

## Frisco mayoral candidates talk traffic, growth and racial integration at forum

Two former City Council members, a school board trustee and a businessman are running in the May 2 election to replace Mayor Jeff Cheney.



By [Angela Mathew](#) | Staff writer

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Frisco mayoral candidate John Keating (left) responds to a question from the moderator as he participates in a forum with fellow candidates Shona Sowell (from left), Mark Hill and Rod Vilhauer at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community in Frisco, March 16, 2026.

Tom Fox / Staff Photographer

For the first time in nine years, [Frisco](#) voters will weigh in on an open seat for mayor during the May 2 municipal [election](#). Incumbent Jeff Cheney, who was first elected in 2017 and shepherded the city through record growth, is term-limited.

The new mayor would have to steer the city through the challenges that accompany its growth. Some residents welcome big developments like Universal Kids, but others feel uncomfortable with the pace of growth and increased traffic. Also changing are the city's demographics: Frisco's population is about 33% Asian. Protesters online and at City Hall have raised concerns that Frisco is experiencing an "[Indian takeover](#)," causing much debate.

Four candidates hoping to take Cheney's place each promised different visions for the city to an audience of more than 200 at a forum at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community.



Frisco mayoral candidate Mark Hill (left), a Frisco ISD board member and attorney, listens to resident Wendell Uldrich speak of the importance of education during a break in a mayoral candidate forum at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community in Frisco, March 16, 2026.

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Mark Hill, an attorney and former board president for Frisco ISD, touted his experience managing the school district's budget, which is larger than the city's, and cast himself as an outsider unencumbered by "political baggage" that former council members may bring.

John Keating, a combat veteran who served on the City Council for 15 years, pitched himself as an experienced politician who understands city government deeply.

Shona Sowell, who worked as the director of community relations for a hospital until January, emphasized her leadership on the legislative and governance committees when she served on the Frisco City Council between 2016 and 2022.

Rod Vilhauer, a retiree who formerly [owned a construction company](#) and served on the city's planning and zoning board from 1992 to 1998, said his experience building roads and managing contracts would be an asset if elected.



Program committee organizer Carol Ketzle reminds a mayoral candidate that their time expired while answering a question during a forum held at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community in Frisco, Texas, March 16, 2026. Candidates included Mayor John Keating (former council member and veteran), Shona Sowell (former council member), Mark Hill (Frisco ISD board member, attorney), and Rod Vilhauer (construction business owner).

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## Managing growth

As the city approaches build-out with about [13% of its land](#) left to be developed, all four candidates said they would attract corporate employers to broaden the city's tax base and shift the burden off homeowners.

Hill said he would focus on making Frisco "a well-rounded city" if elected by investing in arts and parks and making sure the older eastern part of the city has a similar quality of life as the newer west side. Hill, who is on the board of the city's economic development corporation, said he would address traffic by bringing employers to the city, which would reduce the number of residents commuting every day.

Keating acknowledged that some of Frisco's response to growth has been reactive instead of proactive. He said he would continue to work with county, state and federal partners to secure dollars to build new lanes and traffic signals that will alleviate congestion. Keating said he wants the city to be a "full life cycle community" for residents of all generations. He said he would work closely with the school district and higher education institutions in the city, such as the Frisco campuses of UNT and Collin College, to build Frisco's workforce.



Frisco mayoral candidate Shona Sowell (right), a former council member, talks with a constituent following a mayoral candidate forum at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community in Frisco, March 16, 2026.

Tom Fox / Staff Photographer

Sowell said she would reinvest in aging infrastructure and manage Frisco's growth without "indebting future generations because of decisions that we make today." She said she would address traffic by working with mayors in neighboring cities to come up with a regional response and increasing penalties that contractors have to pay the city when construction projects are delayed. Sowell also supports the city's pilot program to use artificial intelligence to calibrate the length of traffic signals to move traffic more efficiently.

Vilhauer also endorsed the city's plan to alleviate traffic using AI and said he would work to build out the city's major thoroughfares to maximum lane capacity. He criticized the city for taking 19 months to complete construction on [Main Street downtown](#), saying it should have taken about eight months. Vilhauer said if elected, he would support offering contractors early completion bonuses to reduce disruptions caused by construction.

## **Religious diversity**

In light of the recent protests about [H-1B visa fraud and "Indian takeover"](#) in Frisco, the candidates were all asked to weigh in on how they would support people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds if elected.

Hill said that he has adopted the slogan "Unite Frisco" as part of his campaign because he saw division creeping into the city. He said being Frisco ISD board president prepared him to handle issues of inclusivity and said diversity had brought the district "excellence." About 44% of students enrolled in the district are Asian.

Sowell praised the city's police department for regularly meeting with leaders of various faith and cultural groups. She said if elected, she would reach out not just to those groups but also neighborhoods and HOA leaders so residents across the city feel heard. Last week, Sowell and all the other candidates attended a celebration of Holi, a Hindu festival, and she noted she has celebrated with the city's Indian community even when she wasn't running for office.

"We were all at Holi the other day," Sowell said. "But one of the things I'm proud of is that I've been going for years."



Frisco mayoral candidate Rod Vilhauer (right), a construction business owner, listens to a constituent following a mayoral forum at Frisco Lakes, a retirement community in Frisco, March 16, 2026.

Tom Fox / Staff Photographer

Vilhauer said that he has met with leaders of the Indian community, but he understands those who “feel like this is an invasion.”

“We need assimilation,” Vilhauer said. “To do that it takes [a] relationship ... we’re going to have to get to know them and help them.”

Vilhauer said he would “take a hard stand” against anyone governed by Shariah or the Quran in Frisco.

Keating called Frisco’s religious diversity one of the “best qualities” of the city.

“We have mosques, we have temples, we have churches,” Keating said. “We can continue to practice our faith, but have a better understanding of our neighbor’s faith.”

Early voting for Frisco’s May 2 election will run from April 20 to April 28. Candidates for Places 5 and 6 on the Frisco City Council and two positions on the Frisco ISD board will also be on the ballot.

By [Angela Mathew](#)

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