



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Human Rights Commission

Recommendation Number: 201701023-001b Women's Equity in Austin Equity in Naming of Public Symbols

WHEREAS, the Human Rights Commission of the City of Austin ("Commission") advocates on behalf of human rights for all people in the City of Austin ("City"); and

WHEREAS, the Commission's duties include, but are not limited to, advising and consulting with the Austin City Council ("Council") as well as all City departments, advisory boards and regulatory agencies on all matters involving discrimination, including providing legislative recommendations and proposing measures to improve the ability of various departments and agencies, as well as initiating and facilitating discussions and negotiations between individuals and groups to lessen tensions and improve understanding in the community and aiding in the formulation of local community groups in neighborhoods as needed to carry out specific programs; and

WHEREAS, on March 23, 2017 the Council passed Resolution No. 20170323-054 ("Resolution"), calling upon the Commission, in collaboration with the City's Commission for Women ("Women's Commission"), to research the City's previous efforts to address gender disparities in the City as well as research other potential practices that have not been documented or addressed by the City which have an unintended disparate impact on women but are commonly used by common governmental entities comparable to the City, examine whether those practices are being used within the City, and if so, determine their nature and scope, and develop recommendations for modifying City policies or practices to eliminate those disparate impacts; and

WHEREAS, the Resolution further called upon for the Commission and Women's Commission to separate their recommendations into long-term and short-term items; and

WHEREAS, with regard to short-term items, the Resolution called upon the Commission and Women's Commission to offer recommendations concerning steps to study disparities in Austin between streets named after men and those named after women, and appropriate measures to eliminate those disparities; and

WHEREAS, the Commission is aware of a 2015 study of seven world metros (London, Paris, San Francisco, Mumbai, New Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore), found that, controlling for gender-neutral names, only 27.9% of streets named for persons were named for women (see article at <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/11/mapping-the-sexism-of-city-street-names/414094/>); and

WHEREAS, the Street Name Database does not itself indicate whether a given street was named after a natural person and many streets that appear likely to have been named after natural persons do not include that person's first name, making determination of their gender impossible without conducting additional research of that street name's history; and

WHEREAS, Equal Visibility Everywhere, a Washington D.C.-based nonprofit dedicated to achieving gender parity in the symbols and icons of the United States, has noted gender imbalances exist nationwide in not only street names, but in building names, statuary, monuments and memorials, public holidays, parades and festivals, as well as in stamps and currency, in museum exhibits and in the media; and

WHEREAS, women's history is full of scientists, writers, artists, activists and politicians, and women who have made positive contributions to society and deserve more widespread recognition for their work; and

WHEREAS, the predominance of public symbols that are laudatory of exclusively male achievements are understood and perceived by America's schoolchildren in ways that contribute to boys' confidence and diminish girls' confidence; and

WHEREAS, the lack of public symbols recognizing the societal contributions of persons of color, particularly women of color, presents a similar problem, which is made worse when a public authority fails to adapt the contextualization of existing public symbols devoted to persons who may have caused or perpetuated racial harms to the modern age; and

WHEREAS, according to data maintained on the City's Demographics Data Library website, whites now make up 47.1% of the City's population (see [http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Demographics/Age by Race 2014.pdf](http://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Demographics/Age%20by%20Race%202014.pdf)); and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief, the City's public symbols that are named after natural persons represent a significantly larger percentage of white persons than persons of color, particularly women of color; and

WHEREAS, as regards new street names, the City's Street Naming Guidelines are posted on the City's website and available for review at https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Applications_Forms/street-naming-standards.pdf ("Street Naming Guidelines"); and

WHEREAS, the Street Naming Guidelines do not list gender equity or racial equity in street naming as among the criteria in the selection of new names for the Street Name Database; and

WHEREAS, the criteria and procedure for the naming or renaming of City facilities (“Facilities”), that is, buildings, structures, or other facilities directly used by the public, as well as parks, park facilities and features set forth at §14-1-31 through 39 of the City Code, which does not list gender or racial equity in its naming criteria; and

WHEREAS, upon information and belief, gender or racial equity play no formal role in considerations for the naming or renaming of Facilities; and

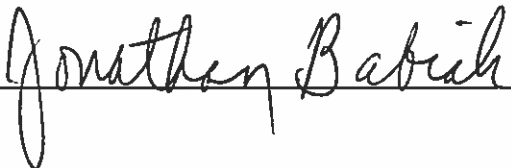
WHEREAS, to the extent that City statutes and memorials are not named using the conventions found at §14-1-31 through 39 of the City Code (relating to “Facilities”), upon information and belief, gender and racial equity play no formal role in considerations for the naming or renaming of them; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council and the City Manager’s Office take all appropriate steps to immediately insert, in those criteria used by the City to select names for streets, public buildings, statues, memorials, public parks, park facilities and features, a requirement that, going forward, gender and racial equity shall be required, meaning that, for any new streets, public buildings, statues, memorials, public parks, park facilities and features, named after natural persons, the half of them shall be named after women and at least half of these shall be named after women of color; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that, after equitable proactive policies have been put in place, Council may again call upon the Human Rights Commission and Commission for Women to offer recommendations in connection with studying the extent of naming inequities and remedial measures to address them.

Date of Approval: October 23, 2017

Record of the vote: Motion to adopt by Commissioner Bennett, second by Commissioner McMahon. Voting in favor were Vice Chair Caballero, Commissioner Avashia, Commissioner Bennett, Commissioner Casas, Commissioner McMahon, and Commissioner Yang. Voting against was Commissioner Royall. Chair Davis, Commissioner Brown, Commissioner Miguez, and Commissioner Normand were absent.

Attest:  _____

Jonathan Babiak
Staff Liaison, Human Rights Commission