

RESOLUTION NO.

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

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

8 **WHEREAS**, pilot programs and initiatives adopted during the pandemic
9 that introduced innovative use of public space and right of way, such as the
10 Healthy Streets Initiative that used “soft” closures to make streets safer for
11 walking, biking, and rolling and the Shop The Block program that successfully
12 promoted safe shopping and dining outdoors, are in the process of transitioning
13 into permanent programs under direction from Council; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

49 **WHEREAS**, a Resident-Led Healthy Streets Program and Play Street
50 Program would, much like the installations of Green Streets, traffic circles, and street
51 “mural” painting projects realized through the Neighborhood Partnering Program,
52 empower neighborhoods to design and implement effective traffic mitigation
53 devices for safer streets; and

54 **WHEREAS**, the Urban Transportation Commission, Pedestrian Advisory
55 Council, Bicycle Advisory Council, ~~nearly~~—three-dozen diverse community
56 organizations, more than 100 businesses, and more than ~~800~~850 individuals have
57 expressed their support for a City of Austin Living Streets program that includes
58 better and easier block parties, Play Streets, and Resident-Led Healthy Streets; and
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60 **WHEREAS**, Council enthusiastically embraces the Living Streets vision of a
61 suite of street activations that are easily accessible to all Austinites for safe and joyful
62 community-building in all neighborhoods and, as efficiently as possible, wishes to
63 see the Neighborhood Block Party Program improved and a Play Streets Program
64 and a Resident-Led Healthy Streets Program created, as detailed below.
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66 **NOW, THEREFORE,**

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

68 Council intends to make block parties easier to organize and more equitably
69 accessible to all residents and neighborhoods. Therefore, Council directs the City
70 Manager to review the Neighborhood Block Party Program (the “Program”),
71 evaluate how to implement the following three goals and their associated strategies,
72 proceed with any of the listed changes that the Manager determines are feasible and
73 can be made administratively, and return to Council by January 21, 2022, with drafts
74 of any necessary code amendments or if any additional policy guidance is needed or
75 any of the listed changes are deemed infeasible.
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- 77 1. Reduce application barriers. When reviewing strategies to reduce application
78 barriers, the Manager should consider:
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- 80 a. Allowing a simple majority of residents along the proposed closure to
81 approve a proposed block party of eight hours or less;
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- 83 b. Allowing a two-thirds majority of residents along the proposed closure
84 to approve a proposed block party of greater than eight hours;
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- 86 c. Providing flexibility for alternative methods of neighbor notification of
87 the proposed block party, such as the posting of signs or the distribution
88 of door hangers, that can substitute for the current requirement to
89 collect the signatures of 100% of the block's residents;
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- 91 d. Fixing or replacing the map tool in the AMANDA-based Austin Build
92 + Connect portal that an applicant is currently required to use to indicate
93 the location of the proposed block party, or ensuring robust, user-
94 friendly mapping functionality in any future online application system,
95 should the Austin Build+Connect portal be replaced entirely;
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- 97 e. Providing an alternative application process for anyone unable to
98 complete an AMANDA-based application, including those with limited
99 technology access or proficiency;
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- 101 f. Providing all block party program information, application forms, and
102 instructions in Spanish as well as English; and
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- 104 g. Continuing to minimize block party permit fees and associated costs to
105 the greatest extent possible and, if feasible, creating a block party
106 permit fee waiver process.

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108 2. Right-size safety obligations. When reviewing strategies to make sure safety
109 precautions are proportionate, the Manager should consider:

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111 a. Continuing to require one unobstructed travel lane for emergency
112 vehicle access, and working with the public safety departments to
113 minimize the required width of that lane using a context-sensitive
114 approach that considers factors such as whether the building heights on
115 residential blocks necessitate the use of aerial ladders;
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117 b. Allowing resident vehicles to remain parked on the street, as long as the
118 emergency travel lane is maintained;
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120 c. ~~Allowing~~ Not requiring monitors to be stationed at the mandatory street
121 barricades ~~to be unmanned~~; and
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123 d. Ensuring the City continues to supply block party street barricades that
124 are highly visible, reflective, and portable by individual block party
125 organizers;
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127 3. Make it inclusive and equitable. When reviewing strategies to ensure
128 inclusivity and equity in the Program, the Manager should consider:

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130 a. Allowing schools and places of worship to be present within a permitted
131 block;
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- 133 b. Developing a block party option for blocks that contain multifamily
134 residential buildings and that are on local streets that can be closed
135 without adversely impacting mobility or safety for the adjacent
136 neighborhood street network~~Level 1 or Level 2 street blocks according~~
137 ~~to the ASMP Street Network Table and Map~~, and adapting the
138 application process, permit fees, emergency access requirements, and
139 any other provisions for this option to the extent necessary to ensure
140 equivalent public safety and community support for the event;
- 141
- 142 c. If feasible, developing a block party option for blocks that contain
143 mixed-use and/or commercial properties and that are on local streets
144 that can be closed without adversely impacting mobility or safety for
145 the adjacent neighborhood street network~~Level 1 or Level 2 street~~
146 ~~blocks according to the ASMP Street Network Table and Map~~, again
147 adapting the programmatic provisions as necessary; and
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- 149 d. Establishing additional sites for street barricade pick-up/drop-off at
150 geographically dispersed City facilities, to improve equity in the
151 accessibility of these barricades for all parts of town.
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153 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

154 Council does not intend for the above strategies to be considered an exhaustive
155 list and supports the City Manager and staff in making additional changes to the
156 Program that align with the goals expressed above. To that end, Council encourages
157 the City Manager to work with past block party permit applicants, community-based
158 organizations (CBOs) such as Walk Austin, relevant Boards and Commissions, and

159 peer cities to identify any additional updates that could be made that support the
160 goals expressed above.

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162 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:**

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

- 173 1. Establishing that a Play Street is intended to be a recurring, complete street
174 closure that may occur for several hours, multiple times per week;
- 175 2. Establishing that a Resident-Led Healthy Street is intended to be a one-block,
176 on-going, partial street closure to through-traffic while maintaining access for
177 residents and their guests, deliveries, and emergency access, similar to the
178 City’s existing staff-led Healthy Streets;
- 179 3. Requiring ~~a simple majority~~sixty percent of residents along the proposed
180 closure to support a Play Street or Resident-Led Healthy Street permit
181 application;
- 182 4. Allowing a Play Street or Resident-Led Healthy Street permit to be valid for
183 up to six months (renewable), as long as compliance with program
184 requirements is maintained;

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5. Establishing that documentation from ~~a simple majority~~sixty percent 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~~(CBOs) 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.

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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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.

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

Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk