TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Joseph Chacon, Austin Police Department Chief
Denise Lucas, Development Services Director

DATE: October 5, 2021

SUBJECT: Safer 6th Street Initiative (Resolution No. 20210729-175)

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on action items related to the Safer 6th Street resolution.

Background
Council Resolution No. 20210729-175 established City Council support for implementing a more comprehensive strategy toward 6th Street that maximizes its assets, embraces new opportunities, and ensures a safer environment for all, and establishes that the strategy needs to be multi-faceted and build on previous stakeholder processes and consultant reports. The resolution outlined several immediate actions be implemented by August 30, 2021 and additional actions by September 30, 2021.

Below is a preliminary update on the action items.

Update on Action Items

- **Action #1:** Create an interdepartmental team led by the Entertainment Services Group and with representation from – at a minimum – the Austin Police Department, Austin Transportation Department, Austin Energy (AE), Austin Fire Department, Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Austin Code, and the Historic Preservation Office

  Update: The interdepartmental team was created and held their kick-off meeting on August 16, 2021 and continues to meet to carry out the action items in the resolution.

- **Action #2:** Use temporary lighting and upgrade existing lighting if necessary to provide dramatically brighter spaces along the 6th Street corridor.

  Update: The interdepartmental team identified locations that need additional lighting as well as priority areas for lighting. For context, 6th St has decorative light poles, and north-south side streets and alleys have traditional street light poles. The decorative poles on 6th St had previously been upgraded to LED and optimized. The locations identified by the team so far for additional lighting are north-south side streets and alleys. Austin Energy crews went through the 6th St District to assess and perform maintenance on the existing traditional street lighting poles. Within the district crews replaced all of the old style high pressure sodium fixtures with LED. In all AE replaced 64 heads of which approximately 10% were not working.

Next Steps:

- Conduct a lighting study to assess if there are gaps in the street light network in the district. Requests for new street light poles to fill any identified gaps will require funding and need to be added to Austin Energy's priority list for installs.
- Street light poles in the alleys are limited. There is very little room in the alleys for poles, existing poles typically get removed for new construction that extends to the lot line, and Austin Energy is not installing new poles in the alleys. The team is going to contact property owners to encourage the installation of lighting from their buildings facing the alley. The team will follow up on this item in October and will consider additional recommendations related to encouraging and incentivizing property owners to install alley facing lighting.
- The team believes that best solution for lighting of high-volume pedestrian areas may be lighting specifically designed for pedestrians rather than the street light network. The team will follow up on this item in October and will consider additional recommendations related to pedestrian lighting solutions.

- **Action #3:** Explore and pilot options such as café seating, water barriers, and other "pop up" efforts for temporarily dedicating wider walkways for patrons to move between establishments and eliminating the space where people gather during the weekend closures by using the street for other purposes

  Update: The interdepartmental team has continued to evaluate how much space is needed for crowds to move around safely during the peak hours of 11pm-2:30am on a block-by-block basis and exploring pilot options for café seating, water barriers and other "pop up" efforts. The team is also continuing to engage with business and property owners in the district to identify locations where there is a desire for café seating and other pop-up efforts, and also to get feedback on options for pilots and the pros and cons of each from their perspective. The team needs additional time to finish the evaluation and stakeholder outreach process in the first half of October and develop a plan and timeline for implementing feasible pilot programs in the Fall.

- **Action #4:** Determine the extent to which earlier assertions about underage presence on 6th Street and underage drinking remain true today

  Update: APD has confirmed that the earlier assertions about underage presence in 6th Street and underage drinking remains true today.

- **Action#5:** Briefly list which recommendations noted in the July 17, 2015, staff memo, "Response to Resolution No. 20140925-081 – Downtown Entertainment Districts" and from the two consultant reports have been implemented

  Update: A brief list of recommendations that have been implemented is attached.

- **Action #6:** Engage with peer cities to identify best practices in entertainment district planning and management and provide additional recommendations to Council based on that research

  Update: The interdepartmental team has engaged with peer cities including Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Orlando, Las Vegas, Arlington, VA and Sydney, Australia. These engagement efforts will continue in October and relevant recommendations will be included in the staff report to Council by October 30, 2021.

- **Action #7:** Explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated EMS presence during weekend nights with personnel using specialized vehicles for rapid response, treatment, and extrication

  Update: Planning is already underway by APD, AFD and EMS to create a dedicated presence and staging area on 6th Street, which will also be the command post for a Rescue Task Force. This strategy will allow EMS and Fire medics, accompanied by APD officers to enter areas that are not completely secured to get to, treat and extricate patients faster.

- **Action #8:** Suggest a process and program for entertainment licenses that includes safety training for staff and increased coordination and communication with public safety officers

  Update: The interdepartmental team has conducted research on other cities and jurisdictions and is discussing and evaluating options for an entertainment license. The team is also engaging with business owners in the district get feedback on options and pros and cons of each from their perspective. The team needs additional time to finish the evaluation and stakeholder outreach process in the first half of October and develop a recommendation for an entertainment license.

- **Action #9:** Coordinate with the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission (TABC) on additional strategies for curbing underage drinking and potentially limiting the presence of underage Austinites on Sixth Street during weekend evenings

  Update: TABC conducted an operation on Sept 2, 2021 to target underage drinkers and fake IDs. Moving forward, TABC and APD will be jointly conducting operations and initiatives.

Staff continues collaborating to address the elements outlined in this resolution and looks forward to providing updates on progress. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Brian Block, Entertainment Services Manager, at 512-974-7966, Brian.Block@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
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José Roig, Austin Code Director
Rob Spillar, Austin Transportation Department Director
Jacqueline Sargent, Austin Energy General Manager
Rosie Truelove, Housing and Planning Department Director

Attachment

Staff Response to Resolution No 20140925-081 – Downtown Entertainment Districts
Update on Recommendations Implemented

- **Recommendation #1:** Create an entertainment license to support consistent enforcement of the sound ordinance, safety and security provisions
    - **Update:** Not previously implemented. Underway now as part of the Safer 6th St resolution.

- **Recommendation #2:** Make information about conditional use permits and conditions of sound permits readily available to enforcement staff, such as through the use of Quick Response (QR) Codes
    - **Update:** Information on the conditions of sound permits is available in AMANDA, Teams and via an online web map for easy access by enforcement staff

- **Recommendation #3:** Expand Public Assembly Code Enforcement (PACE) enforcement authority
    - **Update:** Not previously implemented

- **Recommendation #4:** Identify the lead for the City's efforts to preserve or enhance the nightlife economy while ensuring a safe and vibrant environment
    - **Update:** The Music & Entertainment Division of the Economic Development Department formerly included the staff identified as the subject matter expert for this topic. The department assigned these staff to the newly created Entertainment Services Group in 2017 which was moved to the Development Services Department in 2021 for better alignment.

- **Recommendation #5:** Determine cost and timeline for improved street lighting
    - **Update:** The older streetlights (estimated to be about 54 lights) on 6th Street from IH 35 to Congress Ave were changed to LED early 2015. Materials for the new light head and a Remote Operations and Asset Management (ROAM) module cost about $1,700. With labor it totaled about $2,000 each installed, so approximately a $108K expenditure to replace the lights to LED and to add ROAM nodes in 2015. The ROAM nodes allow Austin Energy to control, dim, and monitor the lights.
    - The lights are operated at normal streetlighting levels (as defined by the American National Standards Institute/Illuminating Engineering Society's "Recommended Practice for Lighting Roadways.") The normal level equates to 250 watts. In coordination with APD, the output is increased to the maximum capability, 400 watts, between the hours of 1 AM to 3 AM to provide additional lighting for patrons leaving the area when the bars close.

- **Recommendation #6:** Activate closed streets on weekends for performance artists and mobile food vendors
    - **Update:** Street performance is allowed without a permit and mobile food vending is allowed and currently takes place on 6th Street through the City's mobile food vending permit process. No dedicated program or pilot has been implemented to curate these activities.

- **Recommendation #7:** Open City garages for nighttime use
    - **Update:** The Affordable Parking Program is a City of Austin and Downtown Austin Alliance initiative aimed at reducing economic barriers for Austin community members to access downtown. Austin service and entertainment industry employees who work downtown can access park options at affordable monthly rates as early as 3 p.m. and stay as late as 7 a.m. during the week, and park up to 24 hours during the weekend, depending on the garage. More than two dozen City, State and private garages are open at night for this program
      View an interactive map of Affordable Parking Program garages.