





MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer 

THROUGH: Jason Alexander, Chief of Staff 

DATE: June 10, 2022

SUBJECT: Update on the Climate Equity Plan (Resolution No. 20210930-110)

The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on [Resolution No. 20210930-110](#), which among other things, directed the City Manager to: (1) identify recommendations included in the 2021 Climate Equity Plan that may be brought forward as a midyear budget amendment; (2) identify near term recommendations and strategies that do not require a budget amendment; and (3) bring forward a list of proposed investments that would advance the city's sustainability and climate goals, furthering the implementation of the 2021 Climate Equity Plan.

Beginning in late fall 2021, soon after the adoption of the Climate Equity Plan (Plan) and passage of Resolution 20210930-110, the Office of Sustainability completed a cross-departmental evaluation of resource gaps and needs that, if fulfilled, could support the implementation of the Plan. In February 2022, and based on input received from departments, the Office of Sustainability prepared a set of proposed resources for consideration.

Items for Immediate Implementation

Through this exercise, meaningful resource additions were identified that can be accomplished without a midyear budget amendment and would support continuity of City operations across departments. Working in concert with the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) to address other separate but related needs, a total of four existing long-standing vacant positions were identified and have been reclassified to provide needed staffing support within HSEM. Two of these positions will be dedicated to and directly support the ongoing development of resilience program management and operations, complementing the work of the new Chief Resilience Officer. The repurposing of these vacant positions will also alleviate staffing strain at the Office of Sustainability, which has been leading the City's resilience planning efforts, including resilience hubs. Temporarily rebalancing the work in the Office of Sustainability to address resilience planning priorities was essential at the time, but it did come at a cost of diminished resources and time focused on the Climate Equity Plan. An overarching conclusion reached throughout the climate resource planning work is that the most immediate and impactful way to implement the Plan is to return key staff back to that work.

In addition to the personnel resources noted above, staff identified two other items important to the implementation of the Plan, which can currently be addressed with available funding.

- Funding for enhanced communications and community engagement related to the Plan. Part of this project includes developing a series of videos that would promote the Community Climate Ambassadors Program and assist in promoting other business-focused programs such as Austin Climate Leaders and Austin Green Business Leaders.
- Conducting an HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) Contractor Decarbonization Study. This work would entail hiring a consultant to conduct a local study of HVAC contractors, assessing their current state of policies, practices, and pricing on equipment that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions from existing buildings. The study would be informed by interviews, focus groups, and other research in developing recommended paths forward. This objective would directly contribute to stated goals in the Climate Equity Plan specific to emissions reduction, but research is needed before new programs and possible incentives can be designed or implemented.

Finally, Resolution No. 20210930-110 directed the City Manager to bring forward a list of proposed investments that would advance the City's sustainability and climate goals (Item 3). Departments are continuing their Fiscal Year 2023 budget planning at this time and are providing the Financial Services Department with their respective investments as part of that process.

Staff acknowledges the criticality of this work and are committed to taking necessary steps to ensure this Council priority is successfully implemented. While remaining resources in Fiscal Year 2022 are limited, we are confident the measures described above will directly enable progress in implementing the Plan while ensuring continuous coordination between departments. As we continue to contemplate future budgets and implementation mechanisms for the Plan, these considerations will remain at the forefront.

Please contact me at lucia.athens@austintexas.gov or Jason Alexander, Chief of Staff, at jason.alexander@austintexas.gov should you have additional questions.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager
Ed Van Eenoo, Chief Financial Officer
Kerri Lang, Budget Officer