see BH Update April 2015).

6. The recent renovations to the Tumlinson Swimming Pool added value to our community. What ideas do you have and what position would you take on future improvements, such as renovating the Jumano Community Center or replacing the wooden fencing on both sides of Block House Drive and on Creek Run?

I have always thought that a recreation center in Jumano Park would be a much needed amenity to encourage fitness, senior activities, and youth activities, along with other resident usage.

The ROW wood fence is a constant maintenance. Since the ROW is owned by Williamson County, and the MUD has a license agreement to maintain the ROW, I would seek the opportunity to add a Concrete fence alongside the wood fence (which is on the property owner’s property line), to create a more aesthetic and much more attractive appearance that will enhance the overall community and maintain property values.

7. What would be your plan on reducing the MUD’s debt?

Continuously evaluate the opportunity and authority of reducing the bond indebtedness by consulting the district’s financial advisor and bond counsel. The district has successfully refinanced most of its bonds to a lower tax rate as the interest rates have a record low for the past several years. The district has refinanced several bonds that have save the taxpayers over $2 Million in interest savings.

8. Many residents would like to see problems in the community resolved more quickly, such as the burned house and the house with no roof razed. How should the MUD Board respond to such problems?

Communication, communication with an understanding of the limitations that the MUD’s authority has on these type of issues. Enforce the restrictive covenant, and if necessary, engage a trial attorney to enforce with a civil lawsuit to get the action necessary to remedy the situation. It may be necessary to engage the power of Williamson County’s environmental constable to enforce the county’s regulation of enforcement.

9. How would you improve upon and foster communication with residents about what is happening in MUD Board meetings and within the Block House community?

Website, email, e-sign, and newsletter. There’s not much more that can be done. The residents are our constituents, and I track the LISD and Williamson County Commissioner’s Court, and very few residents present themselves at these meetings, and most important is that if there is an issue with a particular agenda item or
concern of a resident, then the meetings are posted and have always been consistent to notify a resident that before every meeting there is citizens communications. My consensus is that the silent majority are trusting and satisfied that the board elected will handle and take the fiduciary responsibility given to each board member as a trust that things will be done responsibly.

Livestreaming is expensive, and the MUD board is exploring this option.

10. How would you increase community involvement in the MUD actions and activities?

This is a government and the taxpayers/residents should monitor the news items and read the information that is disseminated in multiple forms (i.e., website, emails, newsletter, kiosk bulletin notices, and social media FB page). I think the current website needs a complete overhaul and revamping to allow the residents a search feature to locate information and an opportunity to receive text messaging alerts!