



# Austin Center for Events Progress Report 2013



# Austin Center for Events

## Progress Report

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## Introduction

Effective special event management is imperative to maintain Austin's reputation for great outdoor experiences, fitness, food, live music and tourism branding.

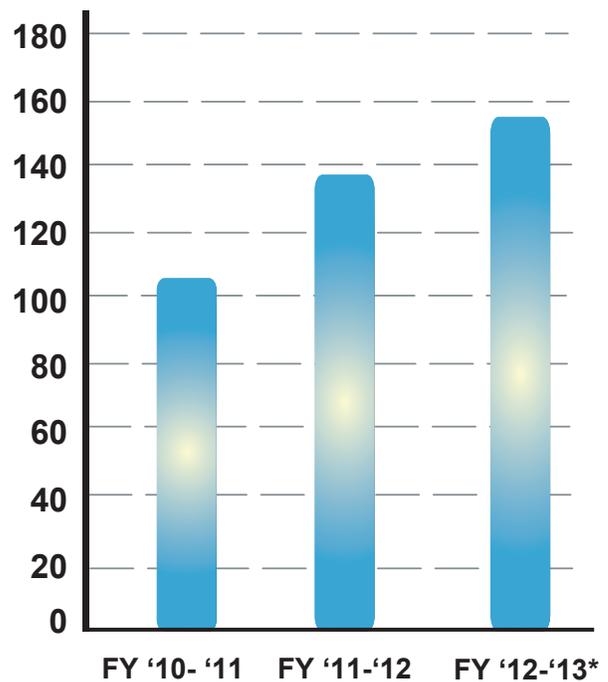
Austin is now America's No. 11 largest city, and demand for special events risks outpacing the City's ability to protect quality of life and ensure public safety. After a record FY 2012 for street event applications, FY 2013 is projected to set another record.

In reaction to rapid special event growth over the past decade, City departments have developed permitting procedures and policies resulting in confusing hierarchies and complicated application processes.

In 2012, City Council directed staff to define the structure, authority and plan for a one-stop shop for special events, including potential ordinance amendments. Departments are working to address the requests, while also managing an unprecedented number of special events with limited resources.

In consultation with more than a dozen departments and agencies, along with community members and event organizers, the Austin Center for Events (ACE) is moving forward with numerous improvements.

### Street Event Applications



*\* projected*

*Special events are increasing in frequency, size and complexity.*

## Austin Center for Events Overview

A 2012 Austin Music Commission resolution, (Appendix A) and subsequent City Council resolution (Appendix B), gave direction to create a centralized, publicized point of contact for special event permitting information and event management.

In response, the City created the Austin Center for Events, or ACE, as a collaborative office anchored by teams from transportation, music, police, fire and EMS departments, and supported by teams from other departments, agencies and facilities. Those involved include:

- Austin Code Compliance
- Austin Convention Center
- Austin Fire Department
- Austin Health and Human Services
- Austin Parks and Recreation Department
- Austin Police Department
- Austin Resource Recovery
- Austin Transportation Department
- Austin/Travis County EMS
- Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services Office
- Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Palmer Events Center
- Planning and Development Review
- Capital Metro
- Long Center for Performing Arts
- Texas Department of Public Safety
- Texas Facilities Commission
- University of Texas

Special event management at the ACE is continually evolving and will allow the City to speak with one voice and collectively address issues. It will also begin to eliminate past issues, such as promoters or vendors misinterpreting a single department's approval of an application as representative approval from the City at-large.

While the ACE is a collaborative partnership, there is no dedicated budget for day-to-day operational expenditures. Separate operating budgets for each division within the ACE are dictated by the individual departments and are funded by different special event planning and permitting fees. Fees generated by those departments are dedicated to their fiscal operating budgets with additional funding transferred from the General Fund to offset revenue deficiencies. Partner agencies, such as Capital Metro and the State of Texas, must charge their own fees unless otherwise indicated by an interlocal agreement or memorandum of understanding with the City. No such agreements are currently in place.

*Austin Center for  
Events partners  
June 2013*



## Outreach Overview

Beginning in early 2013, the ACE offered a variety of special event input opportunities for the community. A collaborative team, coordinated by the Austin Transportation Department, investigated best practices in other cities and on a weekly basis hosted workshops for representatives of many City departments and other agencies.

More than 1,600 people participated in meetings and online surveys. Representatives participated from most of the city's major event organizers, the Downtown Austin Alliance, City Council offices, and the Bouldin Creek, Travis Heights, Zilker and Downtown neighborhood associations.

### Robust Public Outreach

The online public participation effort began with a SpeakUpAustin survey. The survey consisted of five questions to gather basic information, such as length of time in Austin and residential area. The survey continued with eight questions specific to special events permitting and environmental impacts. Finally, the survey asked three open-ended questions inquiring about successes and concerns associated with the current special event permitting system.



In addition to the survey, the ACE hosted five public meetings between April and June 2013. The Communications and Public Information Office facilitated the meetings with a trained mediator leading robust and candid group discussions. Scribes recorded feedback on large poster boards in front of participants and staff incorporated the input into planning. Staff also provided the draft comprehensive permit application and received feedback they incorporated into application revisions.

### Community Feedback

These online and in-person events allowed the ACE to gather feedback on the permitting process, application and fees, as well as community and stakeholder concerns including event parking, environmental impact and sustainability. A summary of the feedback—along with the City staff's responses—is available for review in Appendix C.

Feedback received through the outreach process identified that work should focus on a number of inconsistencies in application deadlines and a variety of ordinances. An outline of event-related codes and regulations is available for review in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Additionally, the feedback identified a need for a Web-based comprehensive application for special events and a database for organizing completeness checklists, billing, reporting and notification lists.

A consistent feedback theme is that the public desired a limit on the number of event days in parks and on certain streets and bridges.

*The annual Austin City Limits festival expanded to two weekends in 2013.*

During outreach, community members and event promoters also consistently expressed that notification measures are not meeting public expectations. It is estimated that about 300,000 notification letters were mailed in the past fiscal year for event street closures, consuming valuable time and resources to individually stuff envelopes. A goal of the new ordinance is to simplify this process by requiring postcards and electronic notification rather than letters.



Thousands of bikers and onlookers converge on Austin for the annual Republic of Texas Biker Rally.

All eyes were on Austin for the first Formula One race in November 2012.

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**THE RACE**  
Hamilton victorious: In fourth victory of the season, Great Britain's Lewis Hamilton bests Germany's Sebastian Vettel. C1

**THE FANS**  
Positive reviews: From lawn chairs to the Paddock Club, attendees applauded Austin's inaugural grand prix. C1

**THE MONEY**  
A boon and a bust: How did Austin's restaurants, bars and hotels fare financially during the F1 race weekend? C1

**ON THE MAP**  
Austin's reputation: With millions of viewers globally, Central Texas was in the spotlight this weekend. C4

## TEXAS-SIZED WIN

117,429 WATCH HAMILTON TAKE AUSTIN'S INAUGURAL F1 RACE

Lewis Hamilton (center) celebrates his victory at Circuit of the Americas with Sebastian Vettel (center left), who came in second, and third-place finisher Fernando Alonso. Gov. Rick Perry (right) presented the trophy to Hamilton. PHOTO BY DALE BARBERA / AMERICAN STATESMAN

**IN THE NEWS**

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Lawmakers want to know who was behind the "talking points" about the consulate attack. A2

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## Action Steps

The City's special events team is actively taking steps in response to City Council and public requests, which include creating a comprehensive application, combined special events ordinance, enhancing communication and public information, establishing event tiers, standardizing executive oversight, establishing a special event definition and adding technology enhancements. Further details are provided in this section.

### Comprehensive Application

ACE partners have created a comprehensive permit application by incorporating several applications into a single form. The application includes various "triggers" that will allow appropriate departments and partner agencies to become notified of an event. This is planned to be rolled out in 2013 and will eventually be online in an interactive format. The draft is available for review in Appendix F. The proposed application process is available for review in Appendix G.

### Combined Ordinance

A new ordinance has been drafted and is under review. It will serve as an overarching governance tool. The ordinance will also allow the ACE to issue a single Special Events Permit. The ordinance will not supersede other ordinances, codes or department-specific permits, such as occupant capacity, or the inspecting of mobile food vendors. It will be important for the new ordinance to be understood easily and enforced by entities such as the Downtown Austin Community Court.

As part of the ordinance, the ACE worked with the City Attorney's Office to define a "special event." The impact of this definition is discussed further in this report.

These improvements are all extremely important because many street events spur satellite events on private property. During 2013 SXSW, for example, dozens of facilities filed Temporary Change of Use permits for performances or mass gatherings.

### Communication and Public Information Enhancements

The public requested access to effective and regular information regarding special events, including a user-friendly, easy-to-find, one-stop website. The ACE is working with the Communications and Public Information Office to consolidate the City's various special events websites and re-tool the CityStage website. A second stage of Web development will create a unique online calendar and create a public database of event applications, which will redact security details or event trade secrets.

The City is also creating a manual to detail the event application process, information about the Austin Center for Events and additional public safety requirements.

### Event Tiers

A specific ACE goal is to address the inefficient "one size fits all" permitting process for special events. Based on an analysis of best practices from around the country, the ACE intends



*Special events attract many unaffiliated entrepreneurs and service providers.*

to implement four tiers of special event designations. The scale will be based on the event's community impact and use of City resources.

The ACE partners are working with the City Attorney's Office to hone tier categories and criteria. It is important for the tiers to be easily understood by city employees, partner agencies, event promoters and community members.

A key part of the tiered strategy is to provide a way for smaller events, which have relatively small budgets, to occur with predictable costs.

Establishing tiers would also remedy inconsistent fees and deadlines applied to various events. Once established, each specific tier will have criteria for permit approval and deadlines for applicants.

Tiers will also establish a manageable and consistent mechanism for public notifications and conflict resolution when community members oppose event plans. Event organizers consistently express concern to staff that events must be planned and paid for many months in advance, yet events can be put in jeopardy within two months of the event date due to opposition from relatively small, but important, community groups.

### **Executive Oversight**

The new ordinance will establish an executive committee consisting of supervisors appointed by the City Manager or designee. The intent is for the committee to have administrative authority to issue or revoke Special Events Permits.

If approved by ordinance, the executive committee will also create rules with public input for executing the provisions of the new ordinance. The ordinance will also establish an appeal process for applications or permits denied by the ACE executive committee.

### **Special Event Definition**

The ACE team is working with the Legal Department to hone a "special event" definition. This definition will designate what occurrences or gatherings in the city limits fall under a new ordinance.

A critical part of enhancing Austin special events is enabling applicants, City staff and partner agencies to identify what plans require a Special Event Permit. Classifying appropriate events as a "special event" will ensure that all events are on the ACE planning schedule.

To illustrate this, there is currently a permit issued by Planning and Development Review under the Land Development Code (Sec. 25-2-921) that allows promoters and event organizers to "temporarily" change the use of outdoor spaces, such as a parking lot, into an event or public gathering venue. This permit is called a Temporary Use Permit, or TUP.

A TUP requires the approval of the various departments, but not the Austin Center for Events. The current process means that police, medical, music and transportation teams in the ACE are not aware of the permits, unless the specific TUP involves the Fire Department, in which case AFD's special events team alerts its ACE partners. The Fire Department is diligent in this duty; however, it is not an efficient system.

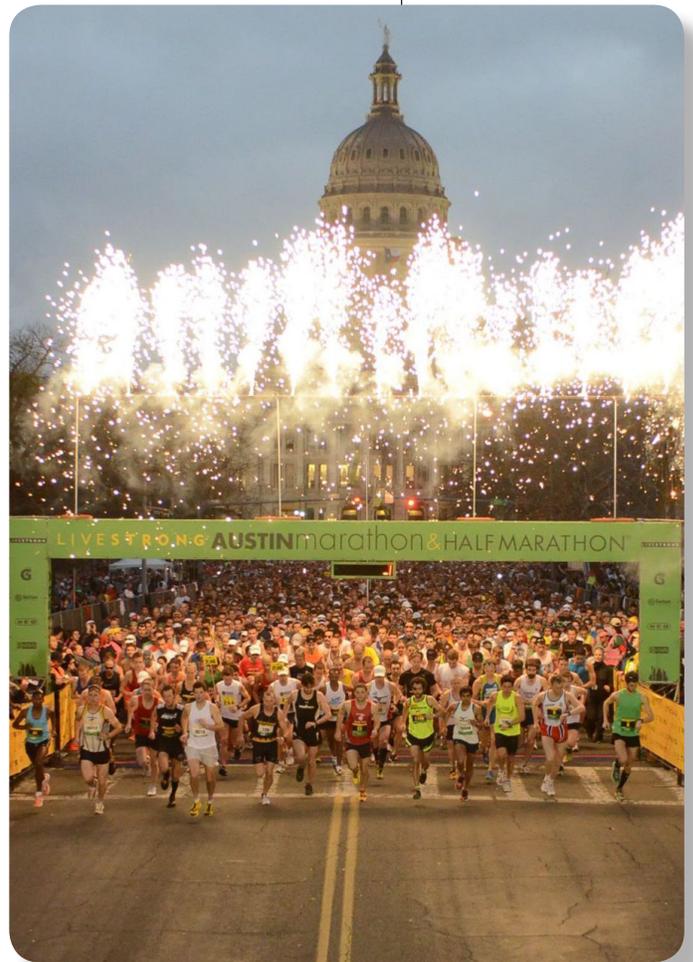
Establishing a special event definition will require public gatherings and entertainment events, which previously obtained TUPs, to engage the Austin Center for Events. This benefit would be realized year-round, but especially during major events, such as SXSW and Formula One when dozens of satellite events "pop up" on private property. For example, during 2013 SXSW, the Austin Fire Department completed 310 inspections of "temporary" venues.

## Technology Enhancements

The City of Austin's Application Management and Data Automation (AMANDA) data entry system is being upgraded to eliminate the need for City departments to redundantly enter data. The ACE is actively represented in system upgrade meetings.

The ACE has identified that the Right of Way Management Approval Network (ROWMAN) system for public entry of street/sidewalk closures for construction and non-construction events should be phased out and replaced with a new system. This recommendation will be brought to the Austin Transportation Department at a later date for evaluation.

Options are being explored to establish a road closure interactive map and mobile application. The goal is to allow viewers to identify closures and sort the data within a range of dates. There is also discussion of utilizing 3-1-1 to geospatially capture problems and concerns from event organizers and community members to either address immediately on event days or identify for future planning.



*Austin is best known for music events, but also has a growing athletic and creative arts event calendar.*

*As the City of Austin continues to grow, special events will grow alongside it. As evidenced by this report, the ACE is working to rise to that challenge and is focused on collaboration across departments to best serve the public.*



*The ACE expects to continue communication with the community and City Council as special event management evolves and will continue to seek out best practices across the country.*

