

Pedestrian Advisory Council Recommendation:
Living Streets Program

Recommendation 20210712-001

WHEREAS, for decades automobile movement and storage has dominated Austin's streets at the expense of walking, bicycling, gathering, placemaking, play, and art;

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted streets' importance in meeting the community's mobility, physical, social, financial, and emotional needs;

WHEREAS, according to the 2016 Sidewalk Plan, only approximately half of Austin 2,580 miles of streets include sidewalks and 80% of existing sidewalks are in functionally unacceptable condition;

WHEREAS, according to the Trust For Public Land's 2020 ParkScore report only 60% of Austin residents live within a ten-minute walk from a park;

WHEREAS, in May 2020, Council approved the Healthy Streets initiative to facilitate safe, socially distanced walking, bicycling, and other exercise and active transportation on neighborhood streets and while still allowing local automobile movement;

WHEREAS, roughly ten miles of Healthy Streets were installed across seven Council districts with the program attracting wide public support, including a 72% public approval rate according to an online City survey, before a City memo in September 2020 announced the program's gradual wind down;

WHEREAS, many residents along Healthy Streets added to these temporary installations by using street art, seating, and other materials to calm traffic and create gathering spaces;

WHEREAS, the Austin Strategic Mobility Program (ASMP) calls for creating a Neighborhood Shared Streets Program to evaluate alternative strategies for creating safe streets;

WHEREAS, by embracing neighbor-led activation of streets, the City could leverage community support to advance multiple City goals; and

WHEREAS, play streets programs, popular in many cities such as New York and Seattle, allow residents to close their streets to through-traffic for several hours for up to multiple days a week to facilitate children's play;

WHEREAS, block parties are a powerful way for neighbors to create lasting social bonds;

WHEREAS, the burdensome nature of Austin's block party regulations creates a barrier to organizing such events;

WHEREAS, low-income communities, communities of color, and people with mobility impairments are disproportionately impacted by dangerous streets;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the PAC recommends that the City of Austin work with stakeholders and community members to create and fully fund a Living Streets program that would allow the following:

- Community-led traffic calming and placemaking installations on neighborhood streets, using resident-sourced creative materials
- A community-led Healthy Streets permit using either resident-sourced materials or City-owned infrastructure designated for this program
- A simplified permit process, available in at least English and Spanish, and less burdensome regulations for block parties
- A play street permit allowing residential streets to be closed to through-traffic for several hours for up to a certain number of days per week for children's play

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Living Streets program should prioritize equity, making sure that special attention is given to reaching out to marginalized communities to solicit their feedback to help shape, participate in, and benefit from such a program.

Vote: Date: July 12, 2021

Vote: 6-0 with Baily, Patel, and Cox absent

Attest:



Kimberly Levinson, PAC Chair