



## COMMISSION ON AGING

### Comments on Office of the City Auditor Audit Report : City Services for Older Adults-- to Improve Age-Friendliness, City Needs to Measure Progress, Improve Outreach, and Evaluate Resources

Adopted by the Commission on December 14, 2022

The Commission appreciates throughout the review the audit staff met several times with the Chair, Vice Chair, and other commissioners. Overall, the Commission agrees with the findings and recommendations of the Audit which confirm areas of improvement that have also been identified by the commission.

#### **Comments on Recommendations:**

#### **1. Improve measures of progress towards goals and strategies in the Age-Friendly Austin Action Plan:**

- a. Include clear, quantifiable indicators to measure success according to the World Health Organization's best practices for measuring age-friendliness
- b. Clarify and communicate the expectations, roles, and responsibilities for each strategy
- c. Incorporate demographic data to assess if the implementation of goals and strategies is equitable across older adults

The Commission **agrees with these recommendations** and **makes the following additional comments.**

- a. Include clear, quantifiable indicators to measure success according to the World Health Organization's best practices for measuring age-friendliness

When the Commission approved the 2021 Update to the Age Friendly Action Plan (AFAP), we identified that more robust and quantifiable metrics are needed. The Commission had been working with the Age Friendly Program Coordinator to begin developing metrics to better measure success of the plan. In addition to the World Health Organization (WHO), we should look to other Age Friendly Cities, as well as to other City of Austin Programs for best practices in creating metrics. Indeed, the Commission is mindful that departments are required to report on metrics for a variety

of other programs and purposes and hope metrics for the AFAP can, to the extent possible, be aligned for efficiency.

**b. Clarify and communicate the expectations, roles, and responsibilities for each strategy**

Lack of clarity around the expectations, roles and responsibilities for each strategy is also a weakness of the plan. A reason for this is when the Commission first developed the plan, we had very little involvement from city staff. Today with the Age Friendly Coordinator on board and greater awareness of the plan, it is the Commission's hope and expectation that Departments will be more involved in updates to the plan, including in development of goals, strategies, and metrics. The Commission is aware that Departments are required to report on metrics for a variety of other programs and purposes, such as Strategic Direction 2023/2028. Having Departments involved upfront would improve outcomes and streamline the collection and reporting of metrics. The Commission also recommends the City Manager give the Age Friendly Coordinator the authority to recommend which Departments should be responsible for which goals and strategies in the Age Friendly Plan.

**c. Incorporate demographic data to assess if the implementation of goals and strategies is equitable across older adults**

The Commission agrees better data is necessary to improve equity. As a commission we feel we do not have the tools to adequately review the equity of programs and services for older adults. We have little information about gaps and barriers in accessing services for older adults in communities of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, non-English speakers, and those with disabilities, as just a few examples. In 2019 we passed a resolution requesting the City collect more granular demographic data to help us better understand how older adults were, or were not, being served by programs and services in Austin. On behalf of all the Quality of Life commissions the Joint Inclusion Committee has also repeatedly asked the City to collect this demographic data in a standard format that all of our commissions can use to evaluate programs and services.

Travis County is another resource that should be utilized for collecting demographic information. The county has information that can help assess needs as well as the effectiveness of programs. Another tool that will help us understand how well we are serving older adults is the Quality of Life study that is getting underway. This study will provide valuable information on needs across the community, equity and effectiveness of programs and qualitative and quantitative data.

The Commission recommends these improvements be implemented as soon as practicable. The July 15, 2026 implementation date suggested by Austin Public Health is much too long.

**2. The City Manager should ensure that all departments provide services with an age-friendly perspective and that the plan’s goals and strategies are incorporated into how they fulfill their department’s mission.**

The Commission agrees with APH’s suggestion to hold a listen-and-learn session to ensure City departments are familiar with the plan. The Commission also agrees with possibly bringing in outside consultants to provide technical assistance and education to departments. The recommendation to have each Department assign a point of contact for the plan will also help ensure each Department incorporates age-friendly policies in its mission.

However, we do not believe that these activities are sufficient to ensure all departments are invested in the AFAP. A one-time listen and learn session could be seen as a check the box type exercise. Austin is an aging city—age friendly should be incorporated into daily work. The City Manager should empower APH and the Age Friendly Program Coordinator to provide regular trainings and incentives to ensure age-friendly is as part of the Austin culture as sustainability and climate action.

**3. Create, implement, and ensure adoption of centralized guidance to help establish clarity and consistency in how the City communicates with older adults about programs and services, which may include a webpage to serve as a “one-stop” information center.**

Families and caregivers should not be forgotten when considering how to best communicate with older adults. Oftentimes they are the ones who need information to support older adults in their decision-making or to make decisions on their behalf.

One of the most frequent complaints commissioners hear from older adults is that they are not aware of what the city offers. The Commission agrees with the assessment of the Auditors and the survey that the city’s website is not age-friendly and difficult for older adults, and those serving older adults, to navigate. The Age Friendly Action Plan supports a “one-stop” information center, as suggested by the Auditors. As in interim step the Commission has been working with community partners to improve information to older adults. The organization A Mighty Good Time has donated and built a custom page for the city of Austin to have a one-stop-shop for older adult activities (social, cultural, lifelong learning): in person, virtual, and phone-based. Partnerships such as this can be an interim step, but the city’s website needs an overhaul to be more user-friendly and age-friendly.

Although improving the city’s website is necessary, it is not sufficient to address the gaps in outreach and communication to older adults. The pandemic and freeze are

examples of where we were scrambling to get vital information out to older adults. In both instances the internet would not have been helpful, as many older adults were not online due to lack of access or lack of electricity. In those emergencies, it was the often the community and local organizations that stepped up to fill in the gaps.

Information and outreach has to be available through multiple sources and in a variety of formats. In addition to providing information online, resources should be made available by other means such as by phone, in community centers, at community meetings, and promotion through traditional media (print, TV, and radio). Material should be available in large print and in multiple languages. 311 Call Center operators should be trained to respond to questions about the needs of older adults.

Recognizing that community -based outreach is effective in reaching older adults, the Commission made a request in the current budget cycle for an additional Age Friendly Program staffer to do outreach in the community, including around resiliency and emergency preparedness. This position was funded during budget amendments from council. Even with this new position, additional resources will be necessary to support outreach to older adults, their families, and caregivers.

**4. APH should assess the resources needed to implement the Age Friendly Action Plan and propose a plan to address any gaps.**

Through our budget recommendations this Commission has shown that we regularly review and make recommendations on resources that are needed to implement the Age Friendly Action Plan. The community service providers surveyed by the Auditors also strongly agreed that the Age Friendly program needs more resources. It is clear that additional resources are likely to be necessary to address the findings and recommendations in the audit.

While the commission welcomes the assessment recommended by the Auditors, we believe a one-time review is insufficient. The Commission recommends the Age Friendly Program Coordinator and APH provide an annual report to the City Manager and the Commission on Aging by February 1 of each year. The report should assess the resources needed to implement the AFAP and make recommendations to address any gaps. This report would be useful for the Commission in making budget recommendations and for the City Manager in their budget proposal.

The Commission recommends the deadline for the assessment established by APH in its management response be moved up several months in order to inform the next City Manager's budget.

Date of Approval: December 14, 2022

Record of the vote: **10-0**

Motioned by: Vice-Chair Temperly

Seconded by: Commissioner Bondi

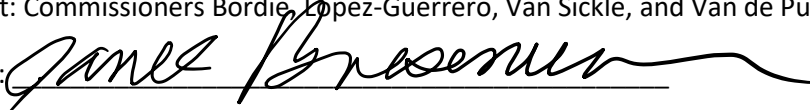
For: Chair Briesemeister, Vice-Chair Temperly, Commissioners Angel, Bauman, Bondi, De Maria Nicola, Garcia-Pittman, Kareithi, Lugo, Varteressian.

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Commissioners Bordie, Lopez-Guerrero, Van Sickle, and Van de Putte

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Briesemeister", written over a horizontal line.

Janee Briesemeister, Chair