

Mentor Visit Assessment #1

Mentors: Shona Huffman and Will Sowell

Profession: City Council Members

Location: Frisco City Council Chambers

Date: March 4, 2019

Time: 3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Assessment:

This past week, the focus at our mentor visit was primarily on my Final Product. It seems like some weeks when I speak to my mentors, there are other things going on, such as Shona's campaign or updates within Frisco. On Monday, we did speak briefly about Shona and the people that filed against her, but mostly I had a chance to ask some of the questions that have come up during my continued local control research and in relation to the property tax bills in the Texas legislature.

One thing that I really enjoyed when I spoke to Shona about how her re-election campaign was going was how I came away with the sense of how much she prioritizes her position once again. I think it can be easy to forget, as people (often thoughtlessly) benefitting from how great Frisco is, that there is so much more than meets the eye that goes in to the city running well. It particularly reminded me of something said on one of my earlier informational interviews with Henry Hill that in local government, if you're doing your job well, the citizens of that city won't have to be involved or think about you. That being said, the commitment Shona has to her campaign is extremely inspiring. She's going to many forums and events that are entirely optional, but as a public servant, she realizes that it's something she will commit her time to for the sake of Frisco voters.

Pertaining more to my Final Product, I obviously got the chance to ask a lot about local control and the legislation currently happening in the capital. One thing that I focused on particularly was making connections with people who could give me another perspective to the local control argument, hopefully on the other side. For my project, it's important to me that I hear from many different perspective, from people working in the city government but in a different capacity, to even state representatives that side with the state as opposed to the city in this debate. Having mentors that are so equipped to help me create these connections is wonderful and I hope that I'll be able to use

these relationships in some way to hear different sides. One area, for example, is school finance and how it relates to local property taxes. The state argues that the money for property taxes goes back to the cities, but in reality, almost 70% of Frisco property taxes go to Frisco ISD. Now, my mentors made it clear that there are some deeper problems with states and how schools are financed, but because legislation hasn't been proposed to address that in this session, people like Shona and Will are trying to work within a property tax cap, but one not as strict.

Hearing all of the different ways that these (seemingly separate) entities are woven together and how that can be reduced down to a situation voters rarely understand is concerning in many ways for what it does to popular opinion vote. After this mentor visit, I realized that in order to really make myself useful with my Final Product, I'll need to not only provide high-level research, but focus on its understandability, too.