



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager *YPR*

DATE: September 25, 2020

SUBJECT: **Update on Resolution 20200507-022 regarding Community Resilience Planning**

This memo comprises a second update on staff progress to fulfill [Resolution No. 20200507-022](#) directing the City Manager to complete a “comprehensive community resilience plan that builds on the adopted Austin Community Climate Plan, Climate Resilience Action Plan for City Assets and Operations, and the implementation of [Resolution No. 20190509-019](#), to reflect this more complete goal of becoming a resilient community which can survive, adapt, and thrive in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, systemic inequities, or significant sources of stress.” Pursuant to the resolution, staff working on Resilient Austin have:

- Activated an interim staff lead for the effort, incorporated resources for a permanent staff lead position in the 2021 Fiscal year budget, and determined placement within the City’s organizational structure for the permanent staff position;
- Completed a review of plans and reports in the City’s Active Plans Portal to better understand the current state of incorporation of the resilience lens across the City’s planning and reporting activities and across the components of the City enterprise;
- Completed an initial scan of external funding opportunities to support the effort;
- Created a staff structure to support the effort;
- Convened a core group of staff to scope the effort and draft a resilience roadmap;
- Identified staff from across the enterprise to assist as Resilience Catalysts for the effort;
- Initiated preparations for a community stakeholder event slated for fall 2020;
- Commenced one on one meetings with internal staff involved with relevant ongoing resilience work or COVID recovery work;
- Commenced documentation on planning cycles within the enterprise relevant for the effort; and
- Continued to pursue conversations with the Global Resilience Cities Network (GRCN) and its members to identify opportunities for learning and support from the network.

Included with this update are key documents which include framing for the effort, the Path to Resilience Roadmap, and key highlights from staff’s review of the Active Plans Portal. We will continue to bring forward updates to Council periodically. Please do not hesitate to contact Alba Sereno at Alba.Donajhi@austintexas.gov if you have any questions.

Attachments

Primer

Resilient Austin

BACKGROUND

On May 7, 2020, the Austin City Council passed [RESOLUTION NO. 20200507-022](#) directing the City Manager to take various steps to coordinate efforts to Complete Resilient Austin: A Comprehensive Community Resilience Plan. Using a definition put forward by the former 100 Resilient Cities Program, Austin starts from an understanding that resilience is:

“the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems within a city to adapt, grow and thrive in the face of both shocks—sudden, traumatic events like earthquakes and floods—and more long-term, chronic stresses, like poverty and housing shortages. City resilience is about making a city better, in both good times and bad, for the benefit of all its citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable.”

The call for the City’s first comprehensive resilience plan arrived in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, social strife and grief over the loss of and harm to life from conflicts between police and the community, and less than a decade out from the anniversary of the City’s racially segregating 1928 master plan. Current conditions highlight the need for staff to take on the work around resilience with an appropriate frontloading of racial equity as called for in the Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities publication Racial Equity: Resilient Cities at the Forefront, which clearly articulates:

“Cities cannot thrive as diverse community hubs and major economic drivers if municipal governments do not act in making their cities more equitable. By...explicitly factoring the effects of racial inequities into daily decision-making, cities can begin to alleviate the major stressors creating deep vulnerabilities in their communities – ultimately building resilience in a way that benefits all residents.”

WHAT DOES BUILDING RESILIENCE MEAN FOR AUSTIN?

Resilient Austin will assess the City's current resilience context (its shocks, stresses and opportunities) and co-create actions that prepare us not only for the future, but to shape it.

One of the most profound resilience fracturing events of Austin's history was the trauma induced by the 1928 master plan. The plan effectively segregated the City and embedded structural racial inequities in Austin for the next 92 years up to today. Its impacts have been felt by Austinites in each part of their **livelihood**, during shocks and outside of them. A livelihood is made up of the capabilities, assets and activities required for people to not only survive, but thrive in their lives. A livelihood is resilient when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Many parts of the City context affect resident's livelihoods. In some areas of the City's work, staff have made important strides to build resilience grounded in equity on the path toward reversing the effects of the 1928 master plan. [Examples of this include, the forthcoming updated Climate Action Plan](#), and the City's [100 year Water Forward Plan](#). However, the work of resilience building is ever ongoing and must be comprehensive. Thus, in anticipation and recognition of the 100 year anniversary of the trauma of 1928, the City will act intentionally to identify opportunities to shore up absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience capacities through Resilient Austin to further build on these first strides.

Resilience can be boosted by strengthening three different types of capacities:

Absorptive capacity: The ability of a system to prepare for, mitigate or prevent negative impacts, using predetermined coping responses in order to preserve and restore essential basic structures and functions. This includes coping mechanisms used during periods of shock. Examples of absorptive capacity include early harvest, taking children out of school, and delaying debt repayments.

Adaptive capacity: The ability of a system to adjust, modify or change its characteristics and actions to moderate potential future damage and to take advantage of opportunities, so that it can continue to function without major qualitative changes in function or

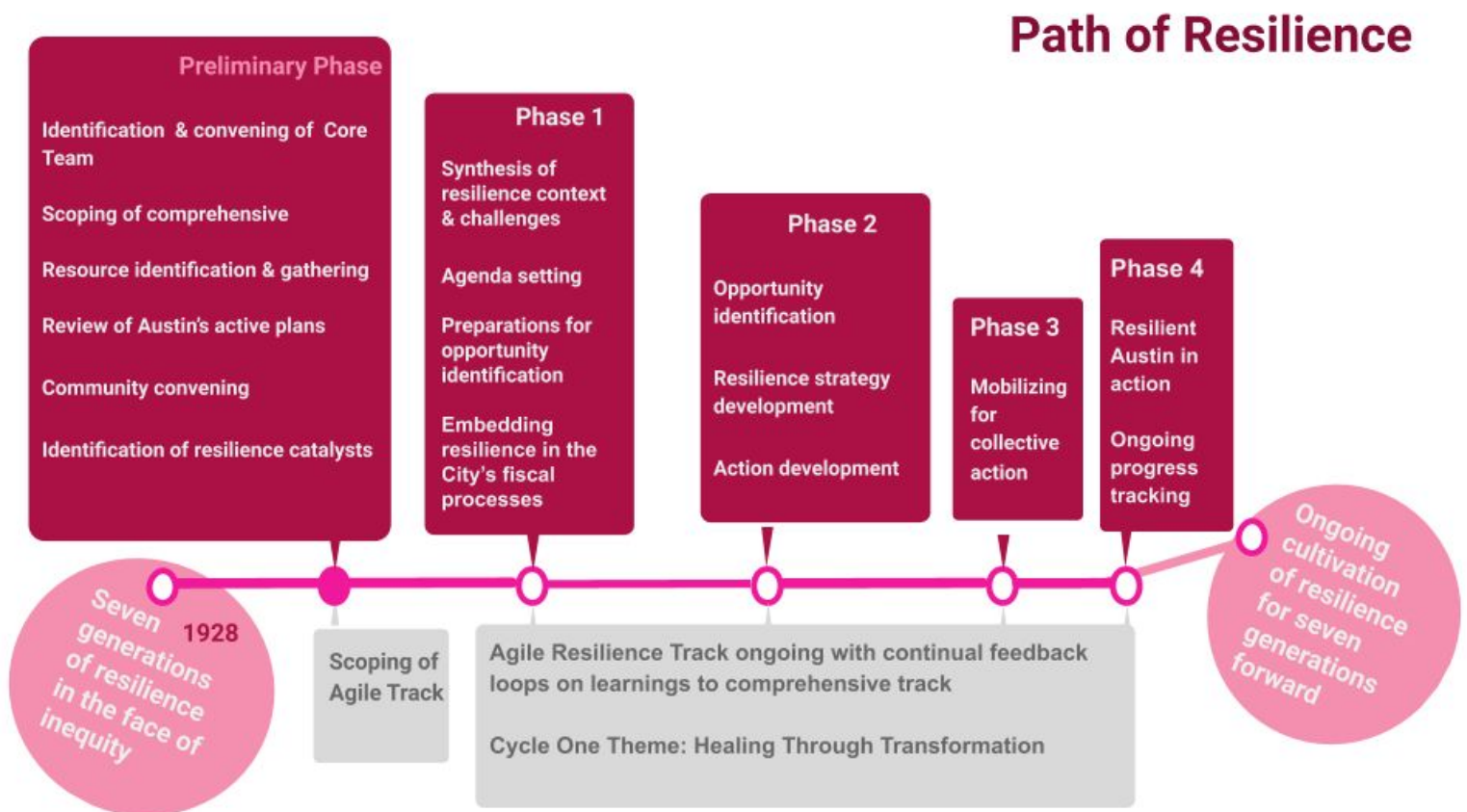
structural identity. Examples of adaptive capacity include diversification of livelihoods, structuring collaborations in delivering basic services.

Transformative capacity: The ability to create a fundamentally new system so that the shock or stressor will no longer have any impact. This can be necessary when ecological, economic or social structures make the existing system untenable. Examples of transformative capacity include the introduction of conflict resolution mechanisms, urban planning measures, or actions to stamp out corruption and increase oversight and accountability.

At the City of Austin, we recognize that individual Austinites and households have done nothing but be resilient in the face of inequities structured by the 1928 plan, the plan's reaffirmation in the 1950's and other significant resilience challenges. We commit to working with the community on building structural, systemic resilience that unleashes equity, and the opportunity to thrive, reducing the burden of the work of resilience on individuals and families.

TIMELINE

Ongoing shocks and ongoing resilience needs call on the City to use resilience strategies in the moment while at the same time building a longer term comprehensive plan. For this reason, in addition to a longer term planning process, Resilient Austin will incorporate a track of agile resilience work that can produce quick outcomes and/or answer to challenges that are on the march now but will affect our near future. This track will incorporate an iterative approach in order to bring the benefit of resilience more immediately to our community. The benefit will be twofold as the results of the iterative approaches will inform our long-term planning in real time.



Review of Plans and Reports in the City of Austin's Active Plans Portal: Key Highlights

RESILIENT AUSTIN

Background

In order to better understand Austin's resilience context and challenges, staff conducted a review of plans and reports included in the City's [Active Plans Portal](#). This review is a starting point to a more comprehensive synthesis of Austin's resilience context and challenges. It brings a beginning clarity to the resilience work that already exists in the City of Austin so that it may be taken into consideration for, refined through, and built on in Resilient Austin in partnership with the community and other key partners. A key summary of highlights is provided below.

The Active Plans Portal was developed by City staff as a place to digitally compile planning documents relevant to City operations. Currently, it contains a mixture of both **plans** and **reports**. Plans included in the portal consist of guiding documents for departments, programs, initiatives or topical areas relevant to City operations and various jurisdictions in Central Texas. Reports included in the portal consist of assessments, compilations of data and recommendations, studies, and documents describing the progress of plans, programs or initiatives across various subject areas.

Although the portal is not fully exhaustive of plans and reports across the City, it is the most extensive compilation currently available for this type of content, and is typically updated on an annual basis. Staff conducting the review found that there are currently a total of 144 plans and reports in the portal spanning back more than twenty years in terms of publication date or adoption date. For this review staff focused on the time span of 2015-2020. This time span was chosen in order to better understand the most recent planning and reporting activity and its relevance for comprehensive resilience planning. In this time span there have been 67 plans and reports adopted or published (44 plans adopted and 23 reports published).

Reports Snapshot

The 23 reports published between 2015-2020 provide puzzle pieces of data that will be necessary for the Resilient Austin planning process. The reports include data on risk for future **shocks**¹ such as drought and wildfire, and further data on shocks that have more recently impacted Austin such as floods. They also contain data on seven unique ongoing **stressors**². These stressors include:

1. Affordability challenges,
2. Health inequities,

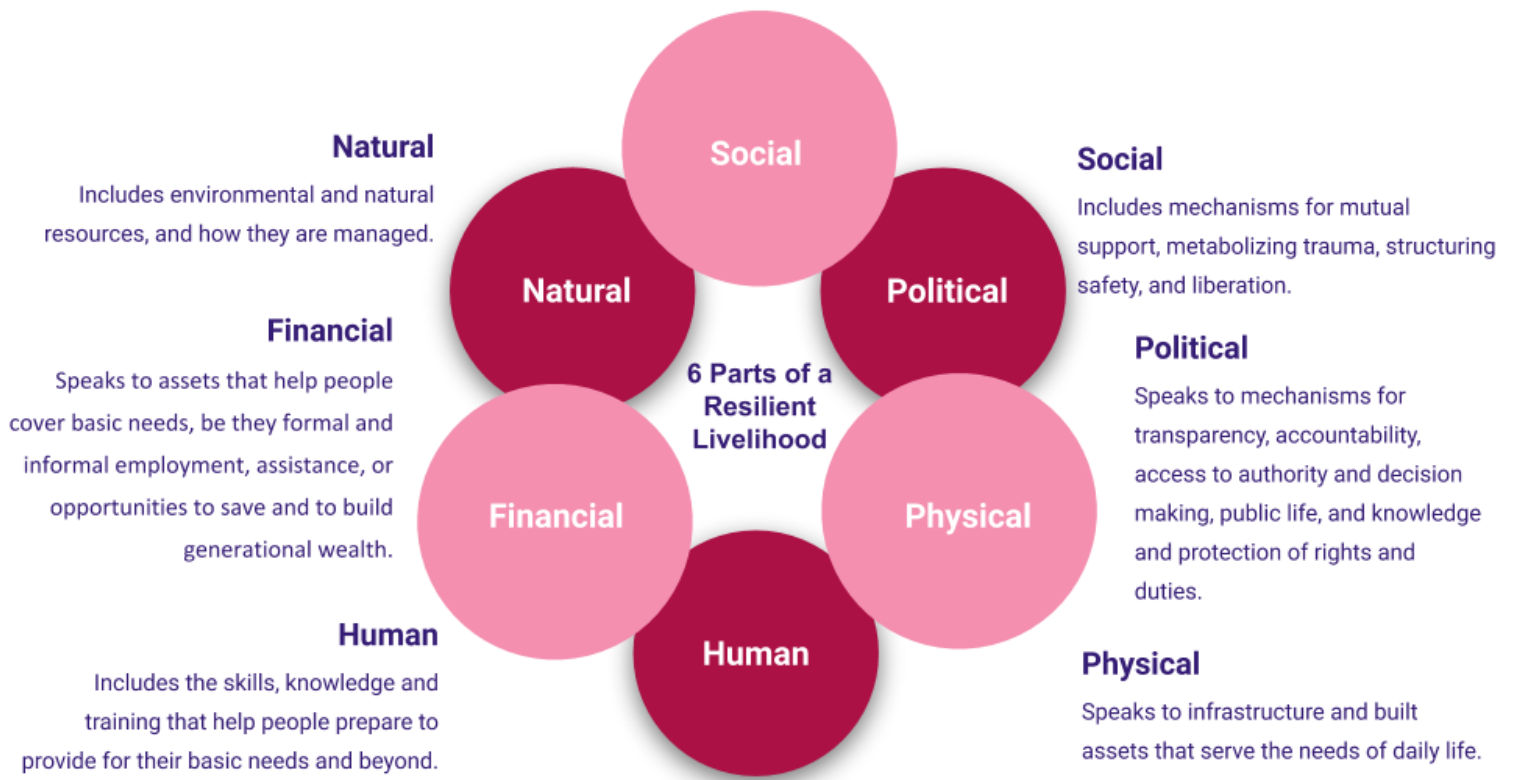
¹ A **shock** is a sudden event with an important and often negative impact on the vulnerability of a system and its parts. Shocks represent significant negative (or positive) impacts on people's means of living and on the functioning of a system. (A system is a unit of society (e.g. individual, household, a group of people with common characteristics, community, nation), of ecology (e.g. a forest) or a physical entity (e.g. an urban infrastructure network).)

² A **stressor** is a long-term trend, weakening the potential of a given system and deepening the vulnerability of its actors.

3. Challenges to the accessibility of healthy food,
4. Climate change,
5. The state of air quality,
6. Homelessness, and
7. Transportation congestion.

Four reports also provide insight on the constellation of stressors specifically affecting groups of people with certain lived experiences such as African American/Black, Chicana/o/x/Latina/o/x/Brown, and Asian American identifying residents, and seniors. Also present is data on the experience of residents by Council district geographies. Upcoming phases of resilience work will need to be informed by data on the risk for, causes, and effects of shocks and stressors that pose a challenge to a resilient livelihood for all Austinites. A resilient livelihood³ is composed of six parts as shown below.

A Resilient Livelihood



³ Adapted for use for Resilient Austin from the Livelihood Capitals Approach developed by the OECD and UNICEF for resilient systems analysis (2014).

Plans Snapshot

The 44 plans adopted between 2015-2020 include:

- Four department wide plans,
- 38 topic specific plans with relevance to one or more departments or jurisdictions, and
- One City Wide Plan, Austin's Strategic Direction 2023.

While four of the 44 plans relate to shocks, 31 plans relate to stressors, and three plans relate to shocks and stressors. A subset of the 44 plans do not deal with shocks or stressors, and few of them currently employ a resilience lens or resilience concepts. This is unsurprising as Austin has not previously engaged in comprehensive resilience planning, and as resilience concepts have only more recently been applied in a comprehensive manner in city contexts in the United States (within the last decade).

Resilience can be boosted by strengthening three different types of resilience capacities:

Absorptive (Coping) Capacity: The ability of a system to prepare for, mitigate or prevent negative impacts, using predetermined coping responses in order to preserve and restore essential basic structures and functions. This includes coping mechanisms used during periods of shock.

Adaptive Capacity: The ability of a system to adjust, modify or change its characteristics and actions to moderate potential future damage and to take advantage of opportunities, so that it can continue to function without major qualitative changes in function or structural identity.

Transformative Capacity: The ability to create a fundamentally new system so that the shock will no longer have any impact. This can be necessary when ecological, economic or social structures make the existing system untenable.

Thus, as part of the staff review of the 43 plans adopted between 2015-2020 staff sought to to better understand the extent to which they address boosting absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. Staff found that few of these plans addressed these capacities, and of those that did it was most common for plans to address the absorptive or adaptive capacities. Further, those that did address at least one of the three resilience capacities were typically, but not always associated with shocks and stressors related to the environment and natural resources, or to infrastructure. Below are a sample of plans that address resilience capacities.

Adopted Plans- Resilience Highlights

Climate Resilience Action Plan For City Assets and Operations	Drought Contingency Master Plan	Water Forward	Austin Pedestrian Safety Plan
Addressed shocks and long-term stressors related to climate change and weather extremes.	Addresses the shock of drought on Austin's water supply.	Addresses Water Supply and water demand strategies for 100 years forward.	Addresses the ongoing stressors that result in pedestrian injuries and fatalities.
The plan:	The plan:	The plan:	The plan:
IDs risk for shocks from heat, flooding, & wildfire; IDs absorptive & adaptive resilience boosting strategies to ensure stability & flexibility in the face of shocks to infrastructure for utilities, transportation & community facilities.	IDs absorptive resilience boosting strategies for the shock of drought, and necessary regional collaborators for activating these strategies.	Boosts absorptive and adaptive resilience mainly through water reuse and conservation strategies.	IDs causes & effects for pedestrian injuries & fatalities. Embeds equity by ID'ing disproportionate effects on people experiencing homelessness & minorities meets inequities w/strategies that boost adaptive resilience.

The Active plans portal does not provide a status of completion for plans or individual items within plans. Staff will document the status of resilience related items within plans as necessary to inform a more comprehensive synthesis of context and challenges for the Resilient Austin planning process.

In addition to plans that have been adopted there are emerging plans and activities at the City that also account for shocks and stressors, and or address shocks and stressors with resilience boosting strategies. These plans and activities are not yet included in the Active Plans Portal.

Emergent Plans and Activities- Resilience Highlights



Challenges as Opportunities and Next Steps

Aside from resilience highlights within the plans there are also patterns of challenges which give our first clues as to where our focus on building resilience may lay:

1. For the Financial and Human Resilient Livelihood Areas, reporting activity on stressors and shocks is significant for artists, musicians and creative people as well as the arts and creative industries more generally. While artists, musicians and creative people as well as the arts and creative industries continue to face resilience challenges, other groups and industries will need to be accounted for. For the absorptive capacity, some of this has started around COVID recovery efforts but there is an opportunity to expand toward other resilience capacities via comprehensive resilience planning. Resilient Austin will help staff consider future dynamic hazards, interdependencies between

systems, workforce groups and industries. It will also consider how each functions in normal circumstances and under stress scenarios. An opportunity also exists to better align informal and formal livelihoods activity in a way that builds pathways to resilient livelihoods for all Austinites.

2. Our current planning activity is infrastructure and built environment heavy in its focus- while our reporting activity is more people focused. Understanding where our focus has been can help us understand what areas have had less coverage, so that we can build further resilience capacity into our system.
3. A key area of uncovered data in the body of reports reviewed is data on shocks and stressors that could arise in other jurisdictions but which carry the potential to cause impact to Austinites and our systems due to our City's role as a regional hub. For instance, these shocks may be ones we have seen before such as hurricanes, or a statewide demand for employment that creates pressure on the local employment market.

In addition to building resilience capacities to match our gaps, the work to come will focus on un-siloing perspectives across existing plans. More highly connected resilience planning and a more robust implementation activity connected to our resilience planning will be areas of focus that will help residents reap the benefits toward increasingly resilient livelihoods.