

**Joint Sustainability Committee**  
**RECOMMENDATION 20230927-010**

**Date:** September 27, 2023

**Subject:** Priorities for accelerating implementation of the Austin Climate Equity Plan

**Motioned By:** Rodrigo Leal

**Seconded By:** Christopher Campbell

## **Recommendation**

The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that additional emphasis be placed on implementing the goals and strategies in the Austin Climate Equity Plan (ACEP), to give our community a chance to meet the goals of the plan. The committee recommends that the City Council, city management, and appropriate city departments start work immediately to implement the following list of strategies identified as priorities.

### **Tracking and Reporting Recommendation:**

1. The Office of Sustainability should publish a schedule of official updates to the Climate Equity Plan implementation dashboard, including metrics on the specific sub-strategies within the plan and more formalized equity accounting, to enable the public to see progress toward Austin's climate equity goals. Recommend biannual or quarterly updates. All city departments should be instructed to provide timely updates with sufficient detail to enable these updates. *[ACEP]*

### **Sustainable Buildings Recommendations:**

2. City Council should (after appropriate stakeholder engagement by Austin Energy and Development Services) adopt the 2024 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC), with a local amendment to require space for a heat pump hot water heater, as quickly as possible. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
3. City Council should update the Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure Ordinance (ECAD) to require energy efficiency upgrades to multifamily and commercial buildings that perform poorly on energy audits. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
4. City Council should consider incorporating the use of the Passive House standard and/or Living Building Challenge standard into a density bonus program when the existing density bonus programs are consolidated. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
5. City Council should establish a policy to explicitly promote or incentivize the Passive House and/or Living Building Challenge standards throughout the City of Austin RFP

- and building funding scoring metrics (stating preference for and/or adding points to scoring for meeting these standards). *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
6. Austin Energy should create a pilot program, possibly utilizing funds from Austin Energy's Energy Efficiency Services fee or grants, to demonstrate the efficacy of certified Passive House and/or Living Building Challenge multifamily projects. Recommend funding \$3,000 per unit for first 1000 Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) units to certify and create a report detailing construction cost increases vis a vis utility savings and other benefits. *[ACEP Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
  7. Austin Energy should work with relevant commissions and stakeholders to update Austin Energy's Green Choice program to address current energy needs, such as load-matching renewable energy and improving grid resilience through energy storage. *[ACEP Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategy 3]*

### **Transportation Electrification Recommendations:**

8. The Joint Sustainability Commission recommends that Austin Energy, in collaboration with CapMetro and City of Austin Department of Transportation and Public Works, define and then conduct an Electric Vehicles (EV) Community Needs Assessment with a focus on the Eastern Crescent, including the Rundberg and Dove Springs areas. Assessment should build on community engagement and feedback (such as leveraging an Ambassadors program and partnering with entities such as TxETRA) to address mobility challenges in these regions and consider other electric mobility options such as buses, shuttles, neighborhood circulators carsharing. *[Transportation Electrification Goal 1, Strategy 1]*
9. The Joint Sustainability Commission recommends that Austin Energy develop city-wide incentives for buying and leasing new and used EVs targeted only to those who qualify for the Austin Energy Customer Assistance Program (CAP). *[Transportation Electrification Goal 1, Strategy 2]*
10. The Joint Sustainability Commission recommends that Austin Energy create a paid ambassador program (e.g., Climate Ambassadors), to provide stipends to individuals and organizations that already have trust in the community to provide EV education. Education should encompass clarifying the EV charging process, raising awareness about available incentives, and increasing community involvement by connecting systematically excluded groups with job and training/education opportunities in the EV field. *[Transportation Electrification Goal 2, Strategy 4]*

### **Transportation and Land Use Recommendations:**

11. The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that the City of Austin take a comprehensive approach to extreme heat mitigation, response, and resiliency, with a focus on the following actions:
  - a. **Cool Corridor Program.** Identify key mobility corridors that could serve as "[cool corridors](#)" with natural and engineered shade/cooling solutions to provide safe, climate-resilient connectivity on key pedestrian and transit routes. These corridors should (1) prioritize benefits in low-income neighborhoods facing high

heat vulnerability, (2) address gaps based on the City's existing heat vulnerability analyses, and (3) be developed in consultation with community-based organizations. Initial locations to prioritize for cool corridors should include the Rundberg area and the St. Johns, Montopolis, Franklin Park, and Dove Springs neighborhoods, due to [high heat vulnerability](#) as measured by various socioeconomic and heat exposure indicators. Key investments in cool corridors should include the following:

- i. Drought-tolerant tree plantings;
  - ii. In partnership with CapMetro, Art in Public Places, and other key institutions and stakeholders, create joint funding for research, design, and installation of resilient transit stops (including upgrades to existing transit stops) at sites facing high heat vulnerability (see [existing example](#)). These sites should provide adequate shade, especially during extreme heat advisories;
  - iii. Installation of shade structures (with solar panels, where feasible), with a focus on providing rest areas and shaded connectivity to parks, recreation centers, trails, schools and other community spaces/facilities;
  - iv. Installation of fan misters at high-traffic transit stops;
  - v. Installation of shaded drinking fountains in parks, recreation centers, trails, and other community spaces/facilities adjacent to cool corridors;
  - vi. Creation of bioswales, vegetated bump-outs, rain gardens, planter boxes, native/drought-tolerant vegetation, and other green infrastructure;
  - vii. Other shade/cooling amenities and features as described in the City of Austin's [Green Streets Introduction](#) and C40's [Urban Cooling Toolbox](#)
- b. **Dedicated Shade Fund.** Create a dedicated fund for shade and cooling that will require continued investment (minimum \$500,000 annually) following that made in the FY24 budget to address urgent shade needs in the identified cool corridors and at other key neighborhood sites based on community input.
- c. **Comprehensive Heat Mitigation and Response Strategy.** Develop a comprehensive strategy to coordinate heat mitigation and response activities in Austin in light of the increasing impacts of extreme heat due to climate change. The strategy should be developed in consultation with City departments, local and regional government stakeholders, CapMetro, the private sector, and non-profit and community partners (e.g., health and social service organizations; disability and homelessness advocacy groups, etc.). The strategy should identify key actions addressing heat mitigation, emergency preparedness, and heat response that will increase the city's resilience to extreme heat. The strategy should also include a clear definition of roles and responsibilities in the implementation of identified heat mitigation and response activities for each of the key stakeholder groups described above.

*[Transportation and Land Use Goal 3, Strategy 3] [Transportation and Land Use Goal 3, Strategy 6] [Natural Systems Goal 2, Strategy 3]*

## **Food & Product Consumption Recommendations:**

12. The disposal rate goal in the Austin Resource Recovery Zero Waste Plan should decline over time, rather than remain steady as indicated in the draft plan. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 3, Strategy 1]*
13. The near-term goals of The Austin Resource Recovery Zero Waste Plan should be redefined as a timeframe of 0-2 years to better align with the goals of the ACEP, instead of near-term being defined as 0-5 years as indicated in the draft plan. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 3]*
14. Office of Sustainability should work with relevant City departments, potentially including Austin Public Health, to begin a stakeholder process to develop educational campaigns and incentives to promote healthy, low-carbon, protein-rich food choices within the retail space and non-retail programs (Mobile Markets, Healthy Food Pantries and pop-ups, etc.). This may include a local program similar to Double Up Food Bucks for protein-rich plant foods (such as beans, lentils and soy). Direct incentives to grocery stores and affordable restaurants (which could be in the form of coupons available to customers) should also be considered. The Office of Sustainability should pursue any available options for outside funding, including an EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant, in addition to city funding. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 1, Strategy 3]*

## **Rationale:**

The Joint Sustainability Committee (JSC) is charged with advising city staff and City Council on implementation of the Austin Climate Equity Plan (ACEP). The JSC created three working groups to evaluate progress in implementing the strategies in each section of the plan. While some progress is being made, and we applaud the work that is being done by staff in several departments in alignment with the goals and strategies of the ACEP, there are many programs and policies that need addressing to implement the plan on the intended timeline. The plan was drafted with 2030 goals and strategies that were to be implemented by 2025. That leaves just over two years to at least get each strategy started. Given the accelerating state of the climate crisis and the fact that the IPCC says that the planet is on track for catastrophic climate change, we urge the City Council, city management, and all departments to work to implement the changes called for in the plan with urgency.

Our working groups have identified a list of strategies we recommend as a first round of priorities to start on now. This is just a subset of the many strategies that still need to be implemented in the plan. These strategies are being highlighted for different reasons, often for some combination of:

- Providing significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
- Improving equity in our community
- Improve community resilience
- Addressing sectors that have received little or no attention

## **Tracking and Reporting Recommendation Rationale**

1. More data and information and more frequent updates to the dashboard is needed to better gauge Austin's stated progress on climate goals. Data gaps, in particular on the

Climate Equity Plan implementation dashboard, exist. Status of progress is only shown down to the “strategy” level, but each “strategy” in the plan actually includes multiple strategies. Reporting on the status of each sub-strategy is needed. Status of the actual implementation is sometimes out of date, and often doesn’t include any information about who is leading an initiative or who to contact to get more information or get involved. Additionally, equity accounting needs to be formalized. [ACEP]

### **Sustainable Building Recommendations Rationale**

2. The 2024 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) will result in more efficient residential and commercial building and will establish initial standards for electric-ready and EV-ready construction. These are important improvements that are called for in the Austin Climate Equity Plan and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Constructing buildings that are efficient and allow for electrification is more cost effective than retrofitting them later. This is a low-cost option for the city because builders would make the investments. It will also ultimately reduce costs for building owners and occupants. [*Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3*]
3. The Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure Ordinance (ECAD) is a good first step to raise awareness about the efficiency of buildings, but with high demand for housing and commercial real estate, disclosure of this information isn’t sufficient to result in improvements to buildings. It’s time to follow the lead of other cities, such as [Washington D.C.](#), and require improvements when energy efficiency deficiencies are identified. This is a medium-cost option for the city because property owners would make the investments, likely with the help of existing incentives from Austin Energy. There are opportunities to create programs for affordable housing where they can receive technical and financial assistance to complete needed projects. Large initiatives like this can attract funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to address administration costs and needed financial assistance to building owners. [*Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3*]
4. It will increase climate resiliency, reduce costs for building owners and occupants, and greatly decrease carbon emissions in the building sector. Passive House and the Living Building Challenge are robust energy efficiency standards. A bonus program that incentivizes builders to meet these more robust standards will benefit building occupants and help meet energy efficiency goals set in the Austin Climate Equity Plan and the Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan. This is a low-cost option for the city because builders would make the investments. It will also ultimately reduce costs for building owners and occupants. [*Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3*]
5. The City of Austin should ensure that the highest energy efficiency and sustainable buildings standards are met for any project funded by the city. The Passive House and

Living Building Challenge standards are robust standards that the city should require for public projects. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*

6. Passive House and Living Building Challenge certified buildings provide safe, resilient housing options that use significantly less energy, especially at peak demand times and their initial costs are marginal. These buildings are being incentivized and even mandated in many cities and states across the continent. The pilot program we are recommending is intended to provide proof of concept examples and is modeled on a successful program in Massachusetts that has led to Passive House recently being adopted as code minimum for all multifamily projects above 12,000 sf. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategies 1 and 3]*
7. Austin Energy's Green Choice program served an important need for many years by providing funding for additional wind energy contracts. Now, funds collected by program participants are used to slightly decrease the Power Supply Adjustment (PSA) fee. While specific wind projects are still designated as supplying Green Choice Participants, new projects aren't procured based on program participation because Austin Energy already has such a large amount of wind generation in its portfolio. The current need is for renewable energy that is available at the times when Austin Energy customers are using energy, so purchasing or contracting for load-matching renewable energy and energy storage resources would be a good use of Green Choice funds. Addition of these dispatchable resources will enable Austin Energy to retire its coal and natural gas power plants and remain financially strong. *[Sustainable Buildings Goal 1, Strategy 3]*

#### **Transportation Electrification Recommendation Rationale:**

8. Austin Energy identified this as a high equity impact strategy. The Austin Climate Equity Plan notes that conducting a community EV Community Needs Assessment will assist in identifying the intersections of mobility challenges, transportation electrification, and racial and economic justice. The assessment will inform localized strategies to increase access to electric modes of transportation at the neighborhood level that will be supported by enhanced communications efforts and incentives. *[Transportation Electrification Goal 1, Strategy 1]*
9. Even though there are federal and state-wide incentives that have made EVs more affordable and comparable to internal combustion engine vehicles, [current incentives](#) are not targeted to low-income communities. Also, EV adopters tend to belong to higher income population groups. Therefore, a city-wide incentive toward low-income communities can promote a just and equitable transition to EVs and accelerate EV adoption city-wide. This would be considered a high equity and high emission reduction impact recommendation. *[Transportation Electrification Goal 1, Strategy 2]*
10. A lack of education around available federal and state tax credits for individuals, environmental impact and how an EV works is a significant factor in EV adoption. In addition to educating systematically excluded groups on EVs to increase EV adoption, providing them with education and career opportunities is

essential so that they can become part of the EV workforce. *[Transportation Electrification Goal 2, Strategy 4]*

### **Transportation and Land Use Recommendation Rationale:**

11. Summer 2023 was Austin's [hottest summer on record](#), surpassing prior records set in 2022 and 2011, and future summers are expected to bring more extreme heat. Mitigating heat through increased shade provision and urban cooling strategies is vital given that it is the [deadliest weather hazard](#) in the US and negatively [impacts health](#), [especially](#) for children, the elderly, low-income populations, communities of color, and outdoor workers. A recent assessment conducted by Go! Austin/Vamos! Austin (GAVA), the City of Austin, and UT Health of the University of Texas at Austin [attached] found that extreme heat is already causing a slew of negative physical and mental health impacts in low-income Austin neighborhoods, and residents of these areas would like to see more trees, parks, water features, and water fountains to mitigate climate-related heat impacts. Providing shade and cooling in public spaces serves the [Austin Climate Equity Plan](#)'s overall goal of implementing equitable strategies in response to climate change, prioritizing Austin's Eastern Crescent. *[Transportation and Land Use Goal 3, Strategy 3] [Transportation and Land Use Goal 3, Strategy 6] [Natural Systems Goal 2, Strategy 3]*

### **Food & Product Consumption Recommendation Rationale**

12. In order for Austin to meet climate goals, reducing waste in the first place is paramount. A disposal rate goal that declines over time is needed. While simply holding the disposal rate steady would be an improvement on the current trend in the short term (0-2 years), more ambitious goals are needed for the 2+ years timeframe. It is important to send a clear signal that the city is going to make a strong effort to reduce the amount of waste our community is producing. As more evidence mounts that there are significant environmental and health challenges around plastic recycling, reducing waste in the first place is paramount. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 3, Strategy 1]*
13. Austin's waste-related emissions are significant and take the form of short term climate pollutants like methane and nitrous oxides that have a large short term impact when compared to carbon dioxide. The draft Austin Resource Recovery Zero Waste Plan lays out near term goals of 0-5 years and long-term goals of 5+ years, but no goals are clearly established for the 0-2 year timeline, which would better align with the goals of the Climate Equity Plan. Thinking primarily in 5-10-year terms simply is not sufficient to move the needle on emissions in a way that aligns with climate science or the urgency of the plastic pollution crisis. Faster action is both needed and achievable. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 3]*
14. Incentivizing healthy, climate-friendly food choices is needed to reduce emissions while improving health. Many of the most nutritious foods also result in less greenhouse gas emissions. By promoting healthy, lower carbon alternatives, like elevating the consumption of beans and other legumes to meet dietary protein needs, and offering educational resources about the health advantages and reduced water usage associated with da, Austin can improve public health while contributing to reduced carbon emissions from the food sector. Providing and promoting healthy, climate-friendly food choices within the retail and non-retail programs can help make these foods more

visible and accessible to all Austinites. *[Food and Product Consumption Goal 1, Strategy 3]*

**Vote:** 11-0

**For:** Diana Wheeler, Alice Woods, Jon Salinas, Yure Suarez, Rodrigo Leal, Chris Maxwell-Gaines, Chris Campbell, Lane Becker, Heather Houser, Melissa Rothrock, Kaiba White

**Against:** N/A

**Abstain:** N/A

**Off Dais:** Charlotte Davis

**Absent:** Kelsey Hitchingham, Haris Qureshi, Larry Franklin, Bertha Delgado

**Attest:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rohan Lilauwala', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rohan Lilauwala, Staff Liaison