



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Human Rights Commission

Recommendation Number: 20190429-003b: Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

WHEREAS, the Human Rights Commission of the City of Austin (“Commission”) advocates on behalf of human rights for all people in the City of Austin (“City”); and

WHEREAS, the City Council adopted Strategic Direction 2023, including the strategic outcomes of Economic Opportunity and Affordability; Mobility; Safety; Health and Environment; Culture and Lifelong Learning; and Government That Works for All; and

WHEREAS, the Commission conducted a Budget Engagement Community Forum on March 25, 2019 to receive feedback from the community on budget priorities;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Human Rights Commission recommends the City Council to give careful consideration to the following Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Proposals:

Increase Funding for the Equity Office

I. Title: Increase Funding for the Equity Office

II. Issue: The Equity Office is underfunded.

III. Data: Collective feedback (including detailed testimony received at the Human Rights Commission Budget Engagement Community Forum on March 25, 2019) and anecdotal evidence (including meetings, informal discussions, and previous testimony at City Council meetings) from community stakeholders strongly suggest that the current budget inadequately supports the Equity Office.

Please see:

- a. [Human Rights Commission Recommendation No. 20180122-5\(A\) Women’s Equity in Austin](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=293530) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=293530>)(Exhibit A)
- b. [Austin City Council Resolution No. 20170323-054](http://austintexas.gov/departments/city-council/2017/20170323-reg.htm#054) (<http://austintexas.gov/departments/city-council/2017/20170323-reg.htm#054>)(Exhibit B)

IV. Recommendation: Funds should be reallocated so that the Equity Office has adequate resources to implement key initiatives and ensure efficacy of programs implemented by the Chief Equity Officer, including but not limited to staffing, toolkits, and monitoring and oversight of program effectiveness.

V. Strategic Outcomes/Indicators

- a. Government That Works for All: Satisfaction with City services
Government That Works for All: Public engagement and participation
Government That Works for All: Equity of City programs and resource allocation
Government That Works for All: Transparency and ethical practices

Very Low Income/Affordable Housing

I. Title: Very Low Income/Affordable Housing

II. Issue: Due in part to displacement in traditionally underserved communities, to include those historically discriminated against on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, gender orientation, age, or disability status, Austin lacks sufficient affordable housing for the poor and working class, including but not limited to residents earning at or below minimum wage and residents on a fixed income.

III. Data: Please see:

- a. [Human Rights Commission Recommendation No. 20160627-5a: Impact of Gentrification on Human Rights](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=257478) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=257478>)(Exhibit C)
- b. [Human Rights Commission Recommendation No. 20160725-4b: Impact of Gentrification in the City of Austin, Part 2](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=262807) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=262807>)(Exhibit D)
- c. [Human Rights Commission Recommendation No. 20180423-005a: Regarding the People's Plan and Housing Crisis](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=298412) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=298412>)(Exhibit E)
- d. [City of Austin S.M.A.R.T. Housing™ Policy Resource Guide \(June 2008\)](https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/Application_Center/S_MART_Housing/smart_guide_0708.pdf)(https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/Application_Center/S_MART_Housing/smart_guide_0708.pdf)(Exhibit F)
- e. [Un-gentrifying Portland: Scheme Helps Displaced Residents Come Home](https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/mar/01/portland-anti-gentrification-housing-scheme-right-return) (<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/mar/01/portland-anti-gentrification-housing-scheme-right-return>)(Exhibit G)
- f. [City of Austin Anti-Displacement Task Force: Recommendations for Action \(November 2018\)](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/Anti-Displacement_Task_Force_Final_Recommendations_and_Report.pdf)(http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Housing/Anti-Displacement_Task_Force_Final_Recommendations_and_Report.pdf)(Exhibit H)

IV. Recommendation: The floor for rental housing should begin at minimum wage to help stem the tide of displacement of citizens of the City who are in low socioeconomic demographics, or who as a consequence of their race, color, ethnicity, gender orientation, age, or disability status have been disproportionately impacted by displacement in the City. One of the highest priorities among all communities is our current housing shortage and the rapid pace of gentrification.

We recommend that a large percentage of the new housing bond go directly toward property acquisition and development specifically for the purposes of housing the homeless and low-income earners in our communities. We recommend this because there is no shortage of units—there is only a shortage of affordable units. Therefore, the City should prioritize public money for those with low socioeconomic status, including residents who earn at or below minimum wage, rather than assist developers in attracting high-wage earners to their properties. High-wage earners continue to have a bevy of options within the City. Additionally, we recommend the expansion of the S.M.A.R.T. Housing™ Initiative to include more developers and developments in order to ensure housing for residents earning at or below minimum wage and residents on a fixed income.

V. Strategic Outcomes/Indicators

- a. Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Income equality
Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Cost of living compared to income
Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Housing availability and affordability*
Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Homelessness*
- b. Health & Environment: Healthy conditions among the public
- c. Culture & Lifelong Learning: Appreciation, respect, and welcoming of all people and cultures
Culture & Lifelong Learning: Honoring and preservation of historical and ethnic heritage

Health Care and Health Equity

I. Title: Health Care and Health Equity

II. Issue: A concern among our community members is the low level of direct spending on health care services allocated in the Public Health budget. While regulatory intervention and consumer protection are laudable goals, it is the opinion of this Commission that direct health care spending is the highest priority.

Austin residents, particularly those in lower-income neighborhoods, lack sufficient access to affordable health care, including urgent care, emergency care, preventive care, gender affirming care, family care and planning, and mental health services.

III. Data: The American Public Health Association has completed five case studies exploring the experience of public health departments as they make a shift to achieving health equity. The research highlighted that inequitable access to health care prevents minorities from getting healthier due to high medical costs they cannot afford. As with most health care issues, low-income people and communities of color bear the brunt of healthcare spending disparities. As has been noted in the press multiple times, Texas ranks as the least insured state in the country. While the city has named “improving percent of residents with health coverage” as a goal, our city is still underinsured. San Francisco began its universal coverage program (Healthy San Francisco) in 2006, which provides services to over 50,000 residents a year at a cost of roughly \$140 Million (2013-14).

Please see:

- a. [Better Health Through Equity: Case Studies in Reframing Public Health Work \(American Public Health Association\)\(March 2015\)\(https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/topics/equity/equity_stories.ashx?la=en&hash=DB7341D9CA82547EAFD8DF9DCAE718A0CD6B92DC\)](https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/topics/equity/equity_stories.ashx?la=en&hash=DB7341D9CA82547EAFD8DF9DCAE718A0CD6B92DC)(Exhibit I)

IV. Recommendation: City Council should ensure the \$1.3 million in new funding for public health initiatives set out in City of Austin FY 2018 budget is used solely for the purposes of direct care.

We also recommend that the City reallocate funds to essential health care programs that create sufficient access to affordable health care, including urgent care, emergency care, preventive care, gender affirming care, family care and planning, and mental health services, including the following:

- Create a program comparable to the Healthy San Francisco program; and
- Prioritize funding and development targeted at low-income individuals and low-income neighborhoods.

V. Strategic Outcomes/Indicators

- a. Health & Environment: Healthy conditions among the public

Health & Environment: Accessibility to quality health care services (physical and mental)*

Health & Environment: Food security and nutrition

- b. Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Cost of living compared to income

Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Homelessness*

Investment in Diversion Programs (Public Safety)

I. Title: Investment in Diversion Programs (Public Safety)

II. Issue: Over policing and criminalization of non-criminal conduct and low-level status offenses, particularly in minority communities and communities of color.

III. Data: Community feedback from the Human Rights Commission Budget Engagement Community Forum on March 25, 2019. Previous testimony and presentations from community stakeholders (including but not limited to the Austin Justice Coalition, Measure Austin, and Black Lives Matter) to the Human Rights Commission.

IV. Recommendation: The City of Austin law enforcement strategy should be refocused from traditional policing and criminalization, which has led in the past to over policing in minority communities, toward a greater reliance on diversionary, preventive, and rehabilitation programs. This refocus should include but not be limited to the diversion of funds into such programs that curb crime before it happens.

Our Commission also recommends that the City deeply analyze the number of victim services counselors, mental health officers, and other staff associated with diversion of activity that is criminal on the surface, to evaluate whether more funds should be allocated to fund these positions. A deeper analysis than requiring a certain number of police officers per citizen is required.

V. Strategic Outcomes/Indicators

a. Safety: Fair administration of justice*

Safety: Timeliness and quality of emergency response

Safety: Public compliance with laws and regulations

Safety: Emergency prevention, preparedness, and recovery

Safety: Quality and reliability of critical infrastructure

b. Government That Works for All: Satisfaction with City services

Government That Works for All: Equity of City programs and resource allocation

Government That Works for All: Transparency and ethical practices

c. Mobility: Safety

Transportation

I. Title: Transportation

II. Issue: Lack of safe, affordable transportation options, including adequate and ADA compliant public transportation, and mobility infrastructure in low-income areas.

Accessibility for people with disabilities to public transportation is inadequate and possibly out of compliance with the ADA in some areas of the City. There is still a need for added infrastructure and sidewalks in socioeconomically depressed areas in the City. The community needs more accessible and affordable public transportation, especially more bus routes and sidewalks.

III. Data: Community feedback from the Human Rights Commission Budget Engagement Community Forum on March 25, 2019, including anecdotal evidence presented to the Human Rights Commission, establishes that Capital Metro has limited bus routes and many streets in low-income neighborhoods need new sidewalks, improved infrastructure, and enhanced ADA compliance.

Please see:

- a. [Human Rights Commission Recommendation No. 20170123-05a: Protection Against Discrimination in Public Accommodations](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=270192) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=270192>)(Exhibit J)
- b. [City of Austin Ordinance No. 20140612-119: An Ordinance Adopting the City of Austin Complete Streets Policy](http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=211844) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=211844>)(Exhibit K)
- c. [Smart Growth America Complete Streets Fundamentals & Fact Sheets](https://smartgrowthamerica.org/tag/complete-streets-fundamentals/) (<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/tag/complete-streets-fundamentals/>)(Exhibit L)
- d. [Capital Metro Project Connect North Lamar/Guadalupe Connector Corridor Flipbook](https://www.capmetro.org/uploadedFiles/New2016/ProjectConnect/Resources/Project_Background/Corridors_and_Services/NorthLamar_Flipbook_032818.pdf) (https://www.capmetro.org/uploadedFiles/New2016/ProjectConnect/Resources/Project_Background/Corridors_and_Services/NorthLamar_Flipbook_032818.pdf)(Exhibit M)
- e. [City of Austin 2015 ADA Implementation Report](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/HR/ADA/coa-ada-impl-report-2015.pdf) (<http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/HR/ADA/coa-ada-impl-report-2015.pdf>)(Exhibit N)

IV. Recommendation: In response to feedback from the community, our Commission recommends that the City implement actions based on prior studies in areas of the City that require improvement of infrastructure, and prioritize planning for infrastructure, identifying areas without Complete Streets (as defined by Smart Growth America), adequate sidewalks, and access for people with disabilities.

We further recommend the City restore bus routes removed two years ago in heavily trafficked areas, and also add new routes in heavily trafficked areas.

V. Strategic Outcomes/Indicators

- a. Mobility: Traffic congestion
Mobility: Transportation cost
Mobility: Accessibility to transportation choices*
Mobility: Safety
Mobility: Condition of transportation-related infrastructure
- b. Safety: Quality and reliability of critical infrastructure
- c. Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Cost of living compared to income
Economic Opportunity & Affordability: Ability to improve your income

* Austin City Council Strategic Direction 2023 “Top Ten” Indicator

Date of Approval: April 29, 2019

Record of the vote: 7-0; Commissioner White motion, Commissioner Brown, J. second. Voting in favor were Chair Davis, Vice Chair Caballero, Commissioner Breckenridge, Commissioner Brown, J., Commissioner Casas, Commissioner Miguez, and Commissioner White. Commissioner Brown, G., Commissioner Museitif, and Commissioner Weigel were absent.

Attest:  _____
Jonathan Babiak

Staff Liaison, Human Rights Commission