

To: Interim City Manager Jesús Garza
From: The City of Austin Planning Commission
Date: June 13, 2023
Subject: **FY 2023-2024 Capital Improvement Memo of Recommendations**

Introduction

The Planning Commission is pleased to transmit the FY 23-24 Capital Improvement Memo of Recommendations. Transmittal of the recommendations to the City Manager allows the Planning Commission to meet its [Charter requirement](#) to submit a list of capital improvements to the City Manager that implement the City's Comprehensive Plan, [Imagine Austin](#).

These capital improvements are intended to further the City's comprehensive plan's long-term aspiration of being a *"beacon of sustainability, social equity and economic opportunity; where diversity and creativity are celebrated; where community needs and values are recognized; where leadership comes from its citizens and where the necessities of life are affordable and accessible to all"* (*Imagine Austin*, p.2).

Imagine Austin has eight Priority Programs that provide the structure and direction to implement the plan's policies and actions:

- ❖ Invest in a compact and connected Austin
- ❖ Sustainably manage our water resources
- ❖ Continue to grow Austin's economy by investing in our workforce, education systems, entrepreneurs, and local businesses
- ❖ Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city
- ❖ Grow and invest in Austin's creative economy
- ❖ Develop and maintain household affordability throughout Austin
- ❖ Create a Healthy Austin Program
- ❖ Revise Austin's development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city

This Memo of Recommendations is organized by these eight Priority Programs. Additionally, the City of Austin is focused on advancing equity in all aspects of City operations. Because of this, the recommendations have been reviewed for their tie to equitable outcomes using the [Equity Office's definition of equity](#).

Invest in a Compact and Connected Austin

- Implement the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan (ASMP).
- Align investments with the updated Bicycle Plan, Urban Trails Plan, and new Sidewalks, Crossings, and Shared Streets Plan.
- Continue to deliver Mobility Bond improvements funded in 2016, 2018, and 2020.
- Expand the amount of Vision Zero safety improvements to address the disproportionate share of people of color among severe crash victims in Austin.
- Prioritize capital renewal and maintenance of infrastructure that supports our mobility goals.

Sustainably manage our water resources

Review the city's resilience to extreme weather events and other impacts of climate change to ensure the safety of city residents, ensure the reliability of electric, water and other critical infrastructure, and identify long-range capital improvements to improve resiliency in an equitable manner.

Continue to grow Austin's economy by investing in our workforce, education systems, entrepreneurs, and local businesses

Work with partners in the private sector to ensure access to affordable commercial space and the availability of workforce training opportunities.

Use green infrastructure to protect environmentally sensitive areas and integrate nature into the city

- Properly evaluate the impacts of capital investments to ensure the equitable mitigation of environmental risks across the city.
- Invest in green infrastructure that creates or enhances Austin's network of natural lands and other open spaces. Examples include stream and shoreline restoration, the construction of trails and green streets, open space acquisition, park improvements, community agriculture, and green stormwater retrofits.
- Integrate nature into the city by supporting, maintaining, and expanding parks and our urban trail network.

Grow and invest in Austin's creative economy

- Support the underfunded needs (~\$35M) of constructing the Dougherty Arts Center Replacement project. The project is designed and scheduled to go into construction the summer of 2024.
- Fund the value engineered portions of the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center Phase 2 Project, such as the children's playground and outdoor stage, estimated at ~\$6M. Phase 2 is currently underway, but the value engineered elements of the project are not currently funded.
- Fund Phase 2 of the Asian American Resource Center's Performing Arts Center. Phase 2, estimated at ~\$46M, is designed, but construction is unfunded at this time.
- Make investments that strengthen our portfolio of culture and lifelong learning programs, events, and facilities, and build trust with the community.
- Increase the amount of affordable creative space that is available to working artists, including performance artists, and incentivize the equitable and inclusive development, redevelopment, and use of assets for creative space.
- Invest in supporting Austin's creative community by continuing to sponsor and facilitate art as a component of public infrastructure.

Develop and maintain household affordability throughout Austin

- Prioritize future infrastructure investments that support the City of Austin's goals of anti-displacement, ending homelessness, affordable housing, creating housing in high opportunity areas, and mobility.
- Procure an enterprise asset management software to monitor and report on capital expenditures, as identified in the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint (ASHB) and Displacement Mitigation Strategy.
- Support the rehabilitation of rental properties purchased by Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) as part of the strategic land banking recommendation outlined in the ASHB.
- Coordinate the City of Austin's capital infrastructure investments with AHFC's capital expenditures such as land acquisition, development assistance, and the repositioning of publicly owned land for affordable housing.

Create a Healthy Austin Program

- Prioritize investments related to public health and safety, and capital renewal such as project rehabilitation and restoration. Maintenance and repair prevention need to be funded appropriately and equitably to minimize premature failures, unacceptable levels of service, and far more expensive replacement of assets.
- Support investments that promote healthy living, reduce barriers to transportation and access to health care and social services, increase healthy food access points, develop spaces accessible for all ages and abilities, consider social vulnerabilities, and foster an environment for all residents to make easy healthy choices.

Revise Austin’s development regulations and processes to promote a compact and connected city

Staff is coordinating with Council to prioritize code updates and based on current efforts do not require CIP funding for code amendments at this time. However, what is necessary to effectively support staff work and guide equitable land use regulations is to fund an update to the city’s comprehensive plan, *Imagine Austin*.

Other Recommendations

There are two areas that, although they do not fall under a specific Priority Program, are relevant across all programs and for the effective implementation of *Imagine Austin*.

- To have a comprehensive picture of existing infrastructure conditions and potential liabilities over time, prioritize a more complete inventory and assessment of existing assets. Implement a robust enterprise asset management approach to ensure coordination and cooperation across all departments and all infrastructures.
- Continue to explore innovative and durable revenue sources and policies.

Conclusion

The above recommendations highlight not only the importance of improving the City's system of asset management to get the most out of the investments we make as a community; they also emphasize appropriate concerns about equity in the investments we make across the city. The recommendations also continue a focus on addressing displacement, homelessness, equity, affordability, opportunity, furthering fair housing, and mobility for Austin. Finally, the recommendations highlight needed ongoing investment to maintain our natural environment and ensure a vibrant creative arts community.

Regards,

Todd Shaw
Chair, Planning Commission

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