

Keep Austin Working

While public health outcomes continue to be unclear as we test more people and see infection and death rates and predictions rise and fall, the economic picture is clearly dire. The Department of Labor has set the official unemployment rate at 4.4% nationally, but [NYT's UpShot thinks unemployment nationwide has risen to somewhere close to 13% and will continue to rise](#). Austin's unemployment numbers are just as dire, as the city is expected to "[see the loss of around 261,000 jobs, or an unemployment rate of about 25% – levels last seen during the Great Depression](#)."

Because the City of Austin has, understandably, paused many Commission meetings due to public health concerns, the Commissions I'm on (Economic Prosperity, D-8, and Ethics Review, D-2) have not been able to meet to talk through and make recommendations to Austin's City Council. This is a running brainstorm of economic development, recovery and jobs programs that I think have merit and may be worth trying. You should know that, for me, this isn't about having the *right* idea right now, this is about taking *action* and, in doing so, finding the right solution as we go. It's about *trying a whole bunch of ideas* to mitigate all of the different, interconnected challenges we're facing right now as a city.

The goal with these ideas is to spur **job creation, job retention, economic security, equality of opportunity, small business creation and sustainability**, and **financial relief**.

Some of these are already being considered by Austin City Council and Travis County leadership, many of these ideas have been curated and refined based on discussions I've had one-off with fellow commissioners, other local nonprofit and business leaders, and constituents. These are not fully-baked, I don't know what public reception of them will be, I don't *know* if they will work, but unprecedented moments require unexpected solutions so I'm throwing this open-source list out there. If you're on a City Commission, please feel free to take any of these and build recommendations around them. They're in a public Google Doc for a reason. Whether you're on a board or commission or not, if you have more ideas, please feel free to [tweet at me](#) or [email me](#) and I may add them to the list.

We're all in this together, y'all. We're gonna get through it together, too.



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Recommendation Ideas

Passed by #ATXCouncil

- ✓ [Done](#) - *Designate a portion of the City's Emergency Funds for Direct Cash Assistance programs to put unrestricted funds directly into people's hands*

Under consideration (by commissions or Austin City Council)

- Streamline and simplify the city's procurement process to allow City of Austin public projects to be approved, move forward, and be paid out more quickly; require that a clear majority of those projects be done by businesses that are based in CoA
- Rapidly create new health codes within the health department to allow unemployed chefs to set up in-home takeout kitchens to sell food from

More

- Establish a grant fund to distribute \$50,000-\$100,000 to small businesses with 100 employees or less
- Create "pop-up" economic recovery customer service centers in each Council district around the city, offering digital tools and job retraining to bring needed short term rental income to support to small-scale Austin landlords
- [Establish a disaster loan](#) for larger businesses and small businesses that need more than \$50,000-\$100,000 to survive
- Authorize the Director of the Economic Development Department to reclassify or repurpose unused discretionary funds for the establishment of an Economic Development Innovation Fund housed with the Economic Development Department; Authorize Directors of Departments that administer City programs to partner with the Economic Development Innovation Fund and/or the Office of Innovation to help fund, within existing budgets, innovative solutions to a prioritized list of Austin's strategic priorities (a modification of one of Economic Prosperity Commission's recommendations in August of 2019)



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- Forgive loans from the [Family Business Loan Program](#)
- Forgive all City of Austin-issued loans that are being used for operating expenses (even if that's not what they were initially approved for)
- Simplify construction permitting to approve construction jobs and start or continue new projects ASAP
- Extend existing city licenses from one to two or more years
- Explore rent abatement or cancellation options for restaurants, bars, hospitality for a period of time (3-12 months)
- Establish a kind of City of Austin [Civilian Conservation Corps](#) to work in Austin's public areas once they reopen
- Establish a City of Austin Digital Response Team within the Innovation Office to employ unemployed tech workers and developers; they can focus on CoA digital initiatives and improve the customer experience for Austin residents
- Develop grant and loan programs to incentivize businesses to shift some of their manufacturing capabilities to produce PPE and other needed medical devices
- Develop new Arts and Cultural grant programs to support City of Austin artists
- Work alongside colleges and universities to provide job training and upskilling programs to unemployed workers
- Increase marketing budgets to promote existing [City of Austin Small Business Program x University of Texas at Austin Center for Professional Education online classes](#)
- Reduce or eliminate licensing or permitting fees for businesses, sole proprietors, and freelancers
- Develop a program that utilizes the city's unemployed restaurant workers to make and distribute meals to underserved communities, frontline workers, and civic institutions
- Convert existing loan programs into grants for a period of nine months; expand those programs
- Expand the [Heritage Grant](#) program to create more Heritage Capital and Site-Specific Heritage Tourism Projects



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- Evaluate and expand applicable programs and resources available within [City of Austin's Get Back In Business program](#) for businesses affected by natural and other disasters
- Prioritize and expand immediately available funds for previously approved transit infrastructure projects
- ~~Legalize busking~~ [ok, nevermind, busking is legal now](#)
- Experiment with property tax rebates for music venues as a kind of economic development grant
- [Expand funding for Austin Public Health programs](#); employ Austinites through these services
- Create tax incentives and develop rent subsidy programs for businesses that are encouraging or requiring employees to work from home to slow the spread of COVID-19
- [Relax or eliminate ordinances or requirements that penalize entrepreneurs](#) based on their lack of collateral or credit scores in order to qualify for business loans or grants
- Increase hiring at parks, public pools, and other temporary recreational staffing positions
- Support Austin's children, parents, educators by extending 10-month school jobs; identify and stipend parents and older students who are/mentors for distance learning transition or for SEL practices
- Support [the Texas Craft Brewers Guild petition](#) to allow breweries to deliver direct to consumers
- Scale up the [Equitable Green Jobs](#) pilot program to provide expanded access to workforce training and job opportunities focused on increasing sustainability and resilience, with a particular focus on low-income communities and communities of color
- Adopt the [Five Principles of a Just COVID-19 Relief and Stimulus](#) to guide City recovery efforts and ensure City-funded initiatives address the dual crises of COVID-19 and climate change whenever possible



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- **If you're part of a City of Austin Commission, please feel free to use these to draft recommendations; they're open source, no need to credit me. Have another idea for this list? [Email me](#).**
 - a. A few more quick notes:
 - i. If you're a City Commissioner or Board Member, note that you should receive guidance from the city staff member that's responsible for managing your board or commission before you try to meet digitally; in the meantime, you can prepare a recommendation for your Commission on your own and submit it for discussion and a vote once meetings are back up and running
 - ii. If you're not a City Commissioner and you have economic development ideas, you can still send them to me here
 - iii. [For a full list of Boards and Commissions, see here](#)
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Resources

- [How to apply for U.S. Small Business Administration Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\) loans](#)
 - [Apply for small business loans via the Texas Division of Emergency Management](#)
 - [Austin-Travis County Offers Help for Residents and Businesses During COVID-19 Outbreak](#)
 - [Austin Chamber of Commerce's list of COVID-19 resources](#)
 - [Austin Young Chamber of Commerce's list of COVID-19 resources](#)
 - [Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce's, COVID-19 update](#)
 - [Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce's COVID-19 resources](#)
 - [Austin LGBT Chamber of Commerce's list of COVID-19 update](#)
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- [Austin Technology Council, COVID-19 information](#)
- [AppSumo is giving away \\$1 million in software to companies affected by COVID19](#)
- [Nonprofit Resources for COVID-19](#), via Mission Capital
- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers to Plan and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 - CDC](#)
- [Nonprofits and Coronavirus, COVID-19](#), via the National Council of Nonprofits



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