



## **Houston Association Hosts Forum to Help Voters Get to Know Mayoral Candidates – August 2015**

Houston is looking for a new mayor, and there are seven major candidates vying for the job. On June 25th, supported by a grant from the National Association of REALTORS<sup>®</sup>, the Houston Association of REALTORS<sup>®</sup> (HAR) held a forum to help HAR members and the voting public sort them out.

"We wanted to help inform the electorate about the candidates' positions on real estate issues and beyond," says Dana Kervin, HAR's Chief Political Strategist, who notes that the association has had a long and productive history with City Hall. During Mayor Annise Parker's administration, members have been involved in developing Houston's Historic Preservation Ordinance and its High Density Ordinance.

Working with the city, HAR developed the Houston Living app, which connects residents to city services and REALTORS<sup>®</sup> listings. In the weeks prior to the forum, HAR representatives worked with Mayor Parker to help streamline the city's process for delivering urgent assistance to those affected by the devastating spring floods. And recently, one of its own members was appointed to serve on the city's Ethics Commission.

This civic involvement of REALTORS<sup>®</sup> was highlighted in a video presentation screened at the forum at Houston's River Oaks Country Club, as lunch was served to the capacity crowd. In addition to its own membership, HAR opened the guest list to like-minded business groups, and about half of the Houston City Council was in attendance, as well. NAR provided a grant of \$15,000 for the event, which received an additional \$6,000 in sponsorship support from CenterPoint Energy, Fidelity National Title, and Shell Federal Credit Union.

The forum was moderated by Miya Shay, an award-winning ABC-13 reporter covering City Hall, whom Kervin has known for years. To prevent the inevitable repetition if all seven candidates were to answer the same questions, the candidates drew numbers corresponding to a list of questions developed by members serving on HAR's Governmental Affairs Advisory Group, various municipal departments, the audience, and one question from Mayor Parker. Each question was answered by two candidates. "That way, we were able to cover a much broader range of issues," says Kervin, "from the budget, technology, traffic, and transportation to affordable housing, infrastructure, and the homestead exemption."

She adds that HAR also used the occasion to encourage voter registration and voter turn-out, which is typically low in Houston. In her introductory remarks, HAR Board Chair Nancy Furst urged members to include voter registration applications in their closing packets for clients moving to and within Houston. Voter registration applications were on all the tables in case any individuals in the politically engaged crowd happened not to be registered, and an HAR staff member, who serves as a Deputy Voter Registrar, was on hand to accept any completed cards. Four applications were received on the spot as well as several requests for blank applications to include in closing packets.



ABC-13 covered HAR's Mayoral Candidate Forum on the 6 o'clock news that evening, and produced a recording of the entire event with a link on its website <http://abc13.com/politics/full-video-houston-mayoral-forum/805809/>. "It was thrilling to see our event on TV when I got home!" admits Kervin. "They did a great job, as did the *Houston Chronicle* in print, online and on social media, live tweeting the event to the *Chronicle's* 169,000 followers." Kervin credits HAR's Communications Chief Matt Burrus for the forum's broad media coverage.

To other associations who might consider hosting a similar event, Kervin strongly advises producing a presentation showing the involvement of REALTOR® members in the community, and in government. "The elected officials who were there, as well as all the mayoral candidates, clearly received the message that we are an engaged, energetic group, in touch with our city and willing to roll our sleeves up and work hard on civic matters. Seeing the video of REALTOR® engagement at City Hall made a real impact." Come January, Houston's new mayor will be one of those candidates who participated in HAR's forum, and he'll know just where to turn for expertise on real estate and private property issues.

*To learn more about how Houston REALTORS® are taking a leading role in the city's political process, contact Dana Kervin, Chief Political Strategist of the Houston Association of REALTORS®, at 713.629.1900 x 223 or [dana.kervin@HAR.com](mailto:dana.kervin@HAR.com).*

