



COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Commission on Seniors

Recommendation Number: 20181114- 4B: Recommendation on Senior Property Tax Assistance (Strategic Outcome Economic Opportunity and Affordability)

WHEREAS, the Commission on Seniors serves as an advisory board to the council concerning the quality of life for senior citizens in the Austin area and to help ensure older adults are productive, independent, and healthy; and

WHEREAS, The Austin Age Friendly Action Plan includes goals for housing affordability, including the impact of property taxes on affordability (see Strategy 3.2.3); and

WHEREAS, Marya Crigler, Chief Appraiser, Travis Central Appraisal District and Bruce Elfant, Tax Assessor and Voter Registrar, Travis County presented at the June 13 Commission meeting regarding Senior tax exemptions and payment options, and barriers to seniors taking full advantage of these tools; and

WHEREAS, the Commission finds that working with nonprofits and/or expanding social service contracts would be effective mechanism to education seniors about property tax exemptions and deferrals; and

WHEREAS, not all residents of the City of Austin live in Travis County; and

WHEREAS, The Report of the Austin Anti-Displacement Task Force includes recommendations that would assist seniors with property taxes.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commission on Seniors endorses the following recommendations of the Anti-Displacement Task Force:

- The City should partner with a non-profit organization to develop a one-stop-shop (e.g., Office of Housing Stability) to:
 - (i) integrate all assistance programs, simplify processes and develop a targeted outreach program to ensure that seniors, low-income homeowners, long-time homeowners and disabled homeowners in neighborhoods experiencing displacement:
 - Are taking full advantage of all exemptions/rebates relating to taxes & utilities;

- Receive assistance regarding property sales/transfers to protect equity/assets of homeowners;
 - Receive assistance with probate and estate planning;
 - Are able to access home repair programs;
 - Receive support from NHCD's financial empowerment program; and
 - Understand options relating to property tax deferrals.
- Partnering with service providers providing services to seniors (e.g., Meals on Wheels) to reach seniors where they live; and via regular presentations at senior centers and neighborhood centers; working with Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, the Texas Legal Service Center, local higher education partners and other non-profit partners to organize legal clinics and one-on-one counseling and resources to help seniors with probate and estate planning.
 - Request that Travis County Appraisal District develop a proactive mechanism by which to identify and notify homeowners who do not have a homestead exemption but who may qualify for that exemption.
 - Consider new or expanded tax exemptions/abatement to assist long-time and/or low income homeowners in neighborhoods experiencing displacement.
 - Consider the possibility of granting special senior and/or homestead tax exemptions to help address instances where seniors or low-income homeowners face a demonstrable inability to pay property taxes, putting them at risk of displacement.
 - If tax exemption measures identified above require legislative action, then pursue those actions during the next legislative session.
 - Seniors can be automatically enrolled for the older-adults tax exemption if the appraisal district has their birthdate on file, so Task Force recommends that: (i) the City of Austin work with the appraisal district to develop a form that homeowners can submit to officially have their birthdate on file; (ii) assist long-time homeowners that currently do not have an older adults exemption to help them submit the form that ensure that this exemption is instituted automatically when they are eligible.
 - Establish a tax abatement program for homeowners and other property owners in "reinvestment zones" as authorized and defined in the Texas Tax Code. The program requires that a homeowner participate in a home repair program.
 - Establish a senior volunteer tax break coupled with a senior volunteer program. Per Texas Tax Code, the City and County can partner to provide volunteer opportunities to low-income seniors in exchange for the senior homeowners' property taxes being forgiven. Pursue legislation that

allows the City/County to set the dollar value of each hour of service and not have the value default to the federal minimum wage. When pursuing legislation, seek to include a clause that allows a community member to volunteer on behalf of a homeowner who is not able to volunteer but who needs the tax assistance.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Commission on Seniors recommends the City work with all appropriate taxing jurisdictions to implement these recommendations.

Date of Approval: November 14, 2018

Record of the vote: 11-0 Ayes: Briesemeister, Varteressian, Bordie, Cagle, Garcia-Pittman, Grampp, Jackson, Lugo, Nicola, Sheth, Van Sickle; Nays: None; Abstentions: None; Absent: Angel, Hauser, Kareithi

Attest: _____