



Economic Prosperity Commission Recommendation (20210317-002B)

WHEREAS, the Economic Prosperity Commission advises council on matters of construction, job creation, and the prosperity of all Austinites and all of these areas were gravely impacted by and are still recovering from the extreme winter events of February 2021;

WHEREAS, extreme weather is becoming more frequent due in part to the negative effects of climate change and these events strain our 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, the City of Austin is not in a recovery, we are still in a crisis as Austinites are still struggling with water, food, and electricity shortages (and fear of high utility and water bills);

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. However, did not account for, or include evaluation of extreme cold occurrences, such as the events of Winter 2011, and Winter 2021;

WHEREAS, extreme winter weather has impacted Austin as recently as January, 2021, 2011 and prior to that in 1989. The data shows that these are not 100 year events. The House Committee on State Affairs issued an Interim Report in December 2012 that specifically addressed cold weather concerns and directly questioned via included memo the ERCOT and Public Utility Board's decision to raise the system wide megawatt hour cap 180 times its normal rate to \$9,000;

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;*

WHEREAS, *many Austinities did not realize there would be a winter storm as significant as Winter Storm Uri until 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 blocked;*

WHEREAS, *phonathons were created in real-time to map the areas of our community that were suffering most from Winter Storm Uri and a comprehensive, multilingual, accessible digital communication infrastructure is required in an innovative, tech-focused city like Austin;*

WHEREAS, *although Austin Energy and Austin Water are mapping where utilities have come back on, Austinites are still experiencing outages without any prior communication or information;*

WHEREAS, *the State of Texas has the 9th largest economy in the world and the City of Austin as the 11th largest city in the country has a responsibility as a global leader in crafting 21st century solutions to social problems affecting those most vulnerable.*

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Economic Prosperity Commission recommends that the Austin City Council:

- Immediately, through direct outreach to customers via the utility companies, determine which Austinities are still struggling with water and electricity shortages to develop a comprehensive response to address these needs;
- Explore tasking the Equity Office with collecting qualitative data by creating an open forum and space for Austinities to share their experiences through the Winter Storm Uri. Utilize these inputs in a formal audit recognizing the trauma of this experience;
- Ensure that regardless of immigration, veteran, or criminal background status, the City of Austin will provide resources to close the financial gap that is often left by FEMA and also provide program information with application support resources via 211/311;
- Develop mapping of which neighborhoods, critical service providers and locations experienced prolonged outages for future extreme weather event preparedness;
- 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 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);

- Establish an emergency preparedness plan for Austin's neighbors experiencing homelessness;
- Conduct a comprehensive refresh of 2018 Climate Resilience Plan that is wider in scope, actionable and accounts for extreme cold weather events;
- Develop an emergency winter weather transportation response plan and explore investments in basic winter weather preparedness equipment (for example, salt and snow removal services);
- Invest in winterization and weatherization of our electricity infrastructure to withstand extreme cold weather events, and explore innovative solutions such as moving electricity-related infrastructure underground where possible to prevent power lines from freezing;
- Invest in winterization and weatherization of our water infrastructure to withstand extreme cold weather events;
- Establish an emergency preparedness communications plan that includes direct, real-time outreach in multiple languages (including ASL) through text messages and phone calls 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 during extreme weather events and times of emergencies;
- Expand the City's Consumer Protection Resources and Financial Advocacy Resources programs, and increase access to and knowledge of the OAG's Consumer Protection Program during emergency weather events;
- Explore ways to increase access to Austin Energy's existing weatherization, rebates & incentives programs (expanding eligibility, lowering thresholds) for residential properties and explore resource tiered programming;
- Explore ways to increase Austin Water's quality testing and education programs;
- Prioritize distributing grants to local farms through the Business Assistance Programs (referenced in the March 12, 2021 memo) so they can receive much needed relief in the aftermath of Winter Storm Uri.

Date of Approval: 3/17/2021

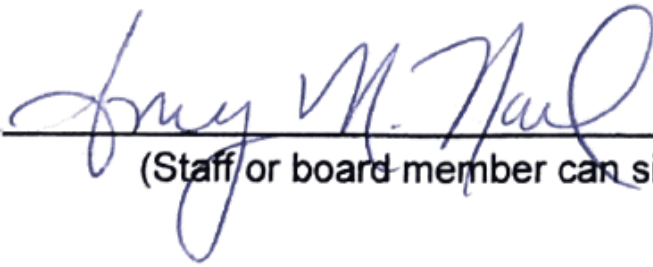
Record of the vote:

6-0 -Yea: Amy Noel, Chair-District-7; Larry Anazia-District 1; Kirsha Haverlah-District 2; Alexis Taylor-District 3; ivanna Neri-District-4; Preston Tom-District 5; Nathan Ryan-District 8

0-0- Nay

Absent: Holt Lackey, Vice Chair- District 10; Rachel Green-Mayor's Appointee; Michael Ybarra-District 6; District 9 - Vacant

Attest:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Amy M. Paul", is written over a solid black horizontal line.

(Staff or board member can sign)