

RESOLUTION NO. 20210408-028

WHEREAS, the Office of Sustainability has worked with multiple offices, including Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Austin Public Health, the Austin Fire Department, the Economic Development Department, and the Equity Office to create and enhance plans for emergency preparedness and resident safety with a focus on specific threats – flooding, drought, extreme heat, and wildfires – as well as on the populations most vulnerable to these specific threats; and

WHEREAS, the 2018 Office of Sustainability report, a “Climate Resilience Action Plan for City Assets and Operations,” assesses City of Austin owned and operated community facilities such as recreation and activity centers, libraries, and neighborhood centers that could potentially serve as relief and assistance centers during extreme heat, flooding, or wildfire events; and

WHEREAS, Austin Public Libraries alone operates 23 locations across the City of Austin, which include the previous Faulk Central Library, the new Central Library, the Austin History Center, and 20 branch libraries; and

WHEREAS, City staff analyzed sheltering capabilities for each location and determined the following:

- 83% (19 facilities) were identified as “suitable” for use as an emergency shelter with emergency communications capabilities, and meeting spaces with room for cots;
- 91% (21 facilities) are “suitable” for use as a cooling station;
- 96% (22 facilities) are equipped for refrigerated food storage;
- Two facilities keep a generator onsite for backup power in case of an outage;

- Two facilities are LEED-certified to be energy and water efficient; and

WHEREAS, the Office of Sustainability has worked closely with the Dove Springs Community on Resilient Dove Springs, a resilience effort that could serve as a model for future resilience planning efforts in other neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, City Council passed a 2019 resolution declaring a climate emergency and calling for an immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate, and that resolution called for the creation of community resiliency hubs to serve as “shelters, evacuation centers, and disaster response hubs during climate emergencies”; and

WHEREAS, Council approved Resolution No. 20190509-019, which directed the City Manager to develop recommendations for creating a comprehensive, community-wide resilience plan, and supporting the general tenets of the Green New Deal; and

WHEREAS, Council approved Resolution No. 20200507-022, which directed the City Manager to create “Resilient Austin: A Comprehensive Community Resilience Plan” and develop 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 that can survive, adapt, and thrive in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, systemic inequities, or significant sources of stress”; and

WHEREAS, in response to Resolution No. 20200507-022, staff released a memo in September 2020 emphasizing the City’s critical contributions to resilience planning as the city serves as a regional hub in Central Texas; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, the Office of Sustainability released a draft version of the Austin Climate Equity Action Plan, which recommends strategies for mitigating climate change and fostering community resilience, particularly in communities of color who bear the brunt of climate hazards due to environmental injustice and institutional underinvestment; and

WHEREAS, as a 2020 Pew Charitable Trust article points out, communities can be more resilient to natural and other disasters when they boost local capacity to recover, rebuild, and ultimately thrive, and cities such as Baltimore and Minneapolis are among the cities now using or exploring what are known as “resilience hubs” both during and between disasters such as hurricanes, pandemics, or floods; and

WHEREAS, as stated in the Urban Sustainability Director’s Network report, “Resilience Hubs: Shifting Power to Communities and Increasing Community Capacity,” much community resilience work relies on top-down approaches that often “fail to meaningfully include equity-centered strategies considering the most vulnerable populations”; and

WHEREAS, resilience hubs are neighborhood centers designed to coordinate culturally sensitive, multilingual services to better meet the needs of diverse groups of community members and to provide a safe place for temporary shelter and relief during days of extreme heat or disaster events such as floods; and

WHEREAS, during non-emergency times, resilience hubs can provide space and programming for community-building efforts that increase resilience when emergencies occur and enable community members to develop familiarity and trust in these shared spaces; and

WHEREAS, resilience hubs tend to involve partnerships between local governments and nongovernmental organizations and are typically housed in trusted, community-managed facilities; and

WHEREAS, best practices involve the community in identifying and determining its particular needs and designing the resilience hub to provide the resources and processes to best meet these needs; and

WHEREAS, resilience hubs are designed to strengthen relationships between governments and the people they serve, to shift to local residents the power to identify and drive solutions, and, in the long term, to address the existing health inequities that disasters highlight and exacerbate; and

WHEREAS, according to Kristin Baja of the Urban Sustainability Director's Network, resilience hubs provide an opportunity to build local community power and leadership, serve as focal points for neighborhood revitalization, and enhance individual capacity while also supporting and strengthening communities; and

WHEREAS, Minneapolis initiated a feasibility study to consider installing solar panels and battery backup to supply temporary electricity should the local power grid go down during an emergency; and

WHEREAS, public schools seem well-poised to serve as resilience hubs as these spaces typically contain commercial kitchens, showers, laundry, communal and individual bathrooms, large spaces, and private rooms; and

WHEREAS, as local schools make repairs sustained during the storm and also deploy bond dollars for modernization, the City should investigate how its own investments could be leveraged in tandem with school district actions to bolster

energy independence and advance the viability of these spaces for use as resilience hubs; and

WHEREAS, on March 10, 2021, the Hispanic Latino Quality of Life Resource Advisory Commission approved Resolution No. 20210310-5a, which included support for the idea of activating and funding “community hubs” in cooperation with grassroots organizations working in those neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, the fact that hundreds of thousands of homes in Austin were without electricity and water for multiple days during the unprecedented winter emergency that began on February 14, 2021, underscores the very critical need for advance planning for community-trusted, safe locations with redundant power and water supplies for individuals to shelter during emergencies; **NOW, THEREFORE,**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL:

The City Manager is directed to engage the Office of Sustainability, the Chief Resilience Officer, the Equity Office, Homeland and Security Management, Austin Energy, Austin Water, Watershed Protection, Parks and Recreation and other relevant departments as well as the Austin Independent School District, other school districts, Travis County, the Pecan Street Project, and the Austin Community College to work with communities to conduct a resilience hub assessment to identify potential locations throughout the City to serve as resilience hubs, including schools, recreation centers, libraries, and other trusted, well-known, community-managed facilities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager should explore options for “passive survivability” and ensure these facilities have redundant power and water through the installation of

solar power, battery storage, and rainwater or potable water cisterns such that during an emergency these facilities can disconnect from traditional infrastructure and operate independently and reliably and in a manner capable of sustaining operations during an extended power outage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager shall ensure that these facilities function in non-emergency conditions in ways that meet existing departmental and community goals with regard to stormwater management, water conservation, community solar generation, and other Council-approved and implemented policy directions.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager shall ensure that during non-emergency conditions, these facilities can provide space and programming for community-building efforts that increase resilience and recovery when emergencies occur.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City's effort should include not only the necessary facilities planning but also engagement with each community in response planning to ensure adequate communications, personnel, transportation, and supplies and resources. Such engagement should also ensure that the process and the hubs themselves embody the principles articulated by the Urban Sustainability Director Network's Resilience Hubs Guidance and Analysis Tools to center the needs of the most vulnerable and affected community members, including ensuring communities successfully receive communications in their native languages.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

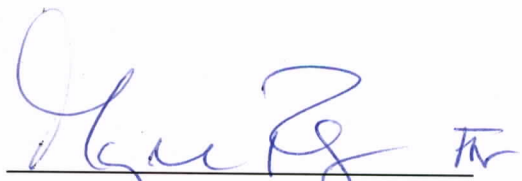
The City Manager shall return to Council no later than June 2021 with a base budget sufficient to fund recommendations and strategies to design and equip hubs for disasters, including the necessary power and water redundancies, and any intergovernmental memoranda necessary to memorialize community partnerships toward the creation of resilience hubs. The City Manager shall ensure that each potential resilience hub be located within a 15-minute walkshed of each neighborhood within Austin or within a 15-minute walkshed of an activity center, activity corridor, or the transit priority network.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

The City Manager shall return to Council no later than June 2021 with budget recommendations, funding strategies, and a timeline for creating a community-wide resilience hub plan sufficient to serve all Austinites during emergencies. By this same date, the City Manager shall present Council with a plan, budget recommendations, funding strategies, and a timeline for designing and equipping an initial six pilot hubs for disasters, including the necessary power and water redundancies. By the same date, the City Manager shall present to Council any intergovernmental memoranda necessary to memorialize community partnerships necessary to create resilience hubs.

ADOPTED: April 8, 2021

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk