

Speech to Austin City Council

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January 29, 2009
HERA Neighborhood Stabilization Program
Tom Davis
Member, Austin Human Rights Commission

Late Backup

My name is Tom Davis; I'm here as a member of the Austin Human Rights Commission. My area of responsibility this year is housing, and so I'm speaking for the Commission on the issue of the HERA grant.

We are in favor of the resolution authorizing the City Manager to apply for, and use, the HERA funds for the purposes stated.

However, the resolution – and the enabling Act – list five different ways that the grant money can be spent. The problem is that of these five, four relate to making the city look better and only one relates to actually helping the citizens of Austin in this time of economic crisis.

Therefore, the first thing the Human Rights Commission respectfully requests of you is that you spend a larger percentage of the grant funds on, as the resolution states, "providing financing such as mortgage financing for certain households" – primarily, helping Austin homeowners avoid foreclosure and stay in their homes.

Not only would this action enhance Austin's well-deserved reputation for being a city that cares for its people; it would also save money in the long run. It would help mitigate the ever-increasing problem of homelessness that's costing Austin more and more of both our budget and our reputation; and it would reduce the money lost from foreclosures by everyone from the banks to the homeowners to their neighbors to the city itself in lost tax revenue.

The second thing we respectfully request is that the Human Rights Commission be included in this grant's expenditure process. We represent a population perspective that needs to be heard, and we are willing to join the effort. If you have any questions regarding our interests, please contact me at 443-0928 or our Chair, Judy Cortez, at 974-3250.

Thank you.