

State of the City Address Transcript – 08/25/2022

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[00:00:01]

Good evening.

and i am so pleased to welcome you to mayor adler's last state of the city address.

my name is lesley varghese.

i have had the honor of serving as chief of staff to the most progressive mayor in the state of texas and the hardest working mayor in america for the last seven and a half years.

i see a lot of our present and former team adler staff here.

and on behalf of these remarkable human beings, the mayor himself, we're so glad to have you here tonight.

you know, people sometimes ask me how i survive for seven and a half years, the hardest working in america part.

and i would say there's always been something familiar about him.

you know, we're both trained as lawyers.

we actually clerked at the same law firm, even under the same partner, but also even though mayor adler is jewish, he operates on indian standard time.

he is always 15 minutes late.

in fact, i was so sure he'd be 15 minutes late right now we have prepared a 15 minute video for you as a thank you to him for his tenure.

um, you know, everyone in this room knows how much steve adler loves austin and mayor.

we love you back you.

the video austin is like no place on earth.

it's this magical place where creative, bright, caring people will lead with their values.

everything that we looked at the office had a lens of is this inclusive.

um, will it bring austinites together? We've been blessed that austin's always been a welcoming city over the last eight years.

austin has become the third largest per capita city of lgbt community.

it just goes to show you that we're doing what's right by the lgbt community.

previous mayor helped some, but not to the extent that may add the dead.

and what may atlas did is brought all the community together and, um, bring us all of us to the table and start to work together to accomplish the city goal that the city could be.

the mayor needs to be the chief defender of our values, the chief defender of our city, uh, from the cynical and relentless attacks by other levels of government by, uh, the most, uh, yes.

they remove it.

examined.

they

[00:15:01]

in a ccb and access.

so, uh, the i say you got, let kb but then they stay in uh say it persona but uh, i say , forever.

the parks and trails, uh, that have been created in the last eight years are forever parks and trails.

my children and their children can have that open space.

and that is something that distinguishes austin from, i think, many, many places, the more cities

[00:20:01]

Like austin and our peers across the state make investments in renewable energies, um, that have been championed by our city leaders, including the mayor.

and we really get to help set the tone for the investments and the, uh, level of new, exciting breakthroughs and renewable energy that we make as a state.

how would i describe project connect? I think a unifying tool that would really, again, usher a new era of mobility for our city is not just about cars, but it's about walkability and about active mobility.

we have made significant progress, enhancing safety and mobility of our infrastructure with the implementation of these projects, you know, will have significant impact on safety and mobility, but we'll also help connect communities, uh, provide multimodal transportation solutions and help address our affordability issue.

the austinites of tomorrow and their children will look back at the choices made as to whether or not austin wanted to remain a car centric, congested city, uh, that was continually sprawling outward.

austinites have made a choice to go a different way to move into a 21st century city where we get around without cars, where we have trains and buses, where we have e-bikes riding and on street protected bicycle facilities, where you can get anywhere in the city, uh, and just 15 or 20 minutes without having to get in a car.

one of the things that's been important for me as a faith leader in our city is that there are a number of people that i speak for and who trust me to be able to give their input to those in leadership.

and so mayor adler has made it a great opportunity for me to be able to share what's happening, not just with our congregation, but with the people of east austin and various other communities that i'm able to associate with.

and so i think it's a good thing that he's done as a role model for the rest of the leaders in the city.

i think the city will change for the future for the better because of the work of mayor adler.

and one of the things that i want to point to is the emphasis on systemic racism and the task force that he convened to bring together advocates, business, community, community leaders, to have a real discussion about what it means to break down systems and structures that have historically and intentionally discriminated against people, particularly black people, well working with mayor adler and his and his team, we've been able to do some, some really good things.

we've been able to have policies that band choke holds, which is something that we were able to do that before a federal administration was, we were able to, um, decriminalize marijuana here in the city of austin, uh, which was also before a lot of other places were doing it.

i think we're in a unique position to have a real strong impact on people's thinking and, uh, how they prioritize racial equity in their work, whether it be the business, whether it be education, whether it be government that we're comfortable and, uh, courageous enough to have the conversation without feeling embarrassed without having to question ourselves our second guest or feel defensive.

i really admired that about his leadership is that it's been centered around how do we make austin a place for everyone, people who have historically built and made the city what it is and people who are coming into the city to take us into our future.

uh, the very first canary in the coal mine was of course, south by southwest.

um, i remember walking into the office and on lots of days you walk in and you have a really tough decision to make.

and that day we had one of the toughest decisions i think we would ever have to make, which was to close the festival that synonymous with the city, uh, to close the festival that many people depended on for their income, uh, for lots of small businesses.

this was the event.

some of them waited for all year, uh, to make money on their inventory and to close.

it was no small question.

i remember the meetings talking about the messaging opportunity is trying to understand what we could about what protections we had available.

um, and at that time there was limited ppe.

there wasn't a way to reliably and responsibly contact trace.

and in that moment, it was clear that there was only one thing to do.

and it was a really, really hard thing to do.

what we saw over the last two years is, uh, government non-profits community groups coming together in ways that haven't always been possible in the past and, uh, incredible working, uh, together, uh, and synergy to achieve much

[00:25:01]

Better outcomes for our population here in austin, travis county, if the rest of the state of texas had the same covid 19 death rate, as in austin, travis county, over 50% of the texans who died of covid-19 would still be alive today.

if we had had south by southwest that year, we would have had a tragedy on our hands that, that we avoided.

it did mean that we had two years of a devastated music economy with empty venues festivals.

that didn't happen.

we worked on a \$12 million bond that the citizens passed.

we got an annual of a stream of funding for the music department.

for the first time time, there's been over 17 million in disaster relief funding.

there's been a live music fund, cultural land trust, and a lot of zoning changes that are really shows and front and center that austin is the live music capital world in a leader, in the space for music cities in this country.

i'm glad that we finally have a city partnership in place where people not only listen, but can implement and design, uh, programs that will help us, uh, evolve and continue 10, 20, 30 years from now a music story in austin that's successful competitive.

um, even if we have a lot of hard work between now and then in austin, texas in this area, we have the ability to set the example that every young person has the opportunity, and this is workforce development, but i think it's even bigger than that.

it's this ideal that you can make a living and a life doing what you love to do.

the key thing we've got to keep moving forward on is the idea that we got to provide a way for every young person in austin.

if they want to stay here to make it, the city funding per young child in our community is increased by more than \$84.

we have significantly advanced the goals of the austin, travis county success by six strategic plan, increasing access to high quality early care and education programs for all of our communities, young children and improving coordination to services.

i know that mayor adler's term is up and i'm really going to miss him in that leadership role.

i appreciate him.

i thank him for his tenure as mayor for the support that he's given to not just mount zion, the faith community, but also to me as a person, mayor adler, thank you so much for your service to the city.

thank you for giving your time, your energy, your knowledge, and so much, uh, to serving the residents of austin.

when you're done with this, you catch up on the arrest, text me, let's go grab a drink and see some great music.

mayor.

steve deeply appreciate all the work i'm in serious consideration.

you've given to our music community by thank you for your service to the city.

thank you for your leadership mayor adler.

we are so grateful that we've been able to stand with you through these last eight years.

we faced incredible challenges together and you and the austin city council have had our backs.

i it's been a great pleasure getting to work alongside you over the last two years.

and more importantly, getting to know you over the past eight years, thank you for everything you've done for our community.

uh, we in the city of austin appreciate all your hard work and we wish you all the best for the future.

and now without further ado to mayor steve adler, so good evening, we can get the sound right.

you know, it is, it is such an an honor and a privilege to stand before you as, as your mayor.

and by now you probably know me well enough to know that i never use one word when i can use 10, but, but

[00:30:01]

I do have one really short and simple message for you today.

and it's thank you.

thank you to the ten one city councils.

my partners, my colleagues, my friends, these last eight years.

um, i, my mayor pro tem, my old mayor pro tem, my old bayer pro tem and, and, and, and the council.

i also understand that, uh, some of my old colleagues are, are with us here today.

uh, county attorney, uh, garcia is here and council member cosar, uh, council member gallo, i think are all with us today.

thank you.

um, also have other public officials that i want to thank for being here.

uh, state representative say israel, i understand is with us today, county judge, uh, andy brown, uh, our tax assessor collector and our voter registrar, bruce l font, uh, i think is with us.

you know, government has really worked, uh, together in ways over the last eight years, uh, that, uh, to my experience have been unprecedented.

i want to really thank the, the, the city employees and the city staff and, and its leadership.

you're a resourcefulness.

your dedication, uh, have impressed me since the moment i began my service.

you do such, such a gift to the city manager, kronk, congratulations on the expanded family.

and, uh, i want you to know, uh, how much it means to me that you would hurry back home to, to be here today.

uh, thank you to the many community advocates and organizations whose expertise and energy made our ideas, sharper our policies more.

just some of you are in the room here tonight.

uh, i want to thank my staff at city hall over the last day of years, without whom i would just be another guy with a lot of crazy ideas.

uh, i will miss all of you.

and i really mean that.

thank you to my family.

uh, especially my wife, diane, um, you know, she's been with me every step of the way, and she is my partner in this job, uh, as with all things that we do in ways that, uh, phew understand, uh, and thank you to the people of austin, uh, to everybody who came to a town hall meeting or to, uh, make their voices heard to everyone who voted to everyone who loves the city enough to give something of themselves to make it better.

thank, you know, austin holds itself to a pretty, pretty high standards.

and i didn't recognize another one of my colleagues, another mayor pro tem, cheryl cole.

and i want to make sure i do that, or i forget who's also with us.

thank you, uh, representative.

but anyhow, austin holds us up to pretty high standards and, and, and, and actually we're not really comfortable celebrating our successes while we still know that there are austinites that are struggling, but tonight we're going to heed the advice of horner of our own, the great, the great molly ivan's who reminded us to fight for freedom, fight for justice, but have fun doing it to, to rejoice.

she sat.

and so we should, because the state of our city is one that we should be proud of in 2015, when the new ten one council and i were first elected, there were some city employees and contractors working for the city that were making as little as \$7 and twenty-five cents an hour.

there was no mass public transit insight.

affordable housing investment was modest.

and we were building to a four year backlog and untested dna rape kits with talk to far too many survivors waiting for delayed justice.

we had unsheltered neighbors living perilously in our creeks and in our storm drains, we had no comprehensive plan to address workforce opportunities in our region and meaningful and constructive police reform.

wasn't untouchable issue, arising

[00:35:02]

National extremist politics was increasingly threatening our local values.

now it is true that much remains to realize the work that we have begun over the last eight years.

but for tonight, for tonight, we're going to pause and celebrate where we are and what we have achieved and how we got here and where we're going to go.

because the state of our city, as against almost every metric used to compare cities is exceptionally strong.

austin is among the top big cities to live in, in the country.

it remains one of the safest in the country.

we are one of the healthiest.

we ranked number one in wage growth.

we are number two in job growth.

austin has one of the lowest unemployment rates among large cities in the country.

the city budget we just passed is not only balanced, but it projects a surplus budget for the next four years.

we are the best big city for job seekers.

it is the best place for entrepreneurs to large new startups.

and since it's not all business all the time, we are in the top 10 of the most fun cities to live in.

and we are the most fun city to live in in texas and of course, we are still the best city in the country for live music.

and we are the reigning live music capital of the world.

this is our city, as it stands today, the state of our city is worth celebrating.

you know, one of my favorite memories in my first years in office was going to gus garcia, young men's leadership academy for the annual tie ceremony.

now, mayor garcia was austin's first latino mayor.

he was a great austin knight.

he was my mentor, and he was a champion of equity, especially in education.

the school that bears his name continues his tradition of leadership.

every year, the older eighth graders help the first year, middle schoolers tie.

what for some of them is the first tie they have ever owned.

it's a symbol of the students bond with each other.

i was supposed to help the younger students tie their ties, but i discovered pretty quickly that i was, i was unnecessary the eighth graders, they had a covered.

in fact, the new sixth graders proudly helped me tie my tie, this very gold tie.

i have, i have two grandchildren and there are two more on the way, a greater source of pride and joy than i could ever imagine.

a greater even than being mayor of the city that i love the young students at gus garcia like mine, like all our children, like all our grandchildren will inherit austin years from now.

and they will inherit the decisions that we make and the culture and expectations that we set.

and we have made hard choices.

these last eight years choices that have disrupted our lives.

they have disrupted disrupted the status quo.

they have made tempers flare, and occasionally they have set us against each other.

we did that.

not because we, we seek conflict, it's easier and it is less disruptive to only try for incremental change sometimes to settle for half measures or even to kick a problem down the road entirely.

every city in america has examples of this of hard choices, deferred and deferred.

again, until the hard choices become impossible.

i am so proud and grateful that on one difficult problem after another, the buck has stopped with us, but ten one council has stood resolute and taken action supported by the community, including

[00:40:01]

On some of the most difficult challenges.

our city faces mobility, social equity and justice, housing, and homelessness.

we have pursued these priorities despite the disruption and the political havoc that follows even while we were facing other decisions great and small and hard and easy that will shape austin for generations, even while managing and overcoming an unprecedented succession of unique disasters and hardships presented these past eight years, there is no statistic or metric, however, stellar that can capture the story of these past eight years.

it is a story of big plans and hard decisions that make them possible in 2014, that election cycle, when the ten one council and i were first running for office, the dominant issue was mobility.

and today eight years later, we live in austin's golden age of mobility.

our city is finally moving forward with a comprehensive public mass transit system project connect a very long project, a long-term project.

it's already underway neighborhood circulators in operation, the pleasant valley and expo center.

and, uh, the, the bus rapid transit lines at mcalla station are already under construction.

the blue and orange light rail lines are inactive planning, \$100 million in any of this placement funding.

a third of the 10, 12 year total has already been raised and turned over to the city, which has programmed already \$20 million of those funding program to buy up land near transit centers and corridors for future affordable housing.

we have a, we have a \$4 billion project to double the size of armed austin bergstrom airport.

it's underway with the first \$400 million already being spent.

as we speak, we've begun work to transform.

a six to \$9 billion project that includes sinking and capping the main lanes.

today.

we have over 400 miles of newly built or repaired sidewalks and safe routes to school.

our bicycle network is expanding faster than any bicycle network in the country.

and by 2025, we will have completed one of the largest bicycle networks in the country throughout the city.

our major corridors are safer.

they are faster, and they are being transformed for 21st century travel.

you know, it was the, it was the architect, uh, david burnham, uh, in his lifetime, a man who shaped american cities more than probably anybody else who had managed us to make no little plans for, they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will themselves not be realized.

and we have in the past made big plans for mobility.

in the 40 years before the ten one city council was elected.

there were five mobility projects that really stand out to me.

our airport moved research and ben white boulevard became highway 71 and 180 3 and s h one 30 was built to the east and mopac was built to the south.

that's a pretty good pace for a small city.

and it's fair to say that until recently, we have sometimes been guilty of acting as if austin were still the smallest city that it has not been for a long time.

that era has passed and austin has put away childish thing.

a great city must make bigger plans, start them faster and do more of them.

and over the past eight years, we have done just that.

austin did those first five mobility projects over a 40 year period.

and we're doing five in the last eight in the same year that the ten one council and i were first running for office.

the people of austin were voting down a public mass transit

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Mobility project for the second time in 15 years.

now, our charge was not to persuade people of austin at the big plan was necessary.

it was to demonstrate that we properly understood, understood the scale that was needed and to restore confidence that we could solve it at all to present to austin a plan that was worthy of a great city to change our destiny by disrupting the status quo, our guiding light has been the austin strategic mobility plan was adopted three years ago, after a lot of work by a lot of people, it was the city's first multimodal integrated and comprehensive plan for transportation.

this visionary plan is foundational to our goal of a long time, sustainable change and disruption, and seeing transportation, not as an exercise in moving cars, but as a commitment to moving people, we want, we went to the people of the city and we asked them to make big plans with us to face the hard decisions that come with them.

and our city did.

and over the last eight years, the people of austin have approved not one but four separate mobility initiatives in 2016, 2018 and two in 2020 raising revenues in excess of \$10 billion.

now this in a city that had passed only a little bit more than half a billion dollars cumulatively in the proceeding 20 years, these initiatives combined with other city county state and federal funds have enabled us as of today to have started work on over \$20 billion in projects.

that is an historic investment in tie our city together, what we do now and where we have gotten today, sets the trajectory for where we will be tomorrow.

our current path leads us to a city where owning a car, which is currently the second highest financial burden for austin.

families is optional.

hundreds of thousands of austinites are going cross the city cheaply and cleanly and quickly without a car, thanks to a world-class light rail system, supported by expanded bus routes and service.

the homes and businesses of people who have lived in austin for decades are going to stand side by side with, with new enterprises and performance venues and public spaces on, as some of our most important community hubs are our light rail stations.

our global city will connect to the world through a new airport that is as large as our dreams and ambitions.

we will walk and bike.

we will eat, we will shop.

we will, we will come together in public spaces that stand on top of a relic of deliberate segregation above a sunken and 30 .

austin will be the most walkable city in texas with over 4,000 miles of sidewalks.

our bicycle network will be one of the largest in the country and on par with new york city, because of the hard decisions that we have made our children and grandchildren will inherit a city that is bound together with new sinews of, of rail and road and trail.

that is a clear sign of austin strength and unity because our transportation system is a visible commitment to the idea that austin is more than just a collection of distant and disparate neighborhoods.

we are more than just the sum of our parts.

mobility is austin's commitment to being a city.

now united nudity in a city is about more than the infrastructure that ties it all together.

it is about it's about shared culture, a serious sense of spirit of community.

[00:50:01]

Austin has had in my nearly five decades, living here a powerful sense of, of its obligation and responsibility to social equity and to justice.

in the past eight years, we have defended, we have preserved that spirit and to an ever increasing degree, we have delivered that justice to those for whom it has too long been denied today.

austin centers, equity and almost everything we do.

and almost every decision that we make to an extent that i believe is unmatched by any other city in the country.

our city has committed \$300 million to mitigate this placement, to promote affordability as a specific line item and project connect.

and that is a scale unheard of in a public mass transit project.

we have doubled the city's investment in public health.

we have committed to paid sick leave.

austin guarantees, fair chance hiring to help formerly incarcerated incarcerated people restart their lives.

we're piloting guaranteed income to find a more efficient just, and cost-effective way to help keep families in their homes.

our city prosecutes, neither truancy nor the personal use of marijuana, both of which have been used historically to disproportionately incarcerate and bring communities of color into the justice system.

we have helped cut the number of people held in the travis county jail by 40%.

we have done as much or more than any city in the country to re-imagine the concept of public safety, not just to talk about it and to change the culture of our police force.

we have enacted new ways of training, police, cadets, including community engagement and anti-racism training.

we have changed the rules guiding when and where and how police use force.

we have increased funding and training for mental health related 9 1, 1 calls eight years ago, about 30% of our general fund budget was devoted to building our city, but spending on social services and public health and parks and our quality of life today, it is almost 40% and it's growing.

and we have done this while still just passing the largest police department budget in the history of the city.

our city leads among cities that honor and support the rights of our lgbtq plus residents.

and austin is to the best of our ability.

it will continue to be a place that is safe for transgender children in their home.

austinites will not face investigation and prosecution.

if they choose to exercise their long held right to an abortion.

these measures are emblematic of our city's belief in the, in the dignity and worth of every austinite.

but belief is only as good as the action that backs it up.

when the ten one council took its seats on the days, our city lacked the kind of infrastructure to ensure the equity and the justice and that they were at the heart of everything that our government does in our office.

this work truly began with the spirit of east austin community conversation.

this was an exploration of equity that empowered hundreds of east austin residents to tell us in their own words, what their dreams and ideas were.

we asked all of austin then to turn and face eastward and to listen.

phew, remember that it was then that the term eastern crescent actually entered austin's popular lexicon, additional focus to a long neglected part of our city.

now we experienced progress both here at city hall and our community coming out of the mayor's task force on institutional racism and systemic inequities,

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Working with partners and advocates to ensure that city decisions confront and change rather than ignore and perpetuate the inequities of the past.

that task force made about 270 recommendations to approve, to improve racial equity in austin.

more than half of which have already been implemented.

thousands of austinites have attended to day race training equity and race training sessions because of the expectation created by the task force and leadership austin's leadership.

these were not simple decisions or easy conversations.

these were people.

there were people who refuse to participate in the task force simply because of the use of the word racism in its name.

now it can be very hard to accept the extent to which institutional racism, worms its way into so many facets, not just of our country or of our city, but our neighborhood and our lives.

this is a us especially true around policing where the conversation turns to how people feel safe when and where they feel safe and who gets to feel safe communities across the country have torn themselves over this issue.

no wonder so many cities avoid this conversation and the undeniable decisions that will follow entering that conversation.

the being an equitable city is not something you achieve.

it is something that you decide every day.

that is why we founded the equity office in the city of austin.

it's a permanent team to ensure that equity is integrated into every decision that we make in our city government.

it is why we started the lgbtq quality of life commission, this civil rights office, the office of police oversight and why we began there were meet the reimagining public safety project.

the progress we have made in better realizing true public safety is a credit to this city, to the activists who stood their ground and to the police leadership and officers who buy into the vision of the apd that works in partnership with the people of our city, where officers see themselves as guardians, not warriors, whose presence reassures everyone in the city, that they are safe.

i cannot claim that austin today has overcome the, the often inequities legacy of our past.

that obviously is the work of generations.

but i believe we can say with honesty that when america reached yet another critical moment in its long reckoning, with our original sin of white supremacy, that austin was not found wanting that, even though we knew that opponents of this reckoning, some with pretty big megaphones would seize on our efforts and cynically ms. Characterize them for their own political ends.

we nonetheless faced the challenge for no reason other than it was necessary.

it was right, and it was long overdue.

okay.

so austin often has been at odds with the leaders of our state and sometime with the president of our country.

but these are not fights that we have sought.

no one with a city to build would choose to spend focus and spirit on hard, exhausting and needless political battles.

but as elected leaders of this great city, we are not free to turn away from those fights either because to do so would yield the field.

we are not free to turn away from those fights because it would betray the character of the good and decent

[01:00:01]

People who entrusted us with these offices.

when donald trump ordered raids to round up undocumented immigrants and expected cities to comply, we resisted in staff.

we fought lawsuits.

i went to washington and argued directly with the attorney general in his office about the administration's overreach.

we stood with our friends and the mexican consulate to provide support and assistance to the people.

the president, the former president wanted to persecute.

there are not many cities like austin in the country that spend public money on legal aid to ensure that fairness and due process and the rule of law still have meaning for all residents, regardless of their immigration status and while it is easy and tempting to pass the buck and say that these are statewide or national issues, they are not, they are local.

they are about the fear on our neighbor's faces when they, when their mosque is vandalized, or there's a knock at their door in the middle of the night.

and they wonder if they're going to be taken away from their families.

that was the point of the ice rates.

that was the point of the muslim travel ban.

it is the point of the persecution of transgender people.

it is the point of trying to call back the right to abortion.

it is the point of everyone in that litany of outrageous against good conscience and common decency.

the point is to make people afraid, to make them wonder if their, if their community is going to turn against them, to throw into doubt whether their neighbors truly recognize the full measure of their humanity and when our state or indeed our country has threatened the rights and dignity of our fellow austinians, we have made it clear, and i will take this opportunity to say it again, that this is, and will forever be a just and fair city where all are welcome.

for each of us in our time are the trustees of austin spirit and soul.

and just as we have done, we challenge the generations who come after us to leave austin and even more equitable, even more welcoming, more, just a more worthy place than it was when they found it over the last eight years, i have had too many occasions to say, and it will still be true with our children and grandchildren inherit this city, probably no legislature, and no election can change who we are.

the world completely lose its mind around us.

and we are still going to be austin, texas.

i said earlier that austin holds itself to a really high standard that we struggled to celebrate all that is great about it.

when we know that our city is in some way, failing to live up to our collective vision of what we should really be that aspiration and that ambition for austin and each other, especially when realizing our better selves requires fundamental change, makes our disagreements all the more fiery and fraught.

nowhere have we seen this more than in providing for the fundamental human need for, for finding a place to call home.

austin is in the middle of a housing supply and housing affordability crisis.

this is an existential challenge.

we are losing neighbors who can no longer afford to live here with their loss.

we lose diversity.

that is our biggest asset, our people, and there is much work to be done.

this challenge looms large, and the city is fighting back.

austin is poised to become the first major city in america to end homelessness, thanks to the continuing eel initiative.

we have already moved hundreds

[01:05:01]

Of people without homes out of tents and off the streets today, a veteran who loses their home in austin has a stable housing and services in less than 90 days, we have reduced the number of children without homes and on our streets by more than half.

and perhaps most critically, we have raised well more than 80% of the \$515 million that are needed to fund the, the community driven, finding home atx three-year plan to get 3000 more people into shelter and off our streets.

this project, the work of a remarkable and broad coalition puts austin on the pathway to ending homelessness for good.

and by the way, you can help finding home atx.org.

we have quadrupled our investment in affordable housing units in this city since just 2014.

and we have invested more in the last six years than in the entire city's history up to that point in time.

and it's still not enough.

last year, austin built more housing than any city in the country, both in absolute numbers and numbers adjusted by population.

it's not a secret that when we, that we in austin have not always seen eye to eye on how to help our fellow residents who live without shelter.

homelessness is not a recent creation.

this was an issue that was, that was tearing up neighborhood associations and, and setting austinites against each other for years.

it's not a problem that lends itself to quick solutions.

in fact, in the modern history of american cities, homelessness is the issue that is most often pushed out of sight and out of mind, and that was us, but there are also enough cities on the west coast that teach.

if homelessness is left unaddressed, thousands of people become 10 thousands of people, a difficult problem becomes unimaginable, and that was going to be us.

i knew as sure as i knew the sun would come up the next day, that if we did not act in bold and unprecedented ways, it would take us maybe six more years to be facing a spiraling crisis that would exceed the available will and resources that we could possibly muster to address it.

so we chose ins that to face the challenge and to make the hard decisions, the debate in this city over public camping brought out strong words, motivated by strong feelings, decriminalize, public camping change.

the way that we thought about homelessness, it could have quite literally changed the way that we saw it.

this was of course, incredibly disruptive.

now we could have, and we should have done a better job in, in managing shared public spaces and our failure to do so caused levels of anxiety and acrimony that that could have been avoided to some degree, but the decision not to put people in jail or to hide them in the woods, simply for not having a place to live was going to be fundamentally disruptive regardless.

and without that disruption, we would never have come together to agree on a common solution.

we would never have raised the funds we are raising now to get the job done.

we would never have been as we are today, the first american city, our size that is poised to end homelessness.

oh, homelessness is just one aspect of our city's larger housing challenge.

we talk a lot about affordability in this city and indeed in this country and housing is at the heart of it.

we ultimately have a simple problem.

we have too many buyers for too few homes

[01:10:01]

Where people want to live.

our current land development code does not allow us to maximize the needed housing supply in the city.

in the six years, the six disruptive years of code next, the city council twice voted to comprehensively change the code.

it was also twice sent back to the drawing board by the courts being willing to make the hard and disruptive choices does not always work out, but you can't give up recognizing the present limitations and the, and the need for a broader consensus.

the current council is active to trade density and supply for greater affordability.

and final ordinances should be passed before the end of the year, because we haven't given up the council just before us also did not give up.

when they followed a failed \$80 million housing bond with a successful \$65 million housing bond, just one year later in 2013.

now we could have learned two lessons from their experience.

we could have concluded that the people of austin did not want to make big investments in housing and their future proposals would need to be more modest in staff.

we concluded that we should not set future investments with a focus on minimizing risk, but determining what the community truly needs to solve, the problem that make, and then make the case strongly and clearly the voters and trust voters to make the right choice.

in 2018, we went to the city and asked, not for \$65 million or \$80 million, but for \$250 million to invest in affordable housing.

and 72% of this city supported that effort.

this november austin voters will have the chance to approve another bond this time for 200, this time for \$350 million to build even more affordable housing to make repairs so that families can stay in their homes.

we are facing an affordability and housing supply crisis, and this bond is appropriate to the scale of the challenge we face, by the way, there are two other bonds coming up for us in november, incidentally, uh, also going to be on the ballot.

both of them address affordability by calling for investments in public education and the community college, even as the city increases our supply of affordable housing education is a, another key to affordability by helping people have more money to spend.

so the austin of the future must keep and care for its people.

when we confront the issues of housing and homelessness, we are deciding who we are.

we're deciding who we will be.

this is about the very spirit and soul of our city.

if so many people want to live in austin, that it becomes impossible for anyone except the rich.

we will not be austin, texas.

if we lose our diversity and our creativity, we will no longer be an austin that creates art and everything that we do.

if the young leaders of gus garcia and all their generation can not afford to live in austin, we won't be an austin to be proud of.

austin ensures its future.

if it honestly confronts its present, now that's not easy because the solutions need to be, need to be as big as the challenges we face.

it w it's hard.

and it requires us to confront base cultural and political differences in our city.

it will be disruptive because it pulls at the threads of our community and encourages us not only to disagree, but to distrust one another's motives.

austin must live up to this challenge because we simply must ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit the city where everyone can not only survive, but thrive.

if we had only as a said, confronted mobility

[01:15:01]

And, and social equity and homelessness and housing, we could justify, we be, be proud of the work that we had done over the last day of years, but we did all three and we did much more besides because as simply a city, won't simply stop to address a few problems. And there have been many others that have demanded our focus and our spirit.

the present state of our city today reflects the broad agenda on which the ten one council was delivered.

it is making good on the promise, the potential, the hopes and the dreams of this new governmental system.

austin continues to be an international leader on climate change mitigation.

we have a 100 year water plan.

78% of our city's energy use is carbon free on a track to beat reach 100% by 2035 electric vehicle charging stations and compost and reach to every corner of this city.

we've cleared a four year backlog of dna rape kits.

we've invested in victim services in a new domestic violence shelter.

we raised the city living wage twice last week, the \$20 an hour, thousands of clean middle-skill manufacturing jobs have been brought here helping to move families out of poverty.

and we have a soccer team.

thank you to the murda.

can we have a stadium tech? We even started a taco award and we won, but we removed the confederate flag from the veterans day parade.

we helped realize the waterloo greenway park, our own highline linear park.

that could be the only thing that people about us 100 years from now.

we cut the ribbon on a new downtown library.

austin's cathedral to our intellectual and cultural traditions.

we have our first ever wildfire preparedness plan we've created and implemented the country's model for preserving workforce housing.

we supported our artists and artistic venues at historic levels.

our city's reputation for innovation is unmatched and all this we have done without city taxes and fees going up more than 2.2% on average over the last eight years, unless you count project connect, but it's still under 3%.

if you do all these things we have done while still developing and executing big plans on mobility, social equity, housing, homelessness, and even more remarkable is that we did these things despite a previously unimaginable sequence of disasters and crises that have come to this city over the last eight years in 2015, we had a record drought and an historic flood.

in 2016, we saw the rise of an extreme and hostile politics that profoundly and perhaps permanently damaged our understanding of our country and each other.

in 2017, we were forced to fight in court, both the governor of texas and the president of the united states.

in 2018, we faced a serial bomber and another a hundred year storm.

in 2019, we faced a water crisis time brought about by, by zebra mussels of all things in 2020, our city and our country and our world stopped for covid.

and that summer became a reckoning for america's sins.

in 2021, we had, we had winter storm uri, and when that passed, we were left to face the enormous political turbulence and disruption of the big lie, a threat to our very democracy.

covid is the disaster that hung over us that hangs over us the longest and that most imperiled our economy and our health.

for two years, we have been isolated our children for a long time.

didn't go to school.

those that were able didn't go to work.

businesses closed some permanently.

our friends and family

[01:20:01]

Got sick all around us.

some of them dying, and we have to spend so much time and resources fighting to keep our community safe.

we fought the governor in court for the right to protect ourselves.

and sometimes it's gotta be sad before each other over how to manage the danger and how to cope with the trauma.

but we endured even with everything else going on, we had a job to do, and we did it.

you know, some things, some things only become clear after the fact.

and some truths can only be seen in the numbers.

we lost people in austin to covid.

each of whom was a person, each of whom was somebody important to somebody else.

it neither disrespects nor diminishes our grief to say that in the midst of that tragedy austinites did something that was truly remarkable.

the rate at which austinites died of covid was half of that in this state as a whole, we amassed up, we washed our hands.

we isolated when we needed to, we got vaccinated, we protect ourselves and we protected each other.

if the rest of the state had protected lives at the same rate, we did 45,000 texans would still be alive today.

yeah.

these crises could have derailed all our other efforts, sapped our focus and our will, but we didn't falter.

we held fast without wavering to the hope that we can pass our eyes on the future.

we want for our city.

and we made the hard and difficult decisions to get there, because this is the austin way.

if we retreat from the progress that we have made, or if we don't confront and own our most serious challenge, if we nibble at problems rather than facing them head on, if we shy away from the

cost and conflict and disruption that attend anything important enough to be worth being done, then we imperil the future that we seek for the sake of that future, we've got to fix the land development code to unlock the needed housing supply.

we must reinvent the development process.

so they built again, austin, no longer costs too much and takes too long.

and if our only choice is to add to the cost, to make it faster or to cut costs, but then it becomes slower.

then we're doing something fundamentally wrong and we need an entirely new and different way.

we need to realize that the south central waterfront, but the palm school district, the colony park neighborhood and the expanded convention center, you know, in this city, we should enact tuition-free community college in service.

in service of enabling every austinite to earn a living wage.

and while we're at it in this city, we should have free and universal childcare making it and historic commitment.

so the competitiveness of our city and the wellbeing of our families, we must do what is necessary for austin, san antonio, to be the next great u s metroplex.

now true.

these are big plans, big goals, kind of plans that would shape the future of the city and everyone who lives in it, some would be disruptive and all of them would be hard, but none of them are bigger.

none of them require harder decisions.

none of them are more disruptive than what we have already done together.

these last eight years, austin is a city that can make big plans that inspire us, that

[01:25:01]

That move our blood.

but this is a choice that cities make.

if the last eight years are remembered for anything, let it be that we confronted our biggest challenges head on without reservation, that we met big problems with big solutions that we made hard decisions that we weren't afraid of disruption.

and we paid the necessary price in focus and spirit and political capital.

we do these things so that our children and grandchildren can inherit a great city with its spirit and its so intact.

i would ask you to remember this in the days ahead, some of you, some of which asks you to believe things that aren't becca, because there are forces abroad.

i want you to remember these things that ad, excuse me, because there are forces abroad in our politics that will ask you to forget what we did and why we did it.

extremism, distressed and misinformation.

some of which asks you to believe things that are not true.

and all of which ask you ultimately not to believe to trivialize the idea that we are even capable of making big plans and hard decisions to forget all that we have accomplished together and to dismiss as nonsense.

what we know as truth, that we are a living community bonded by common dreams and graced with a shared destiny.

if we hold fast to the belief in ourselves, confident that there is no challenge bigger than our imagination, no decision harder than our resolve.

if we believe in austin and each other, we will pass through all of the turmoils we may face and deliver for future generations, the city that they deserve being mayor of this magical place.

the third longest serving mayor in the history of the city, by the way, has been an honor beyond description.

i love this city and i always will.

and while there's more work to be done, i, i, i, i still need, i still there's.

and while there's more work that i still need to get done in january, i will leave this office with a glad heart because i believe that today's austin is a little bit more just, and a little bit more prepared than the city that we inherited.

and this city that we leave to our children and grandchildren is one that they will be proud to call home.

we have done this together in the short time that that we have been its trustees.

i am grateful for the wisdom and kindness and support that you have shared with me these eight years.

and i am humbled by the courage and the grit and the grace and the love that austinites show for their city and for each other.

thank you.

thank you all.

thank you, austin.

* This transcript was created by voice-to-text technology. The transcript has not been edited for errors or omissions, it is for reference only and is not the official minutes of the meeting.