



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Jessica Kingpetcharat-Bittner, Interim Director
Communications & Public Information Office

DATE: March 2, 2020

SUBJECT: Update on Council Resolution 20190822-070 (Senior Property Tax Exemptions)

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a status update on Resolution 20190822-070 regarding recommendations for the most efficient and effective means of educating Austin residents about existing opportunities for seniors to reduce their property tax burden; and recommendations for a senior volunteer program to allow seniors to volunteer as a means of offsetting a portion of their property tax bundle. The City Manager was directed to report back to City Council 180 days after the resolution's adoption date.

In response to the resolution, the Communications and Public Information Office (CPIO) worked with staff in the Budget Office, the Innovation Office, the Neighborhood Housing & Community Development Department (NHCD), the Parks & Recreation Department (PARC), Austin Public Health (APH), and the Law Department to identify the following preliminary results:

- In January 2020, the Travis Central Appraisal District (TCAD) released a press release encouraging property owners to review and file for homestead exemptions before the April 30th deadline. Additionally, TCAD held a townhall meeting on Saturday, February 8, 2020 at the Conley-Guerrero Senior Activity Center to provide additional information to eligible homeowners, including seniors, regarding the exemption process. This information was communicated to the City's Commission on Seniors and to the City's senior centers via CPIO and PARC.
- Staff worked with TCAD to utilize Travis County's annual reporting metrics on the taxpayer utilization rate of opportunities for seniors to meet property tax obligations. Currently, those numbers are based on the quantity of properties in Travis County taking advantage of homestead exemptions. Data is available from 2018, with data from 2019 predicted to be available on the first of March, which can then be shared with City staff.

- Staff research found that the State of Massachusetts is currently the only state to adopt a tax work-off abatement law allowing property owners over the age of 60 the opportunity to volunteer in exchange for a reduction of property tax. At this time, such an option is not statutorily authorized in Texas and requires State legislative action.

Next Steps

Staff intends to further analyze TCAD data to better understand which properties are eligible for a homestead exemption; education and outreach will be further discussed once that audience is identified. Additionally, staff will conduct an analysis of the [Neighborhood Stabilization Data Tool](#), as prepared by the Innovation Office, to observe the concentration of homeowners 65 and older in neighborhoods that are gentrifying or susceptible to gentrification per the University of Texas' Uprooted Study. Using the Neighborhood Stabilization Data Tool and TCAD data, it may be possible to zero in on the individuals specifically in need of property exemptions and where it may be most useful to target the City's efforts. Lastly, the Intergovernmental Relations Office will add senior tax work-off abatement to the list of potential proactive legislative items for Council to consider when adopting the State legislative agenda.

Staff plans to conclude the TCAD analyses once its available and will provide Council with an additional update and the resulting recommendations in the May time frame.

Cc: Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager
Spencer Cronk, City Manager