

Joint Inclusion Committee Telework Report

(1) Pushing for a return to office rather than expanding telework demonstrates leadership that is out of touch with the needs of taxpayers and the workforce.

Travis County recently won [national recognition for their telework policy](#). Among the many benefits cited by Commissioner Shea, includes the \$1.3 million saved in utilities costs for 2020-2021 for the 50% of their workforce (~2500) that is eligible for complete or mostly remote work.

Outside consultants estimated that Travis County could [reduce its administrative space by as much as 83%](#), or more than 1 million square feet. About 40% of the county's real estate is made up of administrative space.

Even though the percentages wouldn't be exact based on the difference between City and County services, roughly speaking if these were reflected of City resources, we could expect:

- **8000 workers working completely or mostly remote.** The City stated that [5,817 workers currently telework](#); however, this seems low and it was unclear how the numbers account for workers who have been required to conduct all or part of their week in office despite lack of business need to do so. This means 8000 fewer cars on the road, and a reduction in the traffic, environmental, and safety concerns related to these commutes.
- Well **over one billion dollars in cost savings** in just a few years due to the [\\$48,126,000 spent annually on building leases alone](#) (pg. 71 of document, pg 98 of PDF), and \$541,000 on land. This cost does not include the multi millions spent on utilities, maintenance, landscaping, security, insurance, and other administrative building related costs.

Embracing a maximized telework policy allows for better utilization of real estate and taxpayer dollars, which is outlined in more detail on page 10.

In addition to the cost savings cited by Travis County, Commissioner Shea outlines the positive impact that telework has had on their **recruitment and retention**:

"The remote work policy has been a boon for recruitment, according to Zephyr Stone, the county's talent planning and engagement manager. Compared to fewer than 23,000 applications in 2019, the county received more than 30,000 in 2020, before settling down to just below 30,000 in the past two years."

This stands in stark contrast to the [City's vacancy rate being up 60%](#) from where it was in 2019. Part of the coordinated Citywide campaign to reduce vacancy rates included the benefit of

“implementing flexible schedules and telework opportunities to support work-life balance;” however, with the repeal of this telework benefit while the County and [State](#), our two biggest competitors, remain completely or mostly remote, we can expect not just a decrease in recruitment, but a high rate of turnover.

In the refusal of HRD and the Interim City Manager’s office to conduct any sort of research on the impact this decision would have on our human capital, the Women to Women’s Affinity Group conducted an informal [survey that was completed by 788 City workers, with 78% of them indicating that reducing their telework schedule would drive them to start looking for other jobs](#). Considering that [replacing employees cost 1.5-2 times as much as retaining employees](#), a decision of this price tag should not be made at the whim of anyone, much less an Interim City Manager who is supposed to answer to the budgetary priorities of City Council, not the other way around.

Other human capital considerations for telework include:

- Delaying a full embrace of telework is just **delaying the inevitable**: [Labor Economists Say Remote Work Here to Stay](#)
- Telework **increases productivity** in many cases: [Society for Human Resource Management Study: Teleworkers More Productive—Even When Sick](#);
- Impacts of remote work on productivity vary based on job but [generally show increases](#); while the Interim City Manager decided to openly insult the City workforce within 90 days of taking his position by implying we had fallen down on the job (without any acknowledgment of the gross rate of understaffing happening in many departments), he provided absolutely no data that demonstrated a reduction in productivity.

(2) Repealing telework is an effective pay cut that will have disproportionately negative impact across race and gender.

We put everyone not earning a director salary in the impossible decision of choosing between an unbearable, expensive commute versus being disenfranchised from the option of building equity through home ownership.

Many of us live 1-2 hours (double that if stuck behind a wreck) from the office. This adds up in commute and childcare costs. But let’s look at the reverse- for anyone without access to generational wealth who is not already owning in the Austin area, homeownership is entirely financially unrealistic for any single or primary earner working below the director level with the City.

Studies by Habitat for Humanity and [HUD](#) underscore how [generational wealth is built through home ownership](#), and the City has (for good reason and I believe with good intention) hired disproportionately high rates of people of color and women. Given how in every state [people of color are less likely to own homes than white households](#), and [given how women have](#)

[to save for longer in order to afford a home downpayment](#), employment with the City will be one more huge barrier in keeping people from being able to purchase homes in one of the smaller, affordable suburban areas where gains could be made towards economic equity with home ownership. The alternative is rent in the city where rents are skyrocketing and our Cost of Living Adjustments for an entire year [barely covered one month of the average rent increase](#).

We don't have enough childcare in this city and workers- mostly women- will be forced to leave the work force because of it.

[There was a report on the lack of childcare in Austin this spring](#). The wait list for City sponsored facilities for childcare are months long. Many parents have been able to avoid childcare altogether because keeping elementary school and middle school aged children entertained in the living room while you finish your 3:00-4:30pm meetings is safe and free, but arranging after school care to last through a post commute arrival of 6:00pm is expensive enough that [many people \(disproportionally women as second earners\) literally won't be able to afford to work](#) because the cost of childcare and gas will be more than they make.

This also hurts front line workers and those who HAVE to be in person in order to do their job, because they also have to fight for these coveted childcare spots. We are making it financially and logistically impossible for parents- especially women- to keep these jobs that we love and that we feel matter.

The average City worker can't afford Austin housing and has been pushed out to the suburbs.

This study found that [a single adult would need to be making \\$55,186 after taxes](#) to live comfortably in Austin. This is roughly \$70,000 before taxes or \$33.65/ hour. If you were in a couple and only one adult worked, you would need to make \$87,314 after taxes. This is roughly \$118,000. This is the average Director salary for the City of Austin. **This means there are roughly 20 people who both work for the City and can afford to raise a family there.**

This disproportionately impacts low income people and people of color as [Austin has seen a decline in lower-income, non-white populations in its urban core](#). The additional gas, car wear and tear, and costs associated with extending or securing childcare will cost most workers an additional \$100-400 per paycheck. For most of us, this is a life changing percentage of our take home pay.

[Commuting to Opportunity: The Working Poor and Commuting in the United States](#) "The working poor spend a much higher portion of their income on commuting. The cost burden of commuting for the working poor is 6.1% compared with 3.8% for other workers. The working poor who drive to work spend the most: 8.4%. The combined costs of commuting and housing make up a larger portion of the household budgets of the working poor than other households.

For working-poor homeowners, nearly 25% of their household income is consumed by housing and commuting expenses compared with just 15.3% for other households. For those who rent, the disparities between the working poor (32.4%) and other households (19.7%) are even greater.”

(3) Telework facilitates a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

Telework improves the physical and mental health of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ workers due to reduced exposure to discrimination and microaggressions.

Teleworking enables women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and our aging workforce- all people who already carry disproportionate stress- to better manage their work-life balance by eliminating the need for long commutes and providing flexibility in scheduling. This flexibility can lead to reduced stress levels and increased overall satisfaction with work and personal life.

- ["Telework and Worker Health and Well-Being: A Review and Recommendations for Research and Practice"](#) According to Henke et al., the extent of telework is beneficially associated with employee health, with **teleworking employees having a lower overall risk of poor health than non-teleworkers**. Similarly both men and women had lower systolic blood pressure, a known stress indicator, when teleworking versus working from the main office, although this association was only significant for women.
- [Flexible work is feminist—and women won't return to a system that hasn't served them well to spare the feelings of powerful men](#) *"New research shows that employees still aren't permitted to work remotely as much as they'd like. And it is hardly a coincidence that the demographic which benefited most from the old system has also expressed the most anxiety about changing it. But we shouldn't confuse the feelings of powerful men with facts."*
 - Teleworking can help mitigate gender bias and discrimination that women often face in traditional office settings. By eliminating face-to-face interactions and focusing on performance and results, remote work can promote equal treatment and opportunities for women. Offering teleworking options can improve retention rates and career advancement for women. By providing flexibility and accommodating work-life integration, organizations can retain talented women who may otherwise leave the workforce due to family obligations or other constraints.
- ["Remote Work Helps People with Disabilities Land Jobs"](#) *"There is no hiding the fact that thanks to the pandemic, remote work played a key role in the rising statistics of workers with disabilities," Basile said. "Remote work is a great reasonable accommodation for both workers with and without disabilities."*

- [5 Reasons Working From Home Benefits Older Workers — and Their Employers](#) *"We've learned from the pandemic that many kinds of workers can work from home," says the Urban Institute's Johnson. "Both employees and employers are learning that new technologies make remote work easy and productive. Those lessons won't be forgotten once the pandemic ends."*
 - Keeping our older workers employed for longer also has the added benefit of delaying the start and span of drawing on retirement benefits- a discussion that is being had on the macro level with talks of Social Security reform at the national level.
- ["Fewer micro aggressions: Companies share why remote work is boosting DEI"](#) *"It's stressful, exhausting, and dehumanizing to constantly have to code switch and endure discrimination for half of your waking hours. It's no wonder 97% of Black knowledge workers prefer remote or hybrid work environments and 80% of women say remote work options are among the most important factors when evaluating a new job," argued Suros."*
- ["Remote work is protecting employees from toxic workplaces. Now, employers must do better, says expert"](#) *"Joseph said remote work shields her from harmful workplace microaggressions — intentional or unintentional discriminatory or derogatory remarks or behaviours. She has fewer in-person interactions with people, which means fewer opportunities to face those microaggressions. 'It's a peaceful, safe place and you don't hear the background noise ... there's no office chatter,' she said."*
 - Teleworking can reduce the impact of workplace bias and discrimination that minorities may experience in traditional office settings. Remote work allows individuals to focus on their work without being subjected to potential biases and stereotypes that can exist in physical workplaces.
- [For some LGBTQ employees, remote work is a 'game changer' for inclusion](#) *"For Solberg, sharing their pronouns on their LinkedIn page, in their email signature and on their videoconferencing profile is 'like being at a party and wearing a nametag. Being able to work remotely and having your [virtual presence] represent you by sharing your pronouns right off the bat has been a huge benefit. I'm not constantly having to introduce my pronouns.'"*
 - Teleworking can contribute to improved mental health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ individuals. It reduces the stress associated with navigating potentially unwelcoming work environments and provides an opportunity for self-care, reducing the negative impact on mental health and well-being. Remote work provides a level of privacy and control over one's surroundings, as well as flexibility for individuals to express their gender identity authentically without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Telework is more flexible and respects that the diversity of our commitments and experiences is an important aspect of being able to serve our community well.

Given how much of our workforce lives more than an hour from the office, telework allows people to take just 1-2 hours of Sick Time or a long lunch in order to attend doctors appointments rather than taking a whole day off. This has a disproportionately positive impact on pregnant people, parents, those caring for aging parents, people with disabilities, people with chronic health issues, and our senior workforce.

Teleworking can have positive effects on the health and wellness of these same groups as well due to reduced exposure to potential workplace hazards, communicable diseases, minimizes stress associated with commuting, and provides greater control over one's work environment, which can contribute to better physical and mental well-being. Being able to nurse without hauling a suitcase of supplies back and forth, self administer shots or other medical treatments, or be available purely in case of emergency for kids home sick or elderly parents who need minimal supervision are all examples of how this plays out in real time for thousands of workers every day.

Additionally, people with cultures and religions that have food specifications or prayer practices find it significantly easier to navigate- not just socially but also logistically- when able to observe from their own home.

To disenfranchise these populations from our workforce not only will leave us even more severely understaffed than we have been for years, but will leave us with a workforce that would inherently be more myopic and less in touch with the variety of needs that our taxpayers and citizens are facing every day. We do better by our community when our workforce is diverse, and we do better by our workers when we telework.

Teleworking enables organizations to tap into a broader talent pool by accommodating individuals with different abilities, life circumstances, and geographical constraints. Embracing a diverse workforce fuels creativity, drives innovation, and enhances overall company performance.

The combination of these inclusive factors with the socioeconomic geography of Austin clearly shows that if we want to recruit and retain a diverse workforce- with diversity across a multitude of identities and experiences- telework is one of the most vital benefits we can offer.

(4) A fully maximized telework policy is the only option that both saves taxpayers money and brings the City of Austin closer to our Climate Equity goals.

Unnecessary commutes indisputably contribute towards **harmful emissions**, causing both short and long term harm to our planet, our ecosystem, and our health. Low wage workers, low income communities, and people of color experience disproportionately negative impacts to their health, their quality of life, and the economic ability to participate in “green” initiatives.

Austin's [Climate Equity Plan](#) indicates that City leaders should be already incredibly aware of the negative impacts of carbon emissions from driving, and that eliminating unnecessary commutes is one of the clearest paths forward in reducing these emissions. Here are some additional negative impacts from commuting that extend beyond the negative impacts referenced in the Climate Equity Plan:

- [Travis County: Work from home saves money, boosts morale](#) *“This is something where governments can save money on their utilities. They can improve employee morale. And they can measurably and meaningfully reduce their greenhouse gas emissions,” [Commissioner Brigid] Shea told County magazine.[...] In 2020, Travis County employees reduced their greenhouse emissions by 28% — equivalent to removing 1,200 cars from the roads for the year — by no longer commuting to work during the spread of COVID-19. Employee commutes make up a fifth of the total emissions by the county and were a drain on morale in traffic-clogged Austin.”*

Conservative estimates of the employees with the benefit of telework are almost 6,000. This means that as an even larger employer than the County, we as an employer would make an even more positive impact on the reduction of emissions. **As one of the largest employers in Austin, and as the driving force behind our 2030 climate goals, we have an imperative to set an example for other employers in the city.**

- [New Emissions Analytics study suggests pollution from tire wear now 1,850 times worse than exhaust emissions](#)
- [New study shows the micro plastics from tires and breaks make up 52% of the total emissions from driving](#) *“Of the particles emitted, 82% find their way into water and 18% become airborne. Those airborne particles can be inhaled directly in some cases, but the study also highlights the potential for particles from tires to accumulate in the food chain.”*

Even if we ignore the financial, feasibility, and infrastructure hurdles of trying to speed up adoption of **electric vehicles**, we would STILL be moving in the wrong direction.

Furthermore, while investment in reliable, affordable, widespread expansion and adoption of **public transit** is absolutely a worthwhile investment, there are real hurdles to that as well. It:

- [Costs the tax payers billions](#)
- Will take years, if not decades, to fully implement
- Given the affordability crisis for Austin housing, **a public transit system designed specifically to offset commutes would require collaboration with surrounding counties since the majority of Austin workers can't afford Austin housing** and would still be forced to drive into the office from surrounding counties without a robust, cross county public transit system
- Still contribute to the accumulation of particulates from breaks, tires, and other materials

A robust and fully maximized telework policy for City of Austin employees will move us closer to meeting the goals outlined in the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan and Vision Zero.

Austin [Strategic Mobility Plan](#) indicates that City leadership is very aware of our untenable traffic situation. The I-35 [expansion](#) will be starting in the next few months, which will have horrendous ripple effects on commute times, arterial traffic, rate and severity of accidents, and the increase in emissions associated with idling cars.

“In 2020, Travis County employees reduced their greenhouse emissions by 28% — equivalent to removing 1,200 cars from the roads for the year — by no longer commuting to work during the spread of COVID-19. [Employee commutes make up a fifth of the total emissions](#) by the county”

According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System](#), **24% of fatalities occur when people are commuting** either to or from their work. With an extremely conservative guess of 5000-6000 City workers currently with telework benefits, sending them back into the office will force an additional 60,000 car trips per week or over 3 million car trips per year, many of whom will be driving 2+ hours with traffic just one way, even further increasing the likelihood of entirely avoidable traffic fatalities. According to Austin's [Vision Zero](#) 2023 update:

- Traffic fatalities resulted in over 8,000 years of life lost, a public health metric that quantifies the additional years a person would have lived if they had not died prematurely.
- Pedestrian fatalities continued to rise at an alarming rate, as 42 and 48 pedestrians were killed in 2021 and 2022, respectively, compared with the previous five-year average of 30 per year.
- While Black people make up less than 7% of the Austin population, they accounted for 15% of people seriously injured or killed in crashes over the past two years.
- Crashes were responsible for more than \$6.8 billion in economic losses related to medical and administrative expenses, motor vehicle damage, employers' uninsured costs, wage and productivity losses, and lost quality of life.

As a city we should be setting the standard and finding ways to incentivize **all** employers- public and private- to embrace telework as much as possible, not allowing the regressive personal preferences of our Interim City Manager to make data-less decisions that will send us in the wrong direction and harm all Austinites who drive (or breathe) in the process.

Repealing telework goes directly against the following elements of the Austin Strategic Mobility Plan:

- Primary transportation goal to reach 50% of all trips made through non-single occupant vehicle trips by 2040. This goal is only achievable thanks to telework.

- Shifting away from a strong teleworking policy goes against the ASMP Implementation Action Item #42: Citywide employer TDM strategies - including “Create and implement various strategies for employers that operate within the city limits to encourage fewer drive-alone trips, especially during peak congested times. Strategies can include: -telework and flextime encouragement policy...”
- Also goes against ASMP Action Item 53: Government employer TDM strategies - “Seek partnerships with various federal, state, and local government agencies and universities that are major employers within Austin to encourage employees to telework or to take public transportation and other modes to work and disincentivize employees to drive alone to work.”
- Also goes directly against ASMP Action item 61: City telework, flexible schedule, and hoteling policy - “**Strengthen City of Austin policy to support teleworking** and provide employees with the opportunity to use shared worksites close to where employees live (remote workstations known as hoteling). Provide employees with the technology to work remotely. Where flexible schedules are allowed, encourage employees to consider compressed work weeks and work schedules that avoid the morning and evening peak congested times.”

We see that when we are teleworking, these goals are achievable. There was a 20% increase in non-single occupant vehicle commute trips from 2019 to 2021 - entirely from Work From Home during the pandemic:

<i>Commute Mode</i>	<i>2021</i>	<i>2019</i>
Single Occupant Vehicle	51.1%	71.1%
Carpooling	5%	9.6%
Public Transit	1.3%	3.3%
Walking	1.7%	2.6%
Biking	0.7%	1.1%
Taxi	1.4%	1.5%
Work From Home	38.8%	10.8%
TOTAL Non-SOV	48.9%	28.9%

- Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 and 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates; Table S0801

The most cost effective, feasible, equitable, accessible, safe, environmentally friendly, immediately available option is to eliminate commutes entirely short of demonstrated business need.

(5) Even when commutes are reduced in frequency, the function and existence of office buildings being utilized even just one day a week by each worker negatively impacts the environment and diverts land resources from projects that better meet community needs.

The City's Climate Equity Plan cites the importance of responsible land use and upgrading buildings to more environmentally friendly standards. This is absolutely a step in the right direction. However, a significantly more climate friendly option would be to dramatically reduce the amount of real estate and the number of office buildings that the city utilizes.

Even if we could teleport to work, and even if all of our buildings were built to the highest standard of environmental standards, no "green" office building is more environmentally friendly or does more to move towards equity than a maximized telework policy.

Here are some additional considerations beyond what is found in the City's Climate Equity Plan:

- [Why Buildings are Bad for the Climate](#) *"As the population continuously increases, urban areas will continue to grow, and thus so will the construction of large buildings. In fact, by 2060, the world will add 2 trillion square feet of buildings. To put that into perspective, that's equivalent to building an entire New York City every month for 40 years according to Bill Gates' article."*

This constant **land expansion** contributes to urban sprawl, results in the continual decreased availability of buildings or land for affordable housing, paving of green spaces, destruction of canopy cover, harm of the biodiversity those green spaces were holding, and to the associated housing construction that is inherently tied to a city's continued outward expansion.

- [The Environmental Impact of an Office Building Throughout its Life Cycle](#) *"The key environmental issues found for the buildings were: electricity use in the outlets, HVAC and lighting, heat in ventilation and conduction, materials used in internal surfaces and HVAC services, and the use of water and wastewater, which were quite dominant in that they, as 20 % of all life-cycle elements, caused 45-75 % of the average life-cycle impact of the buildings studied and 60-75 % of the cumulative range."*

Office buildings are full of **vampire energy** for lighting, electronics, printers, office kitchens, etc which all contribute to roughly 20% of average energy consumption and cost. They also create an avoidable duplication of heating/ cooling buildings both during the day and overnight, as well as duplication of other smaller planet damaging resources like most cleaning supplies that end up in our water systems.

A maximized telework policy would allow the city to sublease, sell, or otherwise dissolve their obligations for hard to come by, centrally located Austin real estate. This in turn increases the

possible utilization of that land/those buildings for services that have to be provided in person, both bolstering the economy, and reducing unnecessary land/building usage.

Ignoring the environmental impact data of a telework policy is inherently racist, classist, and harmful to our most vulnerable communities.

- [Your Commute Is Giving Children Asthma](#): *"A recent meta-study identified traffic pollution as a potential contributor to 14 percent of childhood asthma cases, "putting it on par with second hand smoke."*
- [Why Hispanic, Black kids are more likely to have severe asthma than white children](#) *"A new study led by a Dell Medical School researcher found that children who participated in a program that allowed them to move into neighborhoods with lower levels of poverty and better access to public resources, like schools and public parks, saw their asthma symptoms markedly improve."*
- [Heat Island Risks](#) *"Heat islands contribute to higher daytime temperatures, reduced nighttime cooling, and higher air-pollution levels. These, in turn, contribute to heat-related deaths and heat-related illnesses such as general discomfort, respiratory difficulties, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and non-fatal heat stroke."*

"Populations with low-income are at greater risk of heat-related illnesses due to poor housing conditions, including lack of air conditioning and small living spaces, and inadequate resources to find alternative shelter during a heat wave."

"People who spend their working hours outdoors are more prone to conditions such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. They have higher exposures to ozone air pollution and heat stress, especially if work tasks involve heavy exertion."

"High temperatures of pavement and rooftop surfaces can heat up stormwater runoff, which drains into storm sewers and raises water temperatures as it is released into streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes. Water temperature affects all aspects of aquatic life, especially the metabolism and reproduction of many aquatic species. Rapid temperature changes in aquatic ecosystems resulting from warm stormwater runoff can be particularly stressful, and even fatal, to aquatic life."

"Heat islands increase both overall electricity demand, as well as peak energy demand. Peak demand generally occurs on hot summer weekday afternoons, when offices and homes are running air-conditioning systems, lights, and appliances. During extreme heat events, which are exacerbated by heat islands, the increased demand for air conditioning can overload systems and require a utility to institute controlled, rolling brownouts or blackouts to avoid power outages."

“As described above, heat islands raise demand for electricity in summer. Companies that supply electricity typically rely on fossil fuel power plants to meet much of this demand, which in turn leads to an increase in air pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions.

- [Extreme Heat Is Worse For Low-Income, Nonwhite Americans, A New Study Shows](#)
“The study found that in areas with higher rates of poverty, temperatures can be as much as 4 degrees Celsius, or 7 degrees Fahrenheit, warmer during the summer months when compared with richer neighborhoods. The same held true for Americans living in minority communities when compared with their non-Hispanic, white counterparts.”
- [Austin Heat Island Research Underway](#)
- [Suburbanization of Poverty and Spatial Mismatch in the Austin Metro Area from 2000 to 2017](#): “The results indicate that commute times increased significantly for low-income, nonwhite, blue-collar workers, while white, higher-income, and white-collar workers in the Austin Metro Area did not see such a significant increase.”

We can't in good faith say that we are committed to “Climate Equity” if we don't actually hold our own policies accountable for the impact they have on our most vulnerable communities.

“So what do we do with all of our office space? Aren't we worried about the economic collapse of downtown?”

Before I answer this, let's make 2 things abundantly clear:

1. It is an effective payout to reduce the telework benefit. For those hoping for an economic boom resulting from a return to office, if your already underpaid workforce just underwent a 5-20% effective payout, they are not the target audience for buying a \$27 burger downtown. The only businesses who will economically benefit from this decision will be fossil fuel companies and tire manufacturers.
2. It is not the responsibility of City taxpayers to pick up the tab for the lack of foresight and innovation needed from City leaders for the past 3 years. Continuing the “throw good money after bad” by pushing for a return to office rather than embracing the extensive benefits and cost savings of telework is an affront to Austin taxpayers.

That said, the following outlines 10 better ways we could utilize the existing real estate owned or leased by the City of Austin

1. **Allow expansion for departments that need more space.** Austin Animal Center is bursting at the seams- keeping animals in hot trailers and turning found animals away due to lack of space. This is just one example of a department in high need for expansion next to an office building (Betty Dunkerly) that is only utilized due to staff being forced to report for one day in person. Why are we building more buildings when options to better utilize existing resources should be our first move?

2. **Lease or sublease it at market rate to the private sector.** Again, even if we only partially recuperate the lease rate, we would still save millions in elimination of utilities and maintenance costs.
3. **Lease it below market rate for an effective contract agreement increase for community partners.** Austin Public Health alone currently pay millions of dollars each year just to cover the administrative and rental space needed for the nonprofit agencies we contract for community outreach. Rather than reimbursing them at market rate, we could lease our properties at a below market rate- in many cases giving our community partners up to an effective 20% increase in funding due to reduced overhead costs.
4. **Retrofit or redevelop for [affordable housing](#).** In areas of the country where land/demand is the primary factor driving up costs, [it is cheaper to retrofit office buildings than to build new housing](#). However, for private developers it will always be less expensive to expand to the suburbs. If our priorities as a local government are to (1) improve the affordability and diversity of our housing stock- [a goal that we fell depressingly short of in 2021](#) (2) revitalize downtown, we actually can't afford to NOT make better use of these buildings by turning them into housing. If we can spend millions to retrofit a warehouse, we can spend millions to retrofit a high rise.
5. **Retrofit or redevelop for workforce housing.** We desperately need to make housing available to City workers, teachers, and/or community health workers. We have to make sure we don't continue to experience an exodus in those fields due to [lack of being able to afford to both be in this city and work in those fields](#). While NIMBYism is unfortunate, it is a real hurdle, and protests are less likely if the incoming residents are civil servants.
6. **Utilize for rapid rehousing or temporary housing supports.** For the last 3 years, the opportunity cost of propping up antiquated in person work expectations has diverted billions of tax payer dollars from issues that residents actually care about. We already spend hundreds of millions each year trying to address the unhoused population in this city. Meanwhile, we are sitting on hard to come by real estate where we SHOULD be using/renting these buildings as rapid rehousing facilities, but instead are *paying* hundreds of millions to utilize it as office space for workers who can do their jobs as well (or better) at home.
7. **Build City subsidized child care facilities.** As mentioned above, [we have an affordable childcare shortage](#) in Austin. This negatively impacts our workforce - both in terms of reducing gender diversity but also just in sheer number of people able to logistically participate in the workforce. The Economic Development department has already ventured into studying the positive economic impacts of subsidizing childcare, and to be able to allow contracted agencies to utilize existing facilities would save taxpayers from reimbursing them for market rate rents.
8. **Start small business incubators.** Individuals seeking housing aren't the only ones being priced out of our city. We face not just the loss of the businesses who couldn't survive the pandemic, but now also face the constant opportunity cost of making it unaffordable for innovation to take root. Large businesses like Facebook and Tesla have already shown us they will leave just as quickly as they came. This isn't meant to discount the value large companies can bring, but if they do so by cannibalizing all

opportunity around them, we as a City are failing to insulate citizens against the whims of business leaders whose choices are far outside of our control.

9. **Rebuild Austin's art and music community.** We are who we are today because of Austin's long standing "weird" roots. For the last 3 years- as a result of both the pandemic and the untenable affordability crisis- we have seen our local artists be pushed out of the city and/or pushed out of their art. This is not only heartbreaking, but will eventually catch up to us as we just become East LA - bringing both our reputation and tourism revenue down with it.
10. **Sell it.** Even if we sell it at a loss, we are better off returning the cost savings to our community than continuing to insure and maintain spaces that we don't need to hold onto.

Our Call to Action:

Considering the health, safety, equity, housing, budgetary, and environmental benefits of maximizing telework for City employees, we request that the Joint Sustainability Committee make a recommendation for City Council to copy Travis County's award winning telework policy and practices. If it's felt that more information is needed before this recommendation can be made, we request the Joint Sustainability Committee recommend that City Council resume progress on their [resolution](#) from June 2022 in order to make these determinations and to halt all efforts from the Interim City Manager's repeal of telework.

We absolutely acknowledge that not all workers can utilize the telework benefit. However, Interim City Manager Garza grossly manipulated the meaning of equity when he suggested this means we should bring teleworkers back to the office. It first of all misses the entire scope of how telework intersects with equity as outlined above, but worse it's a statement intentionally designed to pit field workers against office workers rather than take responsibility for finding solutions that would improve the working conditions of field workers.

Since the Interim City Manager didn't take the initiative to find these solutions, here are some suggestions for how the City can truly embrace a move towards equity in their telework policy:

1. **Commute Stipend-** to cover gas, tolls, and vehicle wear and tear; alternatively this could be considered a housing stipend since those with shorter commutes are almost guaranteed to spend more on housing
2. **Childcare Support-** both in providing stipends to City workers, but also by subsidizing or otherwise supporting expansion of affordable childcare availability; additionally front line City workers should get first priority with the City's available childcare partnerships
3. **Increasing Sick Pay Benefits-** given their increased exposure to communicable diseases and the importance of not reporting to work when they've been exposed, front

line workers should have at least double the amount of Sick Pay as those working 100% telework

4. **Field Differential** - a payment, similar to longevity pay, provided to all employees who are unable to telework due to having to report to an assigned work location to complete their duties