

Rowlett Mayoral Election

Comparing the Candidates: What's the Difference?

In any election, each candidate has his/her own individual strengths and weaknesses, skills and talents, principles and values, opinions and priorities.

Deb Shinder and Jeff Winget have served on the Rowlett city council together since May 2022. They have both been selected by their fellow councilmembers to fill the leadership positions of mayor pro tem and deputy mayor pro tem, switching titles back and forth, for each of the three years of their terms. Now they're both running for mayor.

Voters want to know about their different positions on issues, and their dissimilar approaches, ideas, and ideologies, to help them decide which candidate is most closely aligned with their own ideas and beliefs, and which is - through ability and availability - better positioned to do the job.

Voting records

Jeff Winget and Deb Shinder have disagreed on some important agenda items. Some on which they voted differently or took opposing positions include:

- **Deb was against obligating taxpayers to \$20,000,000 (twenty million dollars) of debt for a new city hall without direct voter approval. Jeff voted for it.** He also stated on his campaign website that he is proud to support the use of Certificates of Obligation (COs). COs, unlike General Obligation bonds that must be placed on the ballot for a vote of the people, allow the council to make the decision to incur debt on behalf of the citizens.

Deb agrees that a new city hall facility is needed - but she believes COs should be used only to fund emergency needs or expenditures related to public safety or other essential functions. More important, she believes large capital expenditures that obligate tax dollars to pay off long-term debt should be voted on by the citizens.

She is also troubled by the idea that the city plans to spend millions less than the citizens approved for the public safety facility to offset the cost of a city hall that they didn't approve.

- **Deb was against obligating taxpayers to unknown potentially significant maintenance costs. Jeff voted for it.** When the city staff presented a request for the council to approve \$1,780,000 to build a splash pad for the Wet Zone, Deb asked

what the annual cost would be to maintain it. The answer from the city manager was "we don't know." She emphasized that she was requesting only a rough estimate, not an exact figure. The answer was, "No idea."

Deb voted against the splashpad because she takes her responsibility to be a good steward of the taxpayers' money seriously. She couldn't, in good conscience, support obligating those taxpayers to spend unknown amounts on maintenance and operational costs without even a rough estimate. Jeff had made the statement in that meeting that "those things break all the time," yet voted for it without any information on what it's going to cost to keep it working.

- **Deb wanted the city to form a downtown advisory board to give citizens a voice in the development of downtown. Jeff voted against it.** Deb first proposed a city board to give citizens a voice in the development of downtown in 2022 after the city commissioned a study through the Texas Downtown organization and hired a downtown manager. Her research showed that many cities with successful downtowns (including Mesquite, Carrollton, Frisco, Prosper, Royse City, and more) had such boards.

Deb believes Downtown Rowlett belongs to the citizens, not just to the city council and staff. She thinks more citizen engagement in Main Street revitalization will benefit the city and creates more opportunities for its residents. When the council adopted the downtown strategic plan presented by Olsson Studios in October 2024, she formally proposed a downtown board.

At the February 3 work session, a council majority (including Jeff) spoke in favor of creating the board. At the February 17 meeting, when the city attorney brought the ordinance back to the council for adoption, Jeff had changed his mind and opposed the board. The motion to adopt the ordinance failed with a 3 to 3 tie vote so the board was not created.

Deb isn't one to give up on a good idea. As a member of the Economic Development Advisory Board, she teamed up with two other members to form an EDAB downtown subcommittee to collect citizen input and perspective on downtown development.

- **Deb opposed committing over \$15 million in future taxpayer dollars to a private developer. Jeff voted for it.** The Jackson-Shaw project in the North Shore was approved by the previous city council in April 2022 before Deb and Jeff were elected to the council in May 2022. Later that year, Jackson-Shaw requested incentives

through a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) that would use the property tax increment of new and existing development to rebate 50% of the increment to Jackson Shaw in an amount not to exceed \$15,153,528 over a period of at least 22 years.

Deb voted "no" because she did not like the idea of making a long-term commitment of future property taxes to the developer in such a large amount.

- **Deb voted against raising property taxes without voter approval or a clear emergency. Jeff voted for it.** From the minutes of the September 21, 2022 special council meeting: "A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tem Winget, seconded by Councilmember Galuardi, that the property tax rate be increased by the adoption of a tax rate of 0.681000, which is effectively a 3.06 percent increase in the tax rate. *The motion passed with a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed (Shinder).*"

Deb voted "no" because there was no bond election in 2022 at which the voters approved a tax rate increase, and there was no emergency expenditure that required a tax increase. The city manager (at that time) told the council that the city was in the best financial condition it had seen in two decades, so she didn't believe a tax increase was necessary or justified.

- **Deb wanted to allow a homeowner to make reasonable improvements to his property to protect his child. Jeff voted against it.** Deb is an adamant proponent of property rights; she believes in letting homeowners have control over the property they paid for, pay to maintain, and pay high taxes on, unless it causes demonstrated harm to someone else. At the February 18 council meeting, a homeowner requested to build a 6-foot wood privacy fence where there was currently a 4-foot wrought iron fence, for the privacy and safety of his little girl while she plays in the yard.

Deb made a motion to allow the wood fence after confirming with city staff that it would not present any obstruction to drivers or any other safety issues. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Britton. The motion failed with a tie vote of 3 to 3, with Jeff voting against it. He said he didn't want to set a precedent.

[NOTE: When another such request for a wood fence in the same area came to the council, coincidentally the week before early voting began, Jeff voted in favor].

- **Deb stands by her decisions, even when they're controversial.** The most high-profile differentiator may be Deb's and Jeff's respective actions on the controversial decision to dissolve the DEI Commission in May 2024. After months of attempts to

resolve problems with the Commission, Deb made the motion to approve a resolution that removed it from the slate of city boards and commissions. Jeff made a motion for an amendment to restore it, which failed. He then voted against the original motion.

Deb explained her reasoning for her decision and motion in detail at the meeting and on social media, and stands by it. According to several conservatives, now that he's running for mayor Jeff says he does not support DEI and wouldn't bring the commission back. *Deb believes actions speak louder than words.*

Other Factors

In addition to their voting records, there are many differences in the backgrounds and experience of the two candidates, their approaches to governance, their leadership styles, and where each of them is in his/her life – all of which are relevant to their ability to lead the council as mayor.

Previous municipal government experience

Deb Shinder's experience in municipal government spans a lifetime and many different roles and perspectives. Service to the city ran in her family. Her father worked 32 years for the City of Dallas and then 10 for the City of Seagoville. After training and working as a paralegal in her early 20s, she studied public administration courses at (then) North Texas State University.

She was appointed city secretary at Balch Springs and then Seagoville. She resigned to run for and serve on the Seagoville city council in the 1980s and was appointed Public Safety Commissioner. She served on several boards of directors, including the Chamber and Kiwanis.

As a commissioned police officer and subsequently as a training sergeant in the 1990s, she taught at the North Central Texas Council of Governments Regional Police Academy. She was then training coordinator and lead instructor in Eastfield College's Criminal Justice program. In those roles, she worked with command level officers in many different cities across the metroplex. She served almost a decade on Eastfield's Criminal Justice Training advisory board, including a stint as chair.

In the 2000s, she leveraged her public sector experience to work on government regulatory compliance and security projects for Microsoft. She was awarded Microsoft's MVP Award fourteen years in a row, and wrote or co-wrote over 20 books on cybercrime and security.

Deb and her husband moved to Rowlett over 20 years ago. Prior to running for and winning her council seat in 2022, she served on two ad hoc boards (the 2009 Bond Committee and

2015 Charter Review Commission) before serving on the Board of Adjustment, and then the Planning & Zoning Commission.

Jeff Winget has lived in Rowlett for a little over 10 years. He ran for council in 2017 and lost to Brownie Sherrill. Prior to running unopposed for council in 2022, he served as a member of the Charter Commission, Strategic Plan Committee, and Arts and Humanities Commission.

Approach to governance

Deb's background and training are based in law/law enforcement and regulatory frameworks, while Jeff's is in accounting. Different skillsets make for different mindsets and priorities. He digs down into the numbers and implementation details. Her focus is on public safety, compliance with the law, policymaking, and big-picture strategic thinking.

A comment that Jeff Winget made in a work session not long after both were elected to the council illustrates their differing approaches. He commented that although he didn't agree with the majority, he would vote for a particular item because he wanted the council to "present a united front."

Deb believes she was elected to examine all the facts and circumstances surrounding an item and then vote based on the presented facts, citizen input, her core principles, and what's best for the city. While there may sometimes be legal reasons she has to vote in a way she doesn't like, she doesn't believe in just going along with the majority for the sake of appearance.

She also believes the citizens of the city can appreciate that their councilmembers don't agree about everything. Too many councils seem to vote in lockstep. Deb believes respectful disagreement, civil debate, and divided votes are a sign that the council is comprised of members who think for themselves and stand up for what they believe in.

Leadership styles

Deb believes the discussions in all public meetings and especially on the dais should be conducted professionally and in accordance with Roberts Rules of Order, which the council adopted to govern the procedure of meetings. That means comments should be strictly about the issues, not driven by personal feelings toward one another. On multiple occasions recently, Jeff has questioned her motives or challenged her to "explain her vote" in a public meeting.

Most recently, in the March 17 work session, on the dais, he accused her of making "a campaign speech" when she presented a proposal to review the amenities, fees, and tax

burden for senior citizens - something she had first brought up over a year before. She brought it up at this time because some seniors had brought it up to her, and also in response to Garland passing an increase in their city's over-65 property tax exemption.

This is especially ironic given his State of the City video, which was timed to be released right before early voting began (past State of the City videos were released in January or February, before election season heats up) and featured him as the sole "star" of the show, in effect serving as a taxpayer-funded 20-minute campaign commercial.

According to the Council's Rules of Procedure and Code of Ethics, making derogatory remarks about others, especially in a formal meeting, is inappropriate and unprofessional. Everyone has issues about which they feel strongly. Nonetheless, Deb believes that as leaders, councilmembers and especially the mayor (or acting mayor) have an obligation to control their emotions and confine their passion to the issues themselves and not attempt to intimidate or humiliate their fellow councilmembers by misrepresenting their motives to the public.

As mayor, her philosophy will be to lead by example and to facilitate the work of the council, not to rule over it. She will encourage all councilmembers to feel free to state their differing opinions without fear of being the target of disparaging remarks in a public meeting. Deb believes elected officials should answer to the voters, not to their fellow elected officials and they should not use her office and city funds to further their political campaigns.

Communication styles

Deb loves public service, but she doesn't love politics. Her style is not about glad-handing, baby-kissing, and working the room. She prioritizes meaningful, direct engagement over superficial networking, and in-person or live voice one-to-one or small group interactions over social networking. She likes to form real, lasting relationships. While she takes advantage of technology to communicate with constituents where appropriate, she believes it is more effectively done face-to-face or in real-time phone conversations.

Jeff established himself throughout his council tenure as the "city help desk" on the Facebook groups. Responsive answers to online questions are an important element of city-to-citizen communication, but Deb believes that it should be the job of a staff member, not an elected official, to publish information about operational matters on social media.

That's not just her personal opinion. The reason Deb doesn't discuss city business in social media groups is because that was the advice she was given by multiple city attorneys, including the current one. She discusses the reasons in detail in the position paper on her website that talks about Her Personal Social Media Policy.

Deb doesn't *like* the laws that limit her freedom of speech, but she does comply with them. She doesn't want to place herself and other councilmembers at risk of state law violations or create an unfair situation that prevents others from being able to also post in a particular forum due to the "walking quorum" rules. She posts her announcements, opinions, and reasons for her votes on her own "government official" Facebook page as recommended by legal counsel.

She also answers all questions directed to her on that page or via private message, responds to email and texts, returns phone calls, and sets up in-person meetings with anyone who requests it. She attends neighborhood and local organizations' events and does her best to help citizens with their issues with the city, within the boundaries of the law.

Ability and availability

Both Deb Shinder and Jeff Winget have stepped into the mayor's role temporarily over the past three years and they both know how to run a meeting. But to be an effective mayor in a city of Rowlett's size, one must have both the ability and the availability to devote oneself to city business pretty much on a full-time basis. That's what previous mayors Blake and Tammy did. City business was their number one priority. That's what the citizens expect and deserve.

When Rowlett was a small bedroom community, a part-time mayor would suffice, but the city has outgrown that luxury. The city needs someone in the mayor's seat who can be on call 24/7, who can spend the night (or the week) at the Emergency Operations Center in case of a disaster, who can attend not only the council meetings, but also the many daytime and evening meetings with various individuals, organizations, and regional groups.

Deb and Jeff are at different stages of their lives, and this is probably the biggest non-ideological difference between the two of them. Deb has the time to make Rowlett her top priority without any conflicting obligations. She no longer has to work at a paying job. Her children are both grown with successful careers and live in other states. She has no grandchildren. Her parents (and her husband's) have passed away. Neither she nor her husband have any medical or other issues that require time and attention.

Jeff works to support his family of four young children in a full-time position as a finance director for a consulting and training company in Plano. The number of hours in the day is finite and his time will necessarily be divided between competing obligations.

Compliance with the state and city campaign rules

Many of the state election laws, Texas Ethics Commission rules, and city requirements governing campaigns are long and complex and difficult to understand. But some are pretty straightforward. The prohibition on political signs in the rights-of-way is clear.

There are campaign signs of Jeff's that are blatantly placed in the rights-of-way all over town. It's not just a few in places where the location of the R.O.W. isn't clear. It might seem like a petty thing, but it's unfair to those candidates who were careful to try to put their signs only where it's legal to do so, and it shows a disregard for the rules and the law.

City staff finally admitted they can't keep up with enforcing the rules and notified all candidates that they won't be doing so unless a sign is creating a safety hazard, so now at least it's an equal playing field - but it bothers Deb that because some people don't follow the rules, she will have to choose between breaking them, too, or else suffer the major disadvantage of not getting the level of exposure her is getting with his signs placed in violation of the rules.

The ideological divide

Nobody wants to talk about the elephant and donkey in the room, but this election, more than any Rowlett council race in recent memory, is taking place in a city divided along ideological lines. Rowlett's city elections are non-partisan, which means no party affiliation appears next to candidates' names on the ballot, but many voters want to vote for candidates whose ideologies align with their own.

Jeff appears to have the support of the city's liberal groups and individuals. Deb is supported by conservative groups such as the Rowlett Republican clubs and the Rockwall County Republicans.

The Bottom Line: Why Vote for Deb Shinder?

Deb is ready and willing to take on the challenges involved in serving as mayor of Rowlett for the next three years. If voters want a mayor who:

- has extensive municipal government experience,
- is strongly committed to fiscal responsibility,
- wants to give the citizens more of a voice in development matters,
- prioritizes public safety, essential services, and compliance with the law,
- focuses on big-picture long-term critical thinking,

- will maintain professionalism on the dais and in work sessions,
- understands the role of mayor and how to walk the fine line between policy and operations,
- will communicate directly and always within the boundaries of the law,
- is available to be a full-time mayor, and
- will not quit before the end of her term, as so many former mayors have done,
- complies with the campaign laws and will comply with the laws and charter as mayor,



Deb Shinder would be honored to have your vote.

Our city elections are designated as non-partisan. That means no party affiliations appear on the ballot next to candidates' names. This election, however, has become sharply divided along ideological lines. Standing up for your beliefs is a good thing. Hating others because of theirs isn't.

Deb believes that we need to accept one another's differences, but focus on the things that bring us together, not the ones that divide us, and work toward a goal that we can all get behind: a safe, clean, beautiful Rowlett. ONE Rowlett – for everyone.

Please vote on May 3rd for Deb for Rowlett mayor.

Mayoral Candidate Comparison Chart

Key Differentiator	 Deb Shinder	 Jeff Winget
Fiscal Responsibility (Debt)	Voted against \$20M CO debt for City Hall; believes COs are for emergencies & large capital debt for non-essentials needs direct voter approval, demonstrating fiscal responsibility.	Voted for \$20M Certificates of Obligation debt for city hall without direct voter approval.
Fiscal Stewardship (Spending)	Voted against \$1.78M splash pad due to unknown long-term maintenance costs; emphasizes diligent stewardship of taxpayer money.	Voted for the splash pad despite acknowledging potential breakage and unknown maintenance costs.
Citizen Engagement	Championed & voted for a Downtown Advisory Board to give citizens a direct voice in downtown development, after researching successful models in other cities.	Initially supported, then voted against the Downtown Advisory Board.
Taxation	Voted against the FY2023 property tax increase as unnecessary without voter approved bonds or emergency need; committed to fiscal restraint.	Voted in favor of the FY2023 property tax rate increase.
Property Tax Exemptions	Advocates for increasing the homestead exemption from 1% to 5% in 2026, gradually increasing to 10% over the next three years. Advocates making the senior exemption equal to the disability exemption.	Advocates for increasing the homestead exemption from 1% to 2%.

Developer Incentives	Voted against large, long-term (\$15M+/22+ yrs) tax rebates for Jackson-Shaw, expressing concern over long-term commitment of future taxes.	Voted in favor of the \$15M+ tax increment rebate for Jackson-Shaw over 22+ years.
Individual Property Rights	Adamantly supports homeowner rights; voted to allow a privacy fence for child safety, prioritizing individual property rights when there are no safety issues or harm to others.	Voted against the resident's fence request citing precedent (though later voted for a similar one).
DEI Commission	Took a clear stance by motioning and voting to dissolve the DEI Commission.	Motioned to restore the DEI Commission and voted against motion to dissolve it (though reportedly now states he doesn't support it).
Municipal Experience	Brings deep, varied, lifelong experience: City Secretary, Council (prior city), Police Officer/Trainer, Gov Compliance (Microsoft), multiple Rowlett Boards and Commissions including statutory ones over 20+ years in Rowlett.	Has served one term on council and on several boards or commissions over ~10 years in Rowlett.
Approach to Governance	Focus on law, policy, long-term big picture.	Focus on numbers/implementation, operational details.
Availability for Mayor Role	Retired, fully available 24/7 for the demanding, full-time Mayor role; can dedicate undivided attention to city business and emergencies.	Works a full-time job, necessarily dividing time between work, family, and city responsibilities.