



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Sylnovia Holt-Rabb, Director, Economic Development Department

DATE: June 21, 2023

SUBJECT: Staff Response to Resolution No. 20210902-048 – African American Cultural Heritage District

This memorandum provides recommendations responsive to [Resolution No. 20210902-048](#) directing the City Manager to determine strategies necessary to implement various initiatives to preserve and enhance [the African American Cultural Heritage District](#) (AACHD). Appendix A outlines staff's progress on each of the resolution's directives, while the body of this memo concentrates on the directives whose execution are best served through grassroots-based interdisciplinary community planning or are achieved through broader initiatives currently underway.

A. Stakeholder Organizing and Community Planning

The AACHD contains a diverse array of interests and a unique concentration of existing African American landmarks, historical and cultural assets, and the legacy of what once was the diverse and thriving African American residential, commercial, and cultural core in Austin. The stewardship, preservation and celebration of these cultural and historical assets require a comprehensive engagement of businesses, property owners, residents, and advocates to best achieve the Council directives specified in Appendix A. The outcome of that stakeholder engagement would develop an implementation strategy executed through multiple City departments and external agencies.

The Economic Development Department (EDD) will facilitate a two-part strategic planning effort that steers sustainable development and growth in the district, as well as addresses design solutions including pedestrian safety measures, streetscaping, and placemaking efforts:

- 1) **Phase I - Stakeholder Organizing and Plan Framework:** Engage a consultant to identify and organize leadership to scope and steward a larger engagement effort resulting in a plan that is comprehensive of the initiatives for the District and implementors of that district action plan. The deliverable would be the community planning strategy and resources necessary to carry out the community planning effort (Phase 2 below).

Estimated time: 6-12 months from existing City resources.

- 2) **Phase 2 – AACHD Action Plan:** Based on future Council direction, Phase I recommendations, and allocation of sufficient resources, the City would be prepared to engage a consultant to co-

create the AACHD Action Plan with the organized stakeholders from Phase I. The goal of the plan would be to ultimately achieve the directives outlined in the resolution. The Plan will constitute the guiding document to support the implementation of sustainable development and growth, while preserving the rich history the African American community has contributed to the City of Austin's story. It will specify the implementation steps, timeline, resources, and accountable steward for the components of the Plan.

EDD will commence the engagement of an external consultant for Phase I in the Spring through a competitive solicitation.

B. AACHD Business and Cultural Incentives

EDD is leading several complimentary initiatives that will contribute to the overall success of goals identified within the AACHD resolution. Presently, there are no incentive programs administered by EDD that specifically work to attract or grow the entertainment, creative, or cultural industries within the AACHD. The City does administer the [Business Expansion Incentive \(BEIP\)](#) and the Creative Concept Incentive ([CCIP](#)) programs. These two programs are established under [Chapter 380 of the State's Local Code](#). They allow the City to provide grants and/or loans for economic development purposes. Both programs are currently under review and analysis for potential updates. There will be an opportunity to include district enhancement components to existing programs or develop new program(s) with a specified focus on creating opportunities in identified districts and/or creative and cultural industries. EDD will undertake community outreach in the next six months seeking inputs on opportunities to enrich Austin's unique districts and shore up its fragile creative and cultural industries, which will include the organizations and stakeholders identified in the resolution language.

While not targeted specifically to the AACHD, EDD administers [the Creative Space Assistance Program](#) which offers grants between \$5,000 and \$50,000 to creative organizations and independent artists facing displacement or new commercial leases at higher and unaffordable rates. Additionally, core equity principals of Preservation, Innovation, and Elevation & Collaboration (PIE) were integrated into the [Live Music Fund Event Program](#), which is the pilot program supported through the Live Music Fund providing greater equitable economic growth in the music sector.

Additionally, in response to [Resolution No. 20220901-089](#), EDD is preparing land use definitions for creative spaces and recommendations for regulatory incentives to support cultural districts, including cultural districts focused on live music, and creative space development and preservation in general. EDD anticipates that the regulatory uses will contribute to the necessary tools and resources that support the development of a comprehensive framework for Economic and Cultural Districts. This framework will incorporate processes and tools for cultural districts, small business districts, maintenance and operations public improvement districts, and other voluntary districts led by business and cultural institutions. This framework will allow more systematic and coherent management and development of these districts, while identifying additional tools for reinvestment in places such as the AACHD.

C. Urban Renewal Agency Collaboration with the AEDC

[Resolution Number 20210902-048](#) called for renewed efforts to see the redevelopment of Blocks 16 and 18, the last two remaining parcels to be developed in the amended Urban Renewal Plan. The Austin Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), in concert with a consulting team and the Urban Renewal Board of the Urban Renewal Agency (URA), is advancing towards a Request for Proposal for development, expected to be released later this spring. The future development is intended to

complete the vision for the district as a significant mixed-use vibrant gateway between East Austin and Downtown imbued with the cultural identity of the historic African American Cultural District.

In 2022, AEDC and City executed an addendum to the Interlocal Agreement engaging and supporting three development projects including the feasibility of East 11th and 12th Streets Urban Renewal Plan. The Housing Department issued a [memo](#), an update to Mayor and Council, on April 4, 2023. In addition, the Economic Development Department will be soliciting a consultant to develop a strategic plan for the African American Cultural and Heritage Facility as recommended by the recent audit of City Cultural Centers.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sylnovia Holt-Rabb, Director, Economic Development Department at 512-974-3131 or synovia.holt-rabb@austintexas.gov.

cc: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager
 Veronica Briseño, Assistant City Manager
 Lauren Middleton-Pratt, Director, Planning Department

Appendix A: Staff Progress Directives from Resolution No. 20210902-048

Directive	Departmental Leads	Actions
<p>(1) Update all official City Maps that show designated Cultural and Historic Districts and Landmarks to include the African American Cultural Heritage District (AACHD);</p> <p>(2) Develop an official detailed map of the AACHD;</p>	<p>EDD, CPIO</p>	<p>Economic Development Department (EDD) staff have developed the required GIS Data layers and Story Map of the African American Cultural Heritage District. The City does not have an official adopted map that displays current designated cultural districts (African American Cultural Heritage District, 5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor, and Red River Cultural District). However, EDD staff will engage Corporate PIO to determine appropriate location for cultural district maps, and partner with appropriate district management entities to ensure equity and consistency in promoting and displaying district boundary maps, as well as official detailed maps of cultural districts.</p>
<p>(3) Develop way-finding signage for public rights-of-way that provide directional guidance for locating the AACHD in general, and specific landmarks and significant places of interests within the AACHD;</p>	<p>EDD, ATD</p>	<p>Austin Transportation Department partners confirmed the inclusion of the AACHD, African American Cultural Center, George Washington Carver Museum, and the Texas Music Museum as cultural districts and landmarks within the Downtown Map utilized for the Downtown Wayfinding Program. The Downtown Wayfinding Plan implementation will include the installation of eight (8) vehicular directional signs, as well as four (4) pedestrian directional signs/maps within the AACHD, with expected production and installation to occur in early 2024.</p> <p>Ordinance No. 201803022-008 authorized Hotel Occupancy Tax funds to be dedicated to Six Square wayfinding and marketing. To ensure robust community engagement and input in development and implementation of additional wayfinding signage, needs and associated cost estimates will be determined through comprehensive strategic planning efforts within the AACHD.</p>
<p>(4) Fund and implement a highly-visible Place-making program within the District (signage, public art, streetscape features, AACHD branded street signs/markers, historic neighborhood identifiers, etc.);</p>	<p>EDD, Planning Department, Various Departments</p>	<p>Please refer to memorandum Section (A) for response.</p>
<p>(5) Use the cultural/historic/heritage assets inventory list found in the East Austin Historical Survey to assist with designation of historic sub-districts throughout the AACHD to get placement on local, state, and national registers;</p>	<p>EDD, Planning Department</p>	<p>The East Austin Historical Survey, completed in 2016, identified nine historic districts comprising 1,026 properties within the AACHD as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or as locally designated historic districts. Of those, the Historic Preservation Office (HPO) have two (2) assets in achieving historic district or place designation. The Rogers-Washington-Holy Cross Historic</p>

		<p>District was designated by Council in 2020. HPO staff also nominated Huston Tillotson University's campus to the National Register of Historic Places, and it was listed in 2022.</p> <p>Both National Register and local designation processes require owner support, with 2021's HB 2946 strengthening that requirement for local districts at the state level. Outreach to the affected neighborhoods, both at the outset and as the designation process goes forward, would be a critical component to the success of this effort. Current staffing capacity challenges limit the ability for HPO to dedicate resources for the assessment and engagement for historic designation.</p> <p>To continue to support the work identified by the HPO, necessary education and engagement components may be included in the development of a comprehensive strategic planning effort that would identify opportunities, challenges, and appropriate next steps for historic district and/or place designation with the AACHD. See Section (A).</p>
(6) Work with the African American Resource Advisory Commission, Six Square, East Austin Creative Coalition, and other relevant organizations to craft an incentives program specifically to attract and nurture growth of professional entertainment and creative industry businesses, and culture-based organizations to locate into and do business within the AACHD;	EDD	Please refer to memorandum Section (B) for response.
(7) Work with the Music Commission, Arts Commission, African American Resource Advisory Commission, Six Square, East Austin Creative Coalition, and other relevant organizations to establish a funding mechanism specifically to support public arts and culture programming within the AACHD;	EDD	The City administers the Cultural Funding Programs which supports cultural arts programming for the Austin community by contracting with arts organizations for specific services. The Street Performance Program , which can be programmed to support live and compensated music performances in the AACHD. Additionally, EDD maintains a recurring \$300,000 contract with Six Square, the Cultural District Management Entity, representing the AACHD, to provide specific resources to support cultural programming within the AACHD.. Inclusion of comprehensive strategic planning efforts may engage and identify additional public arts and cultural programming needs, with accompanied cost estimates, partnerships, and resources for implementation.
(8) Engage stakeholders, including but not limited to, Six Square, East Austin Creative Coalition, Austin Revitalization Authority, Urban Renewal...	EDD, Planning Department, Various Departments	Please refer to memorandum Section (A) for response.
The City Manager is directed to recommend potential short- and long-term design solutions for the physical	EDD, Planning Department,	Please refer to memorandum Section (A) for response.

landscape of the AACHD to increase pedestrian mobility and safety, and to support place-making efforts...	Various Departments	
The City Manager is directed to complete the streetscape and place-making work in the AACHD;	EDD, Planning Department, Various Departments	Please refer to memorandum Section (A) for response.
The City Manager is directed to consult with the Music Commission, the Live Music Fund Working Group, and the Austin Economic Development Corporation to explore ways of using the Live Music Fund to support the long-term sustainability of Black African American culture-based music industry projects located or producing within the District, and other investments that would help enhance the live music and cultural tourism economy.	EDD, AEDC	Please refer to memorandum Section (B) for response.
The City Manager is also directed to work with relevant departments and organizations to continue to address historic underrepresentation in City funding programs and plot a course to direct City focus on issues of affordability, professional development, business development/mentorship, educational programs, venue establishment and support, and related programs to assure development, growth, and sustainability of the East Austin Music Community within the AACHD...	Six Square in partnership with COA	Please refer to memorandum Section (A) for response.
The City Manager is directed to review the City of Austin's capital project delivery planning and make recommendations that may accelerate investment in cultural venues and deployment of approved funding for creative spaces. This review should reflect the Joint Working Group recommendations unanimously passed by both the Music Commission and Arts Commission on January 6 and 9, 2020, respectively...	EDD, AEDC	Please refer to memorandum Section (B) for response.
The City Manager is directed to review the prior work conducted by the Urban Renewal Agency and the joint Arts Commission and Music Commission recommendations set forth and submitted to Council in January 2020 as guidance, consider the current programs and capacity of the Austin Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), and collaborate and work with the Urban Renewal Agency...	AEDC	Please refer to memorandum Section (C) for response.