

April 6, 2023

To: Mayor Kirk Watson and the Austin City Council

CC: City Manager Jesus Garza, Assistant City Managers Rodney Gonzalez and Bruce Mills

Re: Status Updates of the Disaster Food & Water Appendix and Mass Care Branch Plans

Mayor Watson and Austin City Council Members,

The Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board is concerned about food and water assistance to the community during future disasters and requests an update to the status of several items related to the provision and distribution of food and water in the event of a City of Austin emergency. Because there have been some significant changes to HSEM leadership, we would like to request an update from City Council.

Specifically, we would like to know the following:

What is the status on the adoption of the Disaster Food & Water Appendix to the City of Austin Emergency Operations Plan (Basic Plan)? Hagerty Consulting was contracted to produce this appendix, and a significant amount of time was contributed by individuals throughout the community to provide feedback on experiences from the onset of the pandemic and Winter Storm Uri. Our understanding is that this appendix was completed by Hagerty Consulting and submitted to HSEM on January 6th, 2023 and the Director of HSEM has the authority to approve the Food & Water Appendix to the Basic Plan. The lack of an approved plan led to continued disorganization of emergency food and water distribution during the ice storm in February, as it did not seem to even be referenced or “tested”.

Where does the Food & Water Appendix, once approved, fit into the Mass Care Branch of the Emergency Operations Plan, and what is the timeline for hiring the positions for the Food and Water Access org chart, specifically with regard to the Food Access Group in the Mass Care Branch? It is our understanding that it would be the responsibility of this Food Access Group to implement the Disaster Food and Water Appendix in the event of an emergency. Another disaster could be right around the corner, and without these positions filled, we will continue to be unprepared to help our citizens.

How does Travis County fit into the food and water distribution in these shared plans? It seems an oversight to omit a connection to the County staff/departments that would be responsible for implementing an emergency food and water plan in neighboring areas such as Manor, Elgin, Del Valle, and Pflugerville.

We appreciate the time, consideration and money that have gone into creating these plans, and recognize an urgency to approve and implement them before the next disaster strikes.

Sincerely,

Lisa Barden
Vice-Chair, Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board