

RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, creative activation of residential streets can help build community, increase safety, and improve quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the need for outdoor public spaces where people can gather, socialize, exercise, and play in a safe, physically-distanced manner; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Transportation Department, in a September 30, 2021 Memo to Mayor and Council regarding Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP) Amendments, acknowledges these needs and proposes adding a policy to the ASMP that reads “Support streets as places where non-mobility community functions can take place; Recognize the diverse and expanding civic needs within our right of way and promote adaptive uses of the street”; and

WHEREAS, climate change and weather-related disasters such as Winter Storm Uri have emphasized the importance of community resilience and relationship-building activities in promoting greater resilience; and

WHEREAS, for National Preparedness Month in September 2021, the City of Austin Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management focused a week of their emergency preparedness campaign on “Know Your Neighbors” and encouraged Austinites to “know your community before an emergency or a disaster occurs”; and

WHEREAS, block parties and similar street activations are an excellent way to meet and connect with neighbors; and

WHEREAS, current City block party permit processes and regulations create formidable barriers and also raise serious equity concerns; and

WHEREAS, Section 14-8-32 of the City Code restricts block parties exclusively to streets abutting single family dwellings, which many families and individuals cannot afford to buy or rent; and

29 **WHEREAS**, racial disparities all-too-frequently mirror economic
30 disparities, and therefore a City focused on remedying racial injustice should not
31 restrict opportunities, privileges, or greater safety to those living in single-family
32 dwellings; and

33 **WHEREAS**, Austinites nominated hundreds of streets in every corner of the
34 city for the City’s Healthy Streets Initiative but only a handful of staff-selected
35 locations have been implemented, despite overwhelming support for the initiative;
36 and

37 **WHEREAS**, other cities such as San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles,
38 Chicago, Seattle, Philadelphia, and London have offered their residents Play
39 Streets programs to facilitate greater outdoor activity and community-building; and

40 **WHEREAS**, there are not currently any processes that allow for Austin
41 residents to apply for a permit to create a Healthy Street or Play Street on their
42 block; and

43 **WHEREAS**, the Urban Transportation Commission, Pedestrian Advisory
44 Council, Bicycle Advisory Council, nearly three-dozen diverse community
45 organizations, more than 100 businesses, and more than 800 individuals have
46 expressed their support for a City of Austin Living Streets program that includes
47 better and easier block parties, Play Streets, and Resident-Led Healthy Streets; and

48 **WHEREAS**, Council enthusiastically embraces the Living Streets vision of
49 a suite of street activations that are easily accessible to all Austinites for safe and
50 joyful community-building in all neighborhoods and, as efficiently as possible,
51 wishes to see the Neighborhood Block Party Program improved and a Play Streets
52 Program and a Resident-Led Healthy Streets Program created, as detailed below;

53 **NOW, THEREFORE,**

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

55 Council intends to make block parties easier to organize and more equitably
56 accessible to all residents and neighborhoods. Therefore, Council directs the City

57 Manager to review the Neighborhood Block Party Program (the “Program”),
58 evaluate how to implement the following three goals and their associated
59 strategies, proceed with any of the listed changes that the Manager determines are
60 feasible and can be made administratively, and return to Council by January 21,
61 2022, with drafts of any necessary code amendments or if any additional policy
62 guidance is needed or any of the listed changes are deemed infeasible.

- 63 1. Reduce application barriers. When reviewing strategies to reduce application
64 barriers, the Manager should consider:
 - 65 a. Allowing a simple majority of residents along the proposed closure to
66 approve a proposed block party of eight hours or less;
 - 67 b. Allowing a two-thirds majority of residents along the proposed closure to
68 approve a proposed block party of greater than eight hours;
 - 69 c. Providing flexibility for alternative methods of neighbor notification of
70 the proposed block party, such as the posting of signs or the distribution
71 of door hangers, that can substitute for the current requirement to collect
72 the signatures of 100% of the block’s residents;
 - 73 d. Fixing or replacing the map tool in the AMANDA-based Austin Build +
74 Connect portal that an applicant is currently required to use to indicate
75 the location of the proposed block party;
 - 76 e. Providing an alternative application process for anyone unable to
77 complete an AMANDA- based application, including those with limited
78 technology access or proficiency;
 - 79 f. Providing all block party program information, application forms, and
80 instructions in Spanish as well as English; and
 - 81 g. Continuing to minimize block party permit fees and associated costs to
82 the greatest extent possible and, if feasible, creating a block party permit
83 fee waiver process.

- 84 2. Right-size safety obligations. When reviewing strategies to make sure safety
85 precautions are proportionate, the Manager should consider:
- 86 a. Continuing to require one unobstructed travel lane for emergency vehicle
87 access, and working with the public safety departments to minimize the
88 required width of that lane using a context-sensitive approach that considers
89 factors such as whether the building heights on residential blocks necessitate
90 the use of aerial ladders;
 - 91 b. Allowing resident vehicles to remain parked on the street, as long as the
92 emergency travel lane is maintained;
 - 93 c. Allowing the mandatory street barricades to be unmanned; and
 - 94 d. Ensuring the City continues to supply block party street barricades that are
95 highly visible, reflective, and portable by individual block party organizers;
- 96 3. Make it inclusive and equitable. When reviewing strategies to ensure inclusivity
97 and equity in the Program, the Manager should consider:
- 98 a. Allowing schools and places of worship to be present within a permitted
99 block;
 - 100 b. Developing a block party option for blocks that contain multifamily
101 residential buildings and that are Level 1 or Level 2 street blocks
102 according to the ASMP Street Network Table and Map, and adapting the
103 application process, permit fees, emergency access requirements, and any
104 other provisions for this option to the extent necessary to ensure
105 equivalent public safety and community support for the event;
 - 106 c. If feasible, developing a block party option for blocks that contain mixed-
107 use and/or commercial properties and that are Level 1 or Level 2 street
108 blocks according to the ASMP Street Network Table and Map, again
109 adapting the programmatic provisions as necessary; and

- d. Establishing additional sites for street barricade pick-up/drop-off at geographically dispersed City facilities, to improve equity in the accessibility of these barricades for all parts of town.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

Council does not intend for the above strategies to be considered an exhaustive list and supports the City Manager and staff in making additional changes to the Program that align with the goals expressed above. To that end, Council encourages the City Manager to work with past block party permit applicants, community organizations such as Walk Austin, relevant Boards and Commissions, and peer cities to identify any additional updates that could be made that support the goals expressed above.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

In addition to easier, more accessible, more equitable block parties, Council desires to make Play Streets and resident-led, one-block Healthy Streets available to Austinites as community-building street activations. Therefore, the Council directs the City Manager to evaluate what is necessary to create new Play Streets and Resident-Led Healthy Streets Programs (the “Street Programs”) as detailed below, proceed with creation and implementation to the extent the Manager determines it is feasible to do so, and return to Council by January 21, 2022, with drafts of any necessary code amendments or if any additional policy guidance is needed or any of the provisions below are deemed infeasible or require additional resources to implement. In developing the Street Programs, the City Manager shall consider:

1. Establishing that a Play Street is intended to be a recurring, complete street closure that may occur for several hours, multiple times per week;
2. Establishing that a Resident-Led Healthy Street is intended to be a one-block, on-going, partial street closure to through-traffic while maintaining

access for residents and their guests, deliveries, and emergency access,
similar to the City's existing staff-led Healthy Streets;

3. Requiring a simple majority of residents along the proposed closure to support a Play Street or Resident-Led Healthy Street permit application;
4. Allowing a Play Street or Resident-Led Healthy Street permit to be valid for up to six months (renewable), as long as compliance with program requirements is maintained;
5. Establishing that documentation from a simple majority of residents along an approved Play Street or Resident-Led Healthy Street in support of removing the street activation shall be sufficient grounds to revoke the permit and establish a "cooling-off" period of six months during which the same type of permit shall not be approved for the same location;
6. Striving to design the programs and permit processes to be as straightforward, easy, accessible, affordable, inclusive, and equitable as possible while ensuring sufficient public safety and community awareness and support;
7. Seeking input from community organizations such as Walk Austin, relevant Boards and Commissions, and peer cities on program design; and
8. Adopting all feasible options for street barricades that could reduce program costs while maintaining street safety, such as planter boxes.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

Council directs the City Manager to create a single, public-facing webpage where residents can find a menu of Living Streets activations that may be available to them in their neighborhood and connects them to the Neighborhood Block Party, Play Streets, and Resident-Led Healthy Streets programs. This Living Streets

webpage should be made publicly available in time to support the launching of the
Street Programs.

ADOPTED: _____, 2021 **ATTEST:** _____

Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk

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