

City of Austin Legislative Program

For the 81st Legislature

General Principles

Austin supports legislation that enhances the City's ability to solve problems and improve the quality of life for our citizens. Austin opposes legislation that reduces the City's authority, increases the City's costs, or otherwise erodes the City's ability to govern our own local affairs. Our aim is to work with other cities and the Texas Municipal League in a spirit of collaboration and teamwork. When their positions are consistent with Austin's, we will support the League and other cities in their legislative efforts even if Austin is not directly affected.

The overriding issue during the 81st Legislature will be the state budget. Cities will need to make sure that costs or revenue needs are not shifted to city tax payers and residents out of proportion to the benefits obtained.

Primary Issues

- Oppose appraisal and/or revenue caps that would limit the ability of Austin to raise revenues necessary to provide essential City services.
- Oppose legislation that would reduce the City's authority to protect the environment or protect water quality.
- Seek additional funding options for city and regional transportation projects.
- Seek an appropriation of \$200 million for the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund.
- Seek introduction and passage of meet and confer legislation for non civil service employees.
- Seek additional funding for health care programs to support the uninsured and underinsured residents of Austin, Travis County and all our local health programs.
- Support the zoning authority cities currently have. Protect the City's annexation and extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) authority.
- Support urban counties' efforts to gain authorization for increased land development regulation.

Departmental Issues

AUSTIN ENERGY

- Austin will monitor legislation related to the electric utility industry and take action to protect the status quo with regard to electric markets and to maintain local control. Austin will oppose any legislation that would weaken Austin Energy programs such as Energy Efficiency, Green Building and Green Choice.
- Seek full biomass grant funding in the amount of \$300 million (\$30 million/year over 10 years) for biomass grant programs administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture under Chapter 22, Agriculture Code.
- Support continued state funding to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for near non-attainment areas.
- Support legislation promoting energy efficiency, conservation and development of renewable energy and reducing greenhouse gases.

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

- Amend existing state law allowing a memorial marker at a site where a trooper was killed to include a site where a local peace officer was killed.

AUSTIN WATER UTILITY

- Maintain the City's existing authority over special districts in its ETJ and oppose attempts to remove areas from our ETJ without the City's express consent.
- Oppose legislation that would reduce Austin's water rights or would reduce future water resource options.
- Support the current permitting structure including requirements for effluent reuse and the existing system of surface water rights to include the continued seniority on in-basin water rights.
- Support continued operation of the State's regional water planning process established by Chapter 1010, Acts of the 75th Legislature (1997) (SB 1).
- Monitor any legislation that could affect the City's partnership agreements with the Lower Colorado River Authority.

CONTRACT AND LAND MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

- Support legislation allowing cities to withhold real estate appraisals until the real estate purchase or series of related purchases is completed.
- Oppose legislation that would require expenditures of additional City resources to address undocumented worker issues.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

- Oppose legislation mandating levels of pre-hospital patient care, such as mandates on advanced airway structures.

- Support an amendment to Chapter 54, Education Code, to provide that EMS municipal employees who are not part of a fire department to also be exempted from payment of tuition and lab fees for EMS related classes at Texas publicly funded schools.

ENERGY AND WATER CONSERVATION

- Support legislation that ensures that energy and water conservation policies apply citywide.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

- ~~Oppose~~ ^{Monitor} legislation that would mandate increases to employee pension programs by the City.
- Oppose the passage of any state mandates that do not provide for a commensurate level of compensation.
- Oppose legislation requiring cities to act as collection agencies for State revenue.
- Monitor legislation related to issuing certificates of obligation.

LIBRARY

- Support the budget request of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

MUNICIPAL COURT

- Seek introduction and passage of legislation granting the court an option to use recording equipment instead of court reporters at trials.
- Support legislation increasing the Municipal Court Building Security fee.

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Support legislation that promotes housing affordability and economic stability for City residents, small businesses and neighborhoods.
- Continue seeking funding for affordable housing, including \$50 million for the Housing Trust Fund of the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs.
- Seek State funding and programs to support local efforts to address the homelessness issue in cities.
- Support legislation making improvements to the housing tax credit program to allow the competitive process to be driven by market conditions and community needs.
- Support changes to the mortgage revenue bond program that enhance its flexibility and usability for local issuers.
- Support legislation that promotes the creation and/or use of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) as a means of promoting asset building for low income persons.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE

- Seek enhanced support for immunization programs.
- Support streamlining and simplification of eligibility requirements for Medicaid, which will encourage more eligible but non-covered individuals to use the program.
- Seek continued support for local health departments from State agencies in the area of emergency preparedness and bioterrorism.
- Support legislation allowing additional prescription benefits for Medicaid.
- Support budget and funding items related to retaining, restoring, or increasing funds for primary healthcare. Includes any legislation or budget items related to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicaid and other sources of healthcare funding.
- Protect current level of funding of Primary Health Care (PHC) grants.
- Support legislation providing funding for regional/local health insurance programs.
- Support increased funding for State mental health services.

SMALL AND MINORITY BUSINESS RESOURCES

- Oppose any legislation that would weaken the City's Minority-Owned Business Enterprise/Women-Owned Business Enterprise and Small Business Procurement Programs.

SOLID WASTE SERVICES

- Support legislation that contributes to the City's Zero Waste Goals.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS & REGULATORY AFFAIRS

- Oppose legislation that would negatively impact existing franchise agreements.
- Oppose legislation that erodes municipal authority over rights-of-way or reduces municipal authority to collect compensation for the use of right-of-way.

TRANSPORTATION

- Seek authorization for transit vehicles operated by a metropolitan transit authority or their contracted agents to operate on the shoulders of congested freeways at the discretion of the local TxDOT District Engineer who will determine on a case by case basis the safety and benefits of such authorization.
- Support legislation to allow the use of Texas Department of Transportation TxTags to pay parking fees.