




MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Council Members

From: Marc A. Ott, City Manager 

Re: Planned Repairs to the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless

Date: April 22, 2011

As you are aware, the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless (ARCH) is a multi-purpose facility that opened in 2004 and was intended to be a new resource for homeless people in our community. Given the high demand for this critical resource on a daily basis, there has been a flagrant lack of investment in the proper maintenance and upkeep of this critical resource over time, including needed upgrades. I have directed our Building Services Office to complete a condition assessment of the facility and identify needed repairs, to prioritize these repair issues, and to develop a plan and timeframe for addressing them. We do not often hear personally from the homeless members of our community about their needs. Having visited the ARCH during peak service hours and seen these conditions firsthand, I intend to complete these repairs and improve conditions at the ARCH as expeditiously as possible.

The information below provides more background about the specific conditions that we will be addressing, as well as timetable and recommended funding source.

Background The ARCH is a 26,820 sq. ft. facility located at Seventh and Neches Streets in downtown Austin, and includes a day resource center, health clinic, and 100-bed shelter for men. The ARCH is currently operated by a non-profit contractor, Front Steps, Inc. Our Health and Human Services Department has been working closely with the operator since the facility opened, and staff has been involved in the ongoing operations and implementation of new programs and services at the ARCH.

Since the facility opened in 2004, there have been significant changes that have occurred in the City of Austin contract with Front Steps that expanded the scope of services beyond the original purposes for building. Over time, to accommodate demand given the limited resources in our community, the contractor has taken the following steps, usually at the direction of the City:

- Added mat sleeping for over 100 people
- Added day sleeping in the bunks (men and women)
- Added weekends to the Day Resource Center (initially open only five days per week)
- Repurposed the garage area to allow additional gathering space for clients

- Repurposed the area for clients to recover from alcohol or drug intoxication to offices

The ARCH is currently providing Day Resource Center services to approximately 575 individuals per day (210,764 duplicated clients over a year) and overnight shelter to more than 200 individuals per night (74,171 shelter nights). This is approximately double the number of clients that were initially projected to use the facility's services on a daily basis, not to mention the facility load for which ARCH was designed. As I mentioned above, the significant increase in the number of individuals at ARCH has had a detrimental effect on the facility's condition, causing systems in the facility to deteriorate at a much faster rate than anticipated. This has resulted in the need to repair and/or improve a number of systems in order to meet basic public health and safety needs.

Action Plan We have continued discussions with Front Steps about needed repairs and our Building Services Office has been assisting to identify how best to improve the facility's condition. The repairs combined with some additional minor enhancements are estimated to cost \$685,000. The repairs will address inadequacies in the mechanical system for bathrooms and showers, mold abatement, plumbing systems, and roofing issues. The project cost estimate includes \$75,000 for water fountains, screening, and ventilation for some outdoor areas (rear parking, and front entrance) that will assist in managing the crowded conditions and improve safety. Building Services staff will work with Front Steps and Health and Human Services staff to complete this work as expeditiously as possible. Logistics will obviously be challenging since this is a facility that is in high demand most of the day and night, and this will obviously be a consideration as we more fully develop the scope of work for each element included in the project.

I have asked the Chief Financial Officer to bring forward a budget amendment in May to provide the funding for these repairs. Our plan is to appropriate these funds from the City's Sustainability Fund, which reported an ending fund balance of approximately \$1.4 million at the end of fiscal year 2010. The Sustainability Fund provides limited funding each year to help support the City's housing programs and social services, and is an appropriate source of funds for repairs to the ARCH.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Bert Lumbreras or Leslie Browder.

xc: Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
Leslie Browder, Chief Financial Officer
Shannon Jones, Health and Human Services Department
Eric Stockton, Acting Building Services Officer