



RECOMMENDATION

Commission on Seniors

Recommendation Number: (20190612-04D): Ensuring that Seniors are Educated About and Able to Take Advantage of Existing Tools to Reduce their Property Tax Burden Property Tax Burden

WHEREAS, "Uprooted", a 2018 study of gentrification and displacement in Austin authorized by City Council identified homeowners who are most vulnerable to displacement from rising property taxes as those with the lowest income living in the most rapidly appreciating neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, housing displacement has a number of negative impacts on seniors including increased difficulty in obtaining medical care because of transportation issues and increased risk of social isolation because of disrupted ties to familiar neighbors and friends, and;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin Strategic Direction identifies displacement in Economic Opportunity and Affordability Strategy #5, "Develop and act on recommendations to reduce the number of households and businesses displaced from Austin due to unaffordability";

WHEREAS, previous efforts, including the Anti-Displacement Task Force and the Right to Remain report on the Montopolis Neighborhood have indicated a potential underutilization of remedies available under state law and Council actions for reducing the property tax burden by homeowners in danger of housing displacement; and

WHEREAS, in our discussions over the past year we have heard a number of examples indicating potential barriers for seniors fully utilizing the opportunities for reducing their property tax burden allowed under Texas statute and the legislative actions of the City of Austin and other taxing entities (over 65 exemption, tax deferrals), and

WHEREAS, Texas statute (Tax Code Section 31.035) authorizes taxing entities to establish senior volunteer programs that allow seniors to volunteer as a means of offsetting a portion of their property tax at an hourly rate equal to the federal minimum wage; and

WHEREAS, volunteerism has also been shown to be an effective strategy in combating social isolation that is detrimental to healthy outcomes among seniors; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission on Seniors recommends that City Council direct the City Manager to investigate and make recommendations to Council within 180 days on the most efficient and effective means of ensuring that seniors are educated about and able to take advantage of existing opportunities to reduce their property tax burden property tax burden including, but not limited to:



- 1) increasing taxpayer awareness of the opportunities already authorized by law for meeting or reducing property tax obligations (such as homestead, senior and disabled persons exemptions and tax deferrals);
- 2) including information on property tax exemptions and deferrals in any city-sponsored financial literacy programs such as "Families Not Flippers" (Council Resolution No. 20180510-092);
- 3) working with the Travis Central Appraisal District and Williamson County Appraisal District to develop metrics for annual reporting on the taxpayer utilization rate of available alternatives for meeting property tax obligations; and
- 4) consideration of a senior volunteer tax break coupled with a volunteer program as authorized by state law.

Date of Approval: June 12th, 2019

Record of the vote: Unanimous on a 10-0 vote, Bordie, Lugo, Sheaffer, Van Sickle absent

Attest: _____