



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor and Council Members

**FROM:** Diane Siler, Interim Budget Officer

**DATE:** January 28, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Public Engagement for FY 2021-22 Budget Process

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This memorandum provides an overview of public engagement plans for the FY 2021-22 budget process, which will build on previous year's efforts to improve and expand upon opportunities for community input as we work together to shape the City's next Budget. In developing this plan, staff embraced direction from CM Harper-Madison's Budget Rider 2 as well as feedback from Boards and Commission members and believe the resulting plan will significantly enhance the ability of Council Offices to "overlay community input in their decision-making."

Last budget cycle, engagement efforts included an online budget priority survey, presentations at board and commission meetings and Council District Town Halls, and collaboration with the Equity Office to support community budget forums hosted by the nine commissions of the Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC). Building upon that base, beginning in February the Equity Office will schedule and host Zoom meetings for the members of the JIC budget work groups. This will provide an opportunity for JIC Commission members to meet and discuss issues relevant to their communities that can then be taken back to pertinent department staff for inclusion as budget recommendations for FY 2021-22. These meetings will focus on two outcome areas per meeting and are the perfect opportunity for the public to engage. Additionally, the Budget Office will also be available to present at additional board and commission meetings. As in previous years, board and commission recommendations will be provided to departments, management, and Council for consideration during budget development and deliberations.

In order to address the concern raised in CM Harper-Madison's Budget Rider 2 regarding the lack of time Council had to conduct necessary analysis of feedback generated through engagement efforts, the timeframe for both the budget survey and recommendations from boards and commissions will be adjusted. The survey will be open for public response from April through June 2021 and the final report will be provided with the City Manager's FY 2021-22 Proposed Budget in early July. The first meeting with the Joint Inclusion Committee occurred at the beginning of December. Recommendations from its nine commissions will be due in early April and communicated to Council along with the survey results.

### **Description of Public Engagement Tools**

Below are the various tools the City will use to educate citizens about the Budget and its annual development process and to elicit their feedback. By using a multi-faceted, deliberative approach in order to reach a broad and intersectional audience, we hope to generate wide-ranging input that will allow the City to identify areas of critical need and potential methods of alternative service-delivery, while also providing citizens with information they need to make informed decisions.

Community Survey. A third-party vendor will conduct a statistically valid survey of Austin residents, soliciting information about their satisfaction with City services, perception of the community, and assessment of Austin in comparison with other municipalities.

Joint Inclusion Committee Town Halls. In FY 2021-22, the nine commissions that comprise the Joint Inclusion Committee will be the focal point of the budget engagement process. Staff will assist in coordinating town hall meetings for each of the commissions to gather resident input on budget priorities, and provide support in promoting the events and coordinating translation and interpretation services. The commissioners utilize the feedback collected at the town hall meetings to formulate their respective budget recommendations for the upcoming fiscal year.

Online Budget Priority Survey. In partnership with a third-party vendor, staff are developing an online budget priority survey that will be promoted through social media and other online forums. The survey will solicit residents' feedback on City services and allow for open-ended comments to enable detailed input. The online survey will be available on desktop computers, smart phones, and other mobile devices and will be open for public response from April through June.

Boards and Commissions Meetings. Departments are encouraged to discuss their financial forecasts with their respective boards and commissions. All meetings of the City's boards and commissions are open to the public.

Council District Town Hall Meetings. Staff will be available to make budget presentations, facilitate discussions, and answer general questions about the budget at town hall meetings at the request of council members.

Taxpayer Impact Statement. As outlined in Council Resolution 20150806-052, staff must publish a Taxpayer Impact Statement, which summarizes the proposed tax rate and its impact to the property tax bill for a range of assessed home values. The Taxpayer Impact Statement is published in the budget document and area newspapers.

Public Hearings. In the months of July and August, public hearings are held for public discussion on the tax rate, utility rates, and City budget.

Additional information, including final survey reports, board and commission recommendation summaries, and future budget engagement updates, can be found at the City's Budget Engagement website at [www.austintexas.gov/budget](http://www.austintexas.gov/budget). Should you have any questions regarding this year's budget engagement process, please contact me at [Diane.Siler@austintexas.gov](mailto:Diane.Siler@austintexas.gov).

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager  
Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager  
Ed Van Eenoo, Chief Financial Officer, Financial Services Department  
Department Directors