MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Joseph Chacon, Austin Police Department Chief

Denise Lucas, Development Services Director

THROUGH: Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager

DATE: May 18, 2022

SUBJECT: Resolution Number 20220303-061 - Staff Response, Safer 6th Street

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The purpose of this memo is to provide a response on action items related to the Safer 6th Street resolution.

Background

Council Resolution No. 20210729-175 established City Council support for implementing a more comprehensive strategy toward 6th Street that maximizes its assets, embraces new opportunities, and ensures a safer environment for all, and established that the strategy needs to be multi-faceted and build on previous stakeholder processes and consultant reports. The resolution outlined actions to be taken, and for staff to report to Council on the results.

City staff sent a Memo to Mayor and Council on December 27, 2021, with responses on action items related to the Safer 6th Street resolution.

Council Resolution No. 20220303-061 referenced the staff memo including recommendations for next steps and outlined further actions to be taken. This memorandum responds to the actions outlined in the resolution.

Action Items and Responses

Action: The City Council supports staff' s proposed "Pilot Program 1" that includes activations for seating, dining, and other activities during 6th Street closures which occur on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. The City Manager is directed to finalize program criteria, requirements, and the application process and to implement this program by May 1, 2022; and to bring to Council an ordinance to waive fees associated with this pilot program.

> **Response:** The requirements for participation in the pilot program have been finalized and the application process has been developed. The program criteria are being finalized and the program will be implemented in the coming weeks. An ordinance to waive fees for the pilot program is not necessary, as no fees will be assessed during the pilot, and the pilot program will be utilized to evaluate if fees are warranted and will be required for a regular program.

Action: The City Manager is directed to provide Council with regular written updates on the planning currently underway to create a dedicated Emergency Medical Services presence and staging area on 6th Street that will allow for safer and faster treatment and extrication of individuals needing medical attention. The City Manager shall first report back to Council no later than May 1, 2022.

Response: A staging area has been created in the 600 block of Neches following consultation and assistance from ATD. APD, ATCEMS, and AFD can use this area to stage personnel and/or equipment for both planned and no-notice events. ATCEMS is also in the process of procuring new equipment funded as part of the FY22 budget to provide additional rapid patient care capabilities.

Action: By May 1, 2022, the City Manager shall provide Council with information about previous City-sponsored gun buyback programs (total costs and number of weapons obtained). The City Manager shall also provide Council with a recommendation as to whether or not the City should establish a new gun buyback program and to provide information about potential funding sources should a new gun buyback program be recommended.

Response: The Austin Police Department has previously held two gun buyback programs. The first was held in 2010 and the second in 2011. They allowed citizens to turn in weapons without showing identification and in return VISA gift cards were issued. Funding was provided by private donations from the Greater Austin Crime Commission, and a person would receive a $100 gift card for each handgun or rifle, and a $200 gift card for each assault rifle. For the first event, $30,000 in gift cards was distributed, and $40,000 was distributed in the second. The one-day events collected 340 weapons in the first buyback, and 396 in the second. Most of the firearms received were unwanted guns that were gifted or bequeathed by will. The main goals of the program were to keep unwanted firearms off the street and help families that do not know what to do with unwanted firearms in their home. There are also individuals in the parking lot offering more money to buy the guns than the program.

In 2020 the Austin Police Department instated a “no questions asked” gun surrender program where citizens could safely surrender unwanted firearms and ammunition during quarterly events hosted at the Robert T. Martinez Central East Substation. The Department suspended the events on September 22, 2020 due to the pandemic. Citizens that wanted to surrender a firearm outside of the quarterly events could dial 3-1-1 and request an officer to be sent to their location to retrieve it. Sixty-five firearms and more than 1,000 rounds of ammunition were surrendered during the 1st quarterly event prior to the program being suspended. Effectiveness of gun buyback program depends on the goals of the program, which should be defined. If the goal of a buyback is aligned with the belief that any gun turned in is beneficial (examples: reduction in numbers, reduced access, community outreach and education about gun safety or gun violence), then gun buy backs can be viewed as effective. However, If the goal is to reduce gun violence and associated crime, gun buy backs are viewed as ineffective, as research suggests that firearms turned in by the public are the least likely to be associated with gun-related crimes and violence, and no empirical research has shown significant changes in gun-related crimes due to these programs.

Based on research examined for this resolution buyback or surrender programs do not yield productive numbers in reducing gun related incidents. The Austin Police Department does not recommend these programs.

Action: By May 1, 2022, the City Manager shall provide Council with recommendations related to the possibility of installing more HALO (High Activity Location Observation) cameras throughout the 6th Street area. If the Manager recommends installing additional cameras, he shall provide estimated costs and possible funding sources.

Response: Currently there are 47 cameras as part of the HALO system in the downtown entertainment district. The Police Technology Unit worked in conjunction with the Real Time Crime Center (RTCC) and the Downtown Area Command (DTAC) to compile a list of additional camera sites that would greatly assist and accomplish the City's goal of promoting safety and security within the downtown entertainment district. This collaboration identified the need for 13 additional cameras. Police Technology worked with Motorola Solutions to develop two options for enhancing the HALO system's capabilities.

Option One: $898,187

Option one is the complete update of the current HALO system (to include the Rundberg area cameras) with all new Motorola cameras and a dedicated broadband network. This system includes 67 pan/tilt/zoom cameras and three fixed cameras. The addition of this complete update would allow for an easier and lower cost transition as the RTCC is moved out of the Main Headquarters, and into the Austin Regional Intelligence Center (ARIC) in the future.

Option Two: $193,000

Option two is simply the addition of the 13 cameras to the existing HALO system. This does not include a dedicated broadband network and does not address the need to move to the RTCC out of the Main Headquarters building in the future.

Recognizing the need to install additional cameras now, plus knowing the RTCC will be required to relocate when the Main Headquarters is moved, Police Technology recommends option one. While option one carries a significantly higher price tag than option two, the cost of relocation will only continue to increase in the 4-5 years it will take to design and build a new Headquarters. Combining the update of the HALO system to enhance downtown public safety with the move of the RTCC provides an increased value and financial savings in the future.

Possible funding sources for the HALO System include City of Austin general fund and exploring grant funding.

Action: The City Council desires to take a strong stance against establishments with records of repeated violent incidents taking place among their customers. Within the next 45 days, the City Council requests information about legal options that may be available to the City to address establishments with such records. This information should address existing or proposed regulatory options considered or proposed by other cities, such as Houston.

Response: The Law Department provided information during an April 5, 2022, executive session and provided a legal memo related to the request.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Brian Block, Entertainment Services Manager, at 512-974-7966 or Brian.Block@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager
Gina Fiandaca, Assistant City Manager
Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
Chief Joel G. Baker, Austin Fire Chief
Chief Robert Luckritz, Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services Chief
José Roig, Austin Code Director
Rob Spillar, Austin Transportation Department Director
Jacqueline Sargent, Austin Energy General Manager
Rosie Truelove, Housing and Planning Department Director