



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Commission for Women

Recommendation Number: -AGENDA NUMBER Women's Equity in Austin
Equity in Naming of Public Symbols

WHEREAS, the Commission for Women ("Commission") of the City of Austin ("City") serves as an advisory body to the City Council ("Council") and city manager concerning the needs and problems of women in the Austin area and shall recommend programs designed to alleviate any inequities that may confront women in social, economic and vocational pursuits. The Commission shall develop goals and coordinate research for planning, programming, and action relating to opportunities, needs, problems, and contributions of women in the city; and

WHEREAS, on March 23, 2017 the Council passed Resolution No. 20170323-054 ("Resolution"), calling upon the Commission for Women, in collaboration with the City's Human Rights Commission, to research the City's previous efforts to address gender disparities in the City as well as research other potential practices that have not been documented or addressed by the City which have an unintended disparate impact on women but are commonly used by common governmental entities comparable to the City, examine whether those practices are being used within the City, and if so, determine their nature and scope, and develop recommendations for modifying City policies or practices to eliminate those disparate impacts; and

WHEREAS, the Resolution further called upon for the Commission for Women and Human Rights Commission to separate their recommendations into long-term and short-term items; and

WHEREAS, with regard to short-term items, the Resolution called upon the Commission for Women and Human Rights Commission to offer recommendations concerning steps to study disparities in Austin between streets named after men and those named after women, and appropriate measures to eliminate those disparities; and

WHEREAS, the Commission for Women is aware of a 2015 study of seven world metros (London, Paris, San Francisco, Mumbai, New Delhi, Channai and Bangalore), found that, controlling for gender-neutral names, only 27.9% of streets named for persons were named for women (see article at <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/11/mapping-the-sexism-of-city-street-names/414094/>); and

WHEREAS, the Street Name Database does not itself indicate whether a given street was named after a natural person and many streets that appear likely to have been named after natural persons do not include that person's first name, making determination of their gender impossible without conducting additional research of that street name's history; and

WHEREAS, Equal Visibility Everywhere, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit dedicated to achieving gender parity in the symbols and icons of the United States, has noted gender imbalances exist nationwide in not only street names, but in building names, statuary, monuments and memorials, public holidays, parades and festivals, as well as in stamps and currency, in museum exhibits and in the media; and

WHEREAS, women's history is full of scientists, writers, artists, activists and politicians, and women who have made positive contributions to society and deserve more widespread recognition for their work; and

WHEREAS, the predominance of public symbols that are laudatory of exclusively male achievements are understood and perceived by America's schoolchildren in ways that contribute to boys' confidence and diminish girls' confidence; and

WHEREAS, the lack of public symbols recognizing the societal contributions of persons of color, particularly women of color, presents a similar problem, which is made worse when a public authority fails to adapt the contextualization of existing public symbols devoted to persons who may have caused or perpetuated racial harms to the modern age; and

WHEREAS, according to data maintained on the City's Demographics Data Library website, whites now make up 47.1% of the City's population (see http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Demographics/Age_by_Race_2014.pdf); and

WHEREAS upon information and belief, the City's public symbols that are named after natural persons represent a significantly larger percentage of white persons than persons of color, particularly women of color; and

WHEREAS, as regards new street names, the City's Street Naming Guidelines are posted on the City's website and available for review at https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Applications_Forms/street-naming-standards.pdf ("Street Naming Guidelines"); and

WHEREAS, the Street Naming Guidelines do not list gender equity or racial equity in street naming as among the criteria in the selection of new names for the Street Name Database; and

WHEREAS, the procedure for the naming or renaming of City parks, park facilities or features set forth at §14-1-37 through 39 of the City Code does not list gender or racial equity in its naming criteria, nor upon information and belief, do gender or racial equity play any formal role in the naming or renaming of City statues, memorials, libraries, public schools, or public buildings; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council and the City Manager's Office take all appropriate steps to immediately insert, in those criteria used by the City to select

names for streets, public buildings, statues, memorials, public parks, park facilities and features, libraries and public schools, a requirement that, going forward, gender and racial equity shall be required, meaning that, for any new streets, public buildings, statues, memorials, public parks, park facilities and features, libraries and public schools, named after natural persons, the half of them shall be named after women and at least half shall be named after persons of color; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, after equitable proactive policies have been put in place, Council may again call upon the Commission for Women to offer recommendations in connection with studying the extent of naming inequities and remedial measures to address them.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote:

Attest: _____

(Staff or board member can sign)