



COMMISSION ON SENIORS RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation Number: 20210714-04C: Recommendations to City Council on Emergency Preparedness and Response

WHEREAS, the Commission on Seniors advises City Council on matters related to older adults and all Austinites were gravely impacted by and some are still recovering from the extreme winter events of February 2021;

WHEREAS, older adults are identified by National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) and Center for Disease Control and Prevention as at-risk members of our community due to social vulnerabilities that can be disproportionately impacted by disasters;

WHEREAS, these winter weather events strained services, including emergency management services, utility infrastructure, transportation, and communication networks which are under the auspices of the City of Austin;

WHEREAS, the lack of effective communication to the public by Austin public utilities and the government instilled a lack confidence in local government during Winter Storm Uri;

WHEREAS, emergency response plans should include identifying the at-risk populations and vulnerabilities in the community to provide the right information at the right time before, during, and after disasters;

WHEREAS, Austin City Council recently appointed the first Resiliency Officer and has proactively prepared for extreme weather events recognizing their potential devastation to the local economy in the response to Climate Resilience Resolution 20190509-019, which specifically called for opportunities for city staff and the community to work together and comprehensively address extreme weather impacts and increase Austin's climate resilience;

WHEREAS, March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP)—designed to assist in the ongoing economic and public health efforts—was signed into law by President Joseph R. Biden. Included in this bill is \$195.8 million dollars for the City of Austin, portions of which can be used to make necessary investment in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure;

WHEREAS, advanced notice of the polar vortex was given by the National Weather Service Austin/San Antonio and knowledge that it would create historic lows and winter storms in early February yet the city was still underprepared for this event, for example by opening only one warming center;

WHEREAS, once Austinites experienced the unprecedented and widespread failure of the state's electric grid and subsequent failure of water pipes and infrastructure, it was too late to gather resources, and traditional emergency networks failed and digital communication was not coordinated when the emergency set in, which created confusion and misinformation;

WHEREAS, Winter Storm Uri updates became increasingly unavailable to those who lost electricity and internet;

WHEREAS, those most vulnerable who were unable to leave their houses were also unable to receive support because the roads were impassable;

WHEREAS, many agencies serving older adults, neighbors and volunteers stepped in to provide shelter, food, and water to those in need;

WHEREAS, the recent heat wave and call for energy conservation from ERCOT underscores the vulnerability of the electric grid;

WHEREAS, a comprehensive, multilingual, accessible digital communication infrastructure is required in an innovative, tech-focused city like Austin;

WHEREAS, the City Council has requested recommendations from the Commission on Seniors regarding improvements in emergency preparedness and response services for older adults;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission on Seniors recommends that the Austin City Council incorporate the following as they relate to each phase of disaster-preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation:

- General
 - Direct City Manager to include the City of Austin's Age Friendly Coordinator and representatives from Aging Services Council in all on-going and future Emergency Preparedness and Response planning;
 - Develop collaborative action plans with Travis and Williamson counties to best ensure efficient use of resources and minimize gaps in service;

- Include actionable recommendations for extreme cold weather events in the City's updates of the of the 2018 Climate Resilience Plan and any other relevant plan that addresses emergency response and preparation.
- Assessment of At-Risk Populations:
 - Define, locate, and plan to reach at-risk populations;
 - Utilize existing research regarding demographic and population characteristics of the community;
 - Data should include spoken languages, cultural practices, belief systems, and physical and mental limitations of residents;
 - Locate at risk groups; identify key contacts and organizations; include trusted sources and non-traditional leaders;
 - Identify the best communication methods to reach at-risk populations
 - Create and promote a voluntary registry of vulnerable people and households who should receive wellness checks and may need assistance during emergencies.
- Communication
 - Establish an emergency preparedness communications plan for disseminating essential information and resources that includes direct, real-time outreach in multiple languages (including ASL) through text messages and phone calls (including to landlines) to all Austinites similar to the AISD communication tree;
 - Build a plan to improve 911, 311, and 211 multilingual (including ASL) education, awareness, and usage program, so all Austinites understand how to utilize these resources, especially in times of emergencies;
 - Integrate and formalize a network of community organizations and local businesses for service triage, providing resources in each district and neighborhood during extreme weather events and times of emergencies;
- Basic Needs
 - In the future, contact any customers who are about to have their water, electricity, or other utilities turned off, so they can prepare appropriately;
 - Develop mapping of which neighborhoods, critical service providers and locations experienced prolonged outages for future extreme weather event preparedness;
 - Develop a mapping and outreach plan for vulnerable populations, for whom access to reliable power and water is a matter of life and death (for example, delivering generators and/or offering to move people to a place with reliable power and water prior to extreme weather events occurring);
 - Plan for meeting basic medical needs during an emergency, including:
 - access to medications, oxygen, and medical equipment

- ensuring water and electricity to hospitals, and
- maintaining access to emergency services
- Develop an emergency transportation response plan and include investments in basic winter weather preparedness equipment both to transport vulnerable older adults for medical and physical safety and to clear routes quickly (including for example, salt application and snow removal services and snow moving equipment such as Bobcats and winter snow chains for city owned vehicles);
- Develop a plan to quickly open warming and cooling centers in all areas of the city as needed, and include a plan to provide transportation to those who need it;
- Invest in winterization and weatherization of our electricity infrastructure to withstand extreme cold weather events, and explore innovative solutions to prevent power lines from freezing;
- Invest in winterization and weatherization of our water infrastructure to withstand extreme cold weather events;
- Education
 - Develop and promote emergency preparedness resources for Austin older adults in all types of residences including, single family, apartments, senior housing, group homes, assisted living and skilled nursing facilities;
 - Disseminate information about individual actions older adults and their caregivers can take, including procedures for accessing emergency preparedness plans and resources.

Date of Approval: July 14, 2021

Record of the vote: Moved by Commissioner Van Sickle, Seconded by Commissioner Garcia-Pittman.

Approved on a vote of 12-0

For: Briesemeister, Varteressian, Angel, Bordie, Garcia-Pittman, Hauser, Kareithi, Lugo, De Maria Nicola, Temperley, Van Sickle, Spain

Against: None

Absent: Cagle, Lopez-Guerrero

Attest: _____

