

RESOLUTION NO. 20210902-050

WHEREAS, each year, nearly two billion birds travel through the State of Texas; and

WHEREAS, this number represents between a quarter and a third of all birds migrating throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, it is important to recognize this massive migration of birds occurs at night; and

WHEREAS, these birds must contend with a rapidly increasing but still under-recognized threat of light pollution, which attracts and disorients these migrating birds, confusing them and making them vulnerable to collisions with buildings and other urban threats; and

WHEREAS, more than one billion birds die in collisions with buildings in the United States annually, according to Lights Out Texas, an effort that began in 2020 and is led by a coalition of partners that includes conservation non-profits, universities, local governments, and Texans dedicated to the conservation of birds; and

WHEREAS, the extensive and intense light pollution from Texas cities, combined with the enormous bird migration, creates a particularly hazardous environment; and

WHEREAS, in one study, Texas cities including Dallas, San Antonio, and Houston were among the top American metropolitan areas exposing migrating birds to light pollution; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is a community that cares about protecting wildlife and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department manages over 2,400 acres of preserved land, which provide important benefits, such as habitat for endangered species, clean air, clean water, and flood mitigation; and

WHEREAS, birds are important to the Texas economy; and

WHEREAS, in the Rio Grande Valley alone, Texas A&M found that nature tourism – which is dominated by bird watching – contributes \$300 million to the economy and supports 4,407 full and part-time jobs annually; and

WHEREAS, birds also help control the population of pest insects, enhancing agricultural production, and are important pollinators for many flowering plants; and

WHEREAS, turning off non-essential lights also provides additional benefits such as reducing electricity consumption, saving money, and reducing pollution associated with power production; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is joining an international effort to reduce bird-building collisions by proposing and implementing a simple solution to protect birds: turning off non-essential lighting during critical migration periods; and

WHEREAS, turning off non-essential lights dramatically reduces hazards to migrating birds, allowing them to safely proceed with their journeys; and

WHEREAS, Lights Out Texas is a statewide initiative that aims to raise awareness of the risk light pollution poses to birds and to ask businesses, residents, and governments to turn off lights at night during bird migration; and

WHEREAS, the initiative is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Texan by Nature, which was founded by former First Lady Laura Bush; and

WHEREAS, this effort is also supported by local and statewide conservation groups including Texas Conservation Alliance, Travis Audubon, Defenders of Wildlife, Hill Country Alliance, Texas A&M Biodiversity Research and Teaching Collections, Texas Parks and Wildlife Nature Trackers, and Audubon Texas; and

WHEREAS, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce has been a willing partner in encouraging downtown buildings to participate in Lights Out Texas; and

WHEREAS, the City's Office of Sustainability has successfully worked with City departments including Building Services, Austin Public Library, Austin Parks and Recreation, and the Convention Center to participate in Lights Out Austin; and

WHEREAS, Travis County passed a similar resolution; and

WHEREAS, residents and business owners are encouraged to help protect birds and save energy by turning off all non-essential lighting across Austin from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. during the spring and fall bird migration periods: March 1 – June 15 and August 15 – November 30 each year; and **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to:

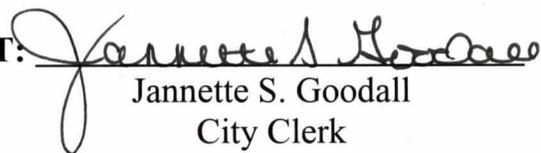
(1) Implement a “Lights Out” policy in which non-essential lighting in City buildings is turned off where feasible from 11:00 PM to 6:00 AM during the peak fall bird migration period from September 5 – October 29, and during the peak spring migration period from mid-April – mid-May.

(2) Provide information to the public from relevant departments, such as the Office of Sustainability, Parks and Recreation, Austin Energy, Austin Water Utility, and Watershed Protection, about the “Lights Out” campaign and the importance of turning off non-essential lighting to protect bird populations during migration periods; and

(3) Explore opportunities to implement a permanent “Lights Out” policy for City buildings as an ongoing effort to protect bird populations during migration, as well as to reduce light pollution and energy consumption, and provide Council with recommendations by October 14, 2021.

ADOPTED: September 2, 2021

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk