



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Darrell Alexander, Building Service Officer, Building Services Department
Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer, Office of Sustainability

DATE: November 23, 2021

SUBJECT: Resolution No. 20210902-050 Lights Out Initiative

This memorandum is intended to provide information in response to Resolution No. 20210902-050, related to the Lights Out Initiative.

BACKGROUND

Lights Out Austin is a City-wide initiative that aims to raise awareness of the risk light pollution poses to birds, by asking businesses, residents, and governments to turn off lights at night during bi-annual bird migrations. It is part of a state-wide initiative called Lights Out Texas, coordinated by nonprofit Texan by Nature and supported in Austin by Travis Audubon. The highest priority for Lights Out is buildings over three stories tall, which present the greatest risk to birds in flight. However, buildings of any height can participate.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Work began in summer of 2021, led by the Office of Sustainability, to explore how the City of Austin might participate in Lights Out. Following the Council Resolution, during the 2021 Fall migration (August 15-November 30), downtown properties managed by participating Departments were part of the inaugural program.

The Building Services Department (BSD) has initiated operational and procedural processes to support Resolution No. 20210902-050 at BSD-managed facilities. In addition, the Office of Sustainability and Building Services have reached out to other City departments to inform them of processes they may utilize for non-BSD managed facilities. We continue to explore artificial light at night (ALAN) reduction opportunities, including enhanced operational processes and capital improvements.

Single Point of Contacts (SPOCS) have been identified in Building Services, the Convention Center, Austin Public Library and Parks and Recreation Departments, and are coordinating with Building Services to fulfill ongoing participation.

City of Austin facilities managed by BSD, including City Hall and One Texas Center, along with the Central Library, Convention Center and Palmer Events Center have been participating in the following ways:

- Turning off all non-essential lights from 11:00pm to 6:00am each night during migration season.
- Refraining from use of landscape lighting to light up trees or gardens where birds may be resting.

For essential lights (like security and safety lighting), where feasible, the following dark skies-friendly lighting practices are being used throughout the entire migrating season:

- Aim lights downward.
- Use lighting shields to direct light downwards and avoid light shining into sky or trees (also referred to as light trespass).
- Use motion detectors and sensors so lights are only on when needed.
- Close blinds at night to reduce the amount of light being emitted from windows.
- Adjust custodial schedules to end by 11:00pm.
- Ask custodial staff to ensure that lights are off after they finish their work.

Avoid:

- Using floodlights.
- Illuminating interior plants or fountains.
- Illuminating unoccupied floors.
- Lighting with blue-rich white emissions (lighting w/color temperature over 3000 Kelvin).

Additional Guidelines for Buildings Taller Than 3 Stories, extinguish or dim:

- Exterior and decorative lighting (i.e. spotlights, logos, clock faces, greenhouses, and antenna lighting).
- Lobby/atrium lighting.
- Lighting in perimeter rooms on all levels of the building.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Office of Sustainability is coordinating communications and outreach efforts on a number of different fronts including:

- Collaborating with the Downtown Austin Association to communicate with private building owners about how they can be involved.
- Utilizing social media channels of their own and other synergistic Departments such as PARD, to communicate Lights Out messages with the public.
- Sponsoring the Travis Audubon Society's recent 'Lights Out for Birds' campaign by providing yard signs to Austin residents.

The Office of Sustainability will continue to play a primary role in the bi-annual migration campaigns, working with public, private and non-profit partners to increase participation and get the word out to the public at large.

NEXT STEPS & CHALLENGES

In future migrations, including 2022 Spring and Fall migration seasons, efforts will focus on including additional facilities and Departments, potentially expanding beyond downtown and refining efforts at all participating facilities. Efforts will be centered on education and empowerment of facility staff, building management, security and custodial employees.

Though our initial efforts have been relatively successful, this initiative also represents some challenges ahead. The newer facilities currently participating, such as the Convention Center, include fairly sophisticated building controls that make it easier to adjust lighting schedules remotely. In addition, some facilities such as City Hall or One Texas Center, have dedicated on-site building management staff, able to focus on compliance measures. As staff seeks to grow the program to include older buildings or those without on-site management, there may be costs for new lighting, lighting controls or staffing.

Other challenges include security patrols in some facilities, like the Central Library, occurring hourly throughout the night which activates sensors and turns lights on. Austin Public Library is investigating shortening the duration that these lights are automatically turned on between 11pm and 6am.

Partnerships with private entities, including increasing participation among owners of tall buildings, will be paramount in making a tangible difference in our downtown skyline. Building Services and Office of Sustainability staff look forward to continuing progress on this effort, to protect birds and keep Austin at the forefront of these State-wide efforts.

For more information or for questions, please contact:

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