

RESOLUTION NO. 20210729-174

WHEREAS, in 2000 the City Council approved a resolution directing the City Manager and staff to plan for hiring and training staff to operate a class “C” offender booking facility or a sobriety center and plan a Capital Improvement Plan for facilities that could house police, municipal court, and a sobriety center; and,

WHEREAS, in 2002 stakeholders worked over a period of six months to create an analysis entitled, “Sobering-Up Station Feasibility Study”; and,

WHEREAS, in March 2009 the Travis County Justice and Public Safety Department was selected to participate in the national Justice Reinvestment at the Local Level (JRL) initiative to develop recommendations to reduce jail populations and reinvest the savings into more proactive public safety measures; and,

WHEREAS, the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee under Chair Judge Nancy Hohengarten pursued ongoing efforts to create an Austin-Travis County Sobriety Center; and,

WHEREAS, on March 20, 2014, the City Council passed Resolution No. 20140320-051, directing the City Manager to work with the Travis County Justice and Public Safety Division, the Travis County Sheriff’s Office, the Travis County Criminal Courts and Prosecution, the Seton Healthcare Family, the Psychiatric Services Stakeholder work group, and other community members to develop an implementation plan and funding strategies for a sobriety center; and,

WHEREAS, Travis County Commissioners Court passed a similar resolution on March 11, 2014; and,

WHEREAS, the Austin/Travis County Sobriety Center Planning Committee analyzed the costs associated with arrests, bookings, jail time, ambulance transport, and emergency care for public intoxicants and concluded that serving certain individuals in a non-emergency setting would be more cost-effective than arresting and jailing these individuals and would increase sworn officers' time and the availability of care for people who truly need emergency services; and,

WHEREAS, on September 22, 2016, the City Council authorized the creation and incorporation of the Austin/Travis County Sobriety Center Local Government Corporation (the "Corporation") pursuant to applicable state law; and,

WHEREAS, the stated mission of the Austin-Travis County Sobriety Center is to enhance public health and public safety by providing an alternative to the emergency room and jail for publicly intoxicated individuals to sober up and, where appropriate, to provide a safe environment to initiate recovery; and,

WHEREAS, from October 2019 to September 30, 2020, the Sobering Center screened 1,527 individuals and admitted 1,397 clients, of which 22.19% were experiencing homelessness, 19.76% were considered at high risk for a substance use disorder, 35% of individuals were uninsured, and 9.52% were admitted on more than one occasion; and,

WHEREAS, of those referred to the Sobering Center, 70% were referred by law enforcement, 26.5% were referred by EMS, and 3% were referred by the Sobering Center outreach van; and,

WHEREAS, the Sobering Center adopts a public health approach to substance use disorders by using a social work model to connect people to a continuum of care; and,

WHEREAS, since the Sobering Center's inception, Travis County jail bookings for new Public Intoxication Class C misdemeanors have decreased by 45% since FY 18; and,

WHEREAS, in 2019, the City of Austin adopted the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute's report identifying and recommending improvements to the first response system for people experiencing a mental health related emergency, diverting as many as possible to care and treatment, and in 2020 the Austin City Council directed that these recommendations be implemented at full scale in 2021; and,

WHEREAS, the Austin-Travis County Sobering Center FY 20 Impact Report indicates an overrepresentation of people with substance use disorders and mental health disorders in the criminal justice and medical systems; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has had a long-standing interest in diversion programs, including establishing the Downtown Austin Community Court in 1999 – the first of its kind in Texas – which serves as a way to link housing and intensive case management services to people experiencing homelessness for a limited number of municipal court offenses and in a limited geographic area; and

WHEREAS, on June 15, 2021, Travis County Commissioners requested that Travis County staff, specifically the county executives of both Justice & Public Safety and Health & Human Services, study the potential for and costs of combining a mental health diversion program with the Sobering Center in collaboration with the City of Austin and key mental health stakeholders; and,

WHEREAS, Travis County asserted that, “such a program would complement a variety of diversion programs already established within Travis County at every level of the criminal justice process and provide more opportunities for connections to care for those in our community with unmet mental health needs”; and,

WHEREAS, both the Travis County Commissioners Court and the Sobering Center Local Government Corporation Board are currently engaged in discussing the opportunities associated with a mental health diversion pilot program that could potentially take place at the Sobering Center; and,

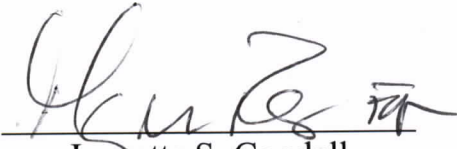
WHEREAS, the Travis County Commissioners Court has taken action to initiate a stakeholder process to form an advisory committee to assist with a feasibility and implementation study for a pilot mental health diversion program with the Sobering Center; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL:

The City of Austin expresses its interest in and support of Travis County’s initiative to study the opportunities of a mental health diversion pilot program with the Austin-Travis County Sobering Center. The City Manager is directed to participate in the stakeholder process as appropriate and to collaborate on expanded diversion opportunities that may connect people experiencing homelessness with intensive case management and housing.

ADOPTED: July 29, 2021

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk