



## **Economic Prosperity Commission Recommendation**

Recommendation Number: (20210129-003b) Economic Prosperity Commission Budget Recommendations.

WHEREAS, Austin, Texas is a compassionate city, and has committed to moving forward "with positive changes that strengthen homeless services and the system as a whole," as stated by Austin's 2018 'Action Plan to End Homelessness', in coordination with the Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO);

WHEREAS, punitive measures like fines and jail time for nonviolent individuals experiencing homelessness lead to warrants or establish criminal records, prompting cycles of criminalization that make it harder for individuals to find steady work or qualify for housing, even if they can afford it;

WHEREAS, in July 2019, Austin City Council changed ordinances that allowed individuals experiencing homelessness to camp, sit, lie, and panhandle, without threat of punitive measures like fines or jail time;

WHEREAS, job losses related to the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated longstanding housing insecurity, causing more Austinites to be susceptible to or fall into homelessness;

WHEREAS, Austin's current land use code does not allow enough housing to be built in Austin, resulting in a housing shortage and a lack of affordable housing overall, leaving us far behind our stated goals in the Strategic Housing Blueprint;

WHEREAS, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness is rising faster than housing can be built in Austin;

WHEREAS, according to the most recently available data from ECHO's Point In Time Count, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Travis County has gone up by 11% year-over-year from 2019 to 2020;

WHEREAS, homelessness is more visible in Austin's public spaces and there are legitimate public health and safety concerns for Austin residents, and especially for individuals experiencing homelessness in Austin;

WHEREAS, the City of Austin earmarked \$67.8 million for 2021 to address challenges related to homelessness, including the establishment of rapid re-housing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, social, physical, and behavioral services; food, and access to personal and public hygiene stations;

WHEREAS, homelessness is a symptom of many, larger, socioeconomic conditions, and, while immediate steps need to be taken to address this as an emergency situation, we must address this challenge with a coordinated, long-term effort with a focus on permanent supportive housing;

WHEREAS, the State of Texas and Governor Greg Abbott have indicated they are likely to engage on the issue of homelessness during the 2021 legislative session in a way that would threaten the City of Austin's autonomy;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Economic Prosperity Commission recommends that the Austin City Council:

- Fund a fully developed Universal Basic Income Program (UBI) to help combat displacement, ensure more Austinites do not fall into homelessness, and help lift individuals out of homelessness similar to established programs in cities also facing affordable housing crises such as Stockton, CA
- Continue to invest in innovated permanent supportive housing options, like refurbished hotels, and also consider alternative housing options, including but not limited to tiny homes or structures that may be more cost-effective, per unit, than hotels
- Direct City of Austin staff to work quickly with existing homeless service organizations to identify and establish additional, low-barrier, emergency city-sanctioned encampments throughout Austin on publicly-owned property;
- Ensure that these city-sanctioned encampments include access to restrooms, bathing facilities, trash collection, 24/7 security, water, food distribution, mental and other healthcare access, transportation assistance, access to job placement and financial aid;
- Consider alternative ways to enforce cleanliness in public spaces that doesn't include reinstating fines or jail time for nonviolent individuals who are experiencing homelessness;
- Study positive ways to incentivize individuals experiencing homelessness to move into city-sanctioned encampments or other available, transitional, rapid-rehousing options;
- Develop and finalize a long-term comprehensive plan with benchmarks and a timeline by end of Q2, 2021
- Develop a public education campaign to inform constituents of Austin City Council's plan and establish channels to frequently report on progress;
- Make regular, clear, actionable requests so local nongovernmental, nonprofit and for-profit organizations can step in to help fill gaps and provide resources to Austin's unhoused population;
- Continue to earmark money for direct cash assistance programs to ensure that Austin families and individuals do not become unhoused as a result of COVID-19 related job losses;
- Continue to work closely with existing homelessness service and criminal justice reform organizations to revise the comprehensive plan as needed, and communicate changes being made to the strategy based on data;
- Prioritize CDC's guidance on COVID-19 to ensure that actions taken or sanctioned by City of Austin do not exacerbate viral community spread of the disease among Austin's unhoused population;
- Direct City Manager and City of Austin staff to pick up the process previously called CodeNEXT to rework Austin's land use and development code to ensure all types of housing can be built all over the City of Austin, fix our long-term housing shortage, and stabilize the rising cost of housing

Date of Approval: 1/29/21

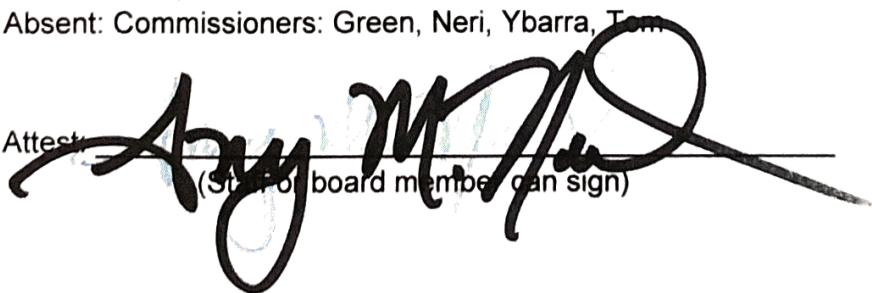
Record of the vote:

6-0 vote - Yea: Commissioners: Anazi, Haverlah, Lackey, Noel, Ryan, Taylor

0-0 vote - Nay:

Absent: Commissioners: Green, Neri, Ybarra, Tom

Attest:



(Signature of board member can sign)