

RESOLUTION NO. 20210506-070

WHEREAS, in April of 2018, the Austin City Council endorsed the “Austin Action Plan to End Homelessness” as an evolving blueprint for ending homelessness in our community through focused efforts to fund homelessness prevention, housing solutions, and services for individuals experiencing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, in June 2019, Council voted to allow camping in public areas when the camping activity does not materially endanger health and safety or impede reasonable use of a public area; and

WHEREAS, at the same meeting, Council directed the City Manager to propose reasonable time and place limitations on camping, to provide options for at least ten locations (one in each Council district) that would allow for camping and receive wrap-around services, and to suggest options for parking areas across the city where people could sleep in cars; and

WHEREAS, City staff’s August 30, 2019, memorandum in response recommended that Council consider limiting camping for health and safety reasons in areas with high pedestrian and vehicular traffic and in high flood risk areas; and

WHEREAS, at the time staff recommended against creating authorized encampments, citing a May 2018 U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness report, “Caution is Needed When Considering ‘Sanctioned Encampments’ or ‘Safe Zones,’” that urges cities to consider first how sanctioned encampments have functioned elsewhere in terms of costs, maintenance and management challenges, success in reducing homelessness, and obstacles to ensuring such spaces are temporary; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Strategy Office opted instead to focus on Housing First efforts, rapid re-housing, emergency shelters, low-barrier housing-focused shelter, permanent supportive housing, and other strategies identified in the “Action Plan to End Homelessness”; and

WHEREAS, in October of 2019, the Council again modified city ordinance and prohibited camping on city sidewalks, and affirmed its prohibition of camping in parks and greenbelts, in high wildfire risk areas, and in public areas when doing so blocks public or private property or endangers public health or safety; and

WHEREAS, since December 2019, the City of Austin has held contracts with both Barb Poppe and Associates and with Matthew Doherty to review existing City programs, to analyze City investments, and to review City policies related to homelessness; and

WHEREAS, the report from Barb Poppe and Associates in part pointed to the need for better public space management and noted some of the costs the City of Austin incurs for expenses related to managing public spaces used by persons who are unsheltered; and

WHEREAS, in the wake of the pandemic in spring 2020, the City Manager interpreted Center for Disease Control guidance and determined that camping should be allowed throughout the city, including in areas prohibited through Council ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the City has since relied heavily on the Parks and Recreation Department’s park rangers and our community’s social service providers to visit newly formed encampments and propose changes or modifications to the encampment’s conditions to allow the residents to continue to shelter in these prohibited areas; and

WHEREAS, in late summer of 2020, recognizing the importance of non-COVID health and safety issues, the Parks and Recreation Department developed a prioritization matrix to assess encampments on parkland that may need to be relocated due to imminent health and safety concerns, though such efforts have been limited due to staffing and resource constraints; and

WHEREAS, during the pandemic, the City has engaged hotels and motels to provide protective lodging as a public health intervention for individuals experiencing homelessness at highest risk for contracting COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the City also continues to make progress on its goal of purchasing hotels or motels to serve as bridge or permanent supportive housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, but the space and services available across the community still remain insufficient to serve the majority of individuals living unsheltered in Austin; and

WHEREAS, the City of Philadelphia implemented the “Encampment Resolution Pilot,” an interdisciplinary collaboration in which outreach teams connected 126 individuals in identified encampments with low-barrier housing and services; and

WHEREAS, at its October 17, 2019, meeting, Council considered a resolution mirrored after the Philadelphia encampment response strategy but did not take action; and

WHEREAS, in February 2021, Council approved Resolution No. 20210204-049, which created the [Housing-Focused Homeless Encampment Assistance Link \(HEAL\) initiative](#) to provide resources to individuals experiencing homelessness in certain parts of the city, to relocate those individuals to safer and more dignified spaces, and to connect individuals with housing and services; and

WHEREAS, the Homeless Strategy Office anticipates Phase I to be fully completed by August 2021; and

WHEREAS, the recent Homeless Summit convened a group that included the City of Austin and community partners and resulted in setting a goal to house an additional 3,000 individuals within the next three years; and

WHEREAS, temporary designated campsites could offer health and safety benefits to individuals currently living unsheltered while the City and its partners continue the work of developing additional permanent housing solutions; and

WHEREAS, Texas's Governor established a designated campsite in November 2019 at a Texas Department of Transportation site on SH 183, and the resident-named "Camp Esperanza" now provides basic resources, including restrooms, showers, and security; and

WHEREAS, The Other Ones Foundation now manages Camp Esperanza, and community organizations provide other services to residents; and

WHEREAS, City staff have immersed themselves in national conversations about best practices related to homelessness, including focused sessions on sheltering, outreach, and designated encampments; and

WHEREAS, engaging more thoroughly with the City's new Homeless Strategy Officer, national experts, and possibly with individuals the City has contracted with previously may yield new insights and strategies for creating humane and safe designated campsite options; and

WHEREAS, designated camping areas provide the opportunity to create safer and healthier spaces than most of the current encampments and will help the

City achieve and maintain a more balanced use of public spaces; **NOW, THEREFORE:**

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL:

The City Council remains firmly committed to the goal of working with community partners to end homelessness in Austin by connecting individuals to safe and stable permanent housing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

This Resolution shall not supplant the work of the HEAL initiative to connect individuals in designated encampments with housing and services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager shall report back to Council on best practices related to temporary designated encampments on public land and the other issues described in this section no later than May 14, 2021.

The City Manager shall empower the Homeless Strategy Officer to consult further as necessary with national experts such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Matthew Doherty, Barb Poppe and Associates, or other consultants to gain additional strategies and information related to temporary designated campsites.

The City Manager shall present Council with a description of and budget for appropriate relocation services and infrastructure at designated encampments, such as lighting, water, restrooms, showers, storage, mail, laundry services, and security. The City Manager shall also provide Council with criteria for identifying possible locations in all city council districts for campsites, as well as parking sites for people living in cars, and a suggested process for convening public and Council

conversations related to possible designated campsite locations. The City Manager shall name any sites he believes may meet the specified criteria; ultimately, the City Manager shall provide possible options for at least ten locations, one in each Council District, across the City for Council and community consideration.

The City Manager shall post items for Council action as soon as feasible.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

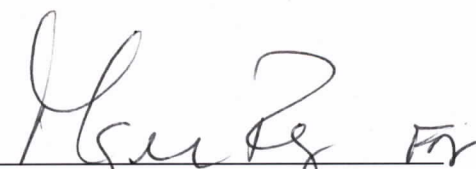
No later than June 1, 2021, the City Manager shall present Council with a proposed schedule, estimated total costs, financial resources, and possible community partners and regional governmental entities who could share expenses and potentially provide services necessary to implement at multiple temporary designated campgrounds around the city. To the greatest extent possible, the City Manager is directed to assess all other funding sources for these investments prior to assessing funding earmarked for investments relating to affordable housing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is also directed to identify publicly-owned land or land within the city limits owned by other intergovernmental entities or willing community partners that could accommodate tiny home structures to serve as temporary housing. The City Manager shall also provide estimated costs for individual units and supportive infrastructure. The City Manager shall provide this information to Council no later than July 1, 2021.

ADOPTED: May 6, 2021

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk