



## COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

### Joint Sustainability Committee

#### **Recommendation 20200422-2A.1 – Budget Recommendation – Funding Climate Justice**

The Joint Sustainability Committee urges the Austin City Council to make climate change mitigation and community resilience a top priority in the FY 2020/2021 budget and as the city seeks stimulus or recovery funding. The COVID-19 emergency has once again highlighted inequities and vulnerabilities in the Austin community and throughout the United States. In many cities, Black people represent a disproportionate number of COVID-19 cases and deaths. This may prove to be true for Austin. Past local disasters have had a disproportionate negative impact on Austin's communities of color. Climate change will continue to exacerbate these inequities. It is critical to simultaneously respond to the COVID-19 emergency and the ongoing climate crisis, which will likely be the source of our next acute emergency situation.

Racial equity is the condition when race no longer predicts a person's quality of life outcomes in our community. The City of Austin Community Climate Plan revision process recognizes that racial inequity is wrong and solving the problem of climate change is impossible without racial equity. In Austin, this means our Climate Plan will only succeed if we center racial equity in the goals, strategies, and plans developed through the Revision Process. City of Austin infrastructure, policies, and investment have historically and systemically neglected and harmed low-income communities and communities of color. We acknowledge these injustices and the need to right these wrongs by changing city institutions, policies and programs and creating a culture of equity.

To align with the Austin Strategic Direction 2023 Health and Environment and Economic Opportunity and Affordability outcomes, the Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that the Austin City Council prioritize the following principles in all aspects of the budget and as the city seeks stimulus and recovery funds from the federal government and other sources:

#### **1. Reducing Emissions:**

The science is clear that rapid emissions reductions are needed now to avoid climate change impacts that we won't be able to adapt to. While Austin has been a climate leader in many respects, we must redouble our efforts to reduce emissions more quickly from all sectors, including transportation, natural gas use in buildings, refrigerants, local industry and electricity.

## 2. Targeting Affordability Efforts Equitably:

At this time when the city budget will be strained, it is especially important to target affordability measures to those who need them the most. While the COVID-19 emergency has been stressful and inconvenient for everyone, the financial impacts have disproportionately fallen on lower-income residents and people of color. Targeted programs to reduce costs for those experiencing hardship is the equitable and financially prudent path. In contrast, indiscriminate rate or fee reductions will result in unnecessary financial losses to the city and windfalls for those who can afford to continue paying their share for public services.

## 3. Improving Community Resilience:

Access to housing, healthcare, healthy food, internet, worker protections, information (including translation and interpretation) and other resources remains deeply inequitable in Austin. These inequities are exacerbated during emergencies. While progress has been made in some of these areas, much more is needed to ensure that climate and other emergencies don't result in inequitable loss of life, illness, or financial hardship.

## 4. Just Transition and Equity in Hiring:

Low-income residents and people of color, who have been disproportionately burdened under our past and current systems, must be prioritized for new jobs in the green economy. The city must invest in targeted job training and recruitment for both public and private sector jobs to ensure equitable outcomes as our economy shifts. Hundreds of grassroots, environmental and social justice organizations have signed onto the [Five Principles of Just COVID-19 Relief and Stimulus](#), which charts a path towards a just COVID-19 recovery that simultaneously tackles the climate crisis. As outlined in the Five Principles, in order to improve community resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the city will need to “rebuild our infrastructure, replace lead pipes, expand wind and solar power, build clean and affordable public transit, weatherize our buildings, build and repair public housing, manufacture more clean energy goods, restore our wetlands and forests, expand public services that support climate resilience, and support regenerative agriculture.” The city should prioritize equitable access to the jobs that will be created through these investments by seeking opportunities to increase goals for small, minority and women-owned businesses and setting diversity goals for workforce participation in city contracting and procurement.

The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends funding the :

1. Reduce the energy burden for lower-income residents by increasing funding in the Austin Energy FY 2021 budget to:
  - a. Expand the customer assistance program to serve low-moderate income residents on a sliding scale; and
  - b. Increase the number of homes (both single family and multifamily) that are weatherized through the free weatherization programs, in part by funding local community organizations to conduct outreach for these programs; and
  - c. Establish a program to provide access to customer-sited solar for lower-income residents; and
  - d. Improve access to energy efficiency and solar programs for renters, especially lower-income renters, through targeted community partnerships to achieve a

more equitable ratio of renters served.

2. Identify possible public-private partnerships and funding to expand access to the Internet for low-income communities and communities of color, which have disproportionately low-levels of access. The city should identify possible public-private partnerships and funding to either create free city-wide Wi-Fi, or free connection for income-qualified residents.
  
3. Allocate an additional \$100,000 in the FY 2021 budget to the Office of Sustainability to continue and expand the Community Climate Ambassadors program. This program, which was crafted collaboratively by the Office of Sustainability, Equity Office, Joint Sustainability Committee and Austin Community Climate Plan Steering Committee is an excellent way for the city to benefit from and support community organizing with a focus on climate change, public health and healthcare access, environmental justice, community resilience and social cohesion. Continuing and expanding these partnerships with existing community groups and community organizers is an efficient way to ensure equitable and distribution of funds and effective design and structuring of a wide variety of city programs (energy, waste, health services, food access, etc.). A permanent staff person should be established in the Office of Sustainability to oversee and engage with this work.

Record of the vote: Motion to approve by Commissioner White, second by Commissioner Phillips. Motion passes 10 approve, 0 opposed, 0 abstained.

Date of approval: April 22, 2020

Attest: Zach Baumer

Zach Baumer, Liaison