



February 15, 2024

Questions and Answers Report



Mayor Kirk Watson

Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison, District 1

Council Member Vanessa Fuentes, District 2

Council Member José Velásquez, District 3

Council Member José “Chito” Vela, District 4

Council Member Ryan Alter, District 5

Council Member Mackenzie Kelly, District 6

Mayor Pro Tem Leslie Pool, District 7

Council Member Paige Ellis, District 8

Council Member Zohaib “Zo” Qadri, District 9

Council Member Alison Alter, District 10

The City Council Questions and Answers Report was derived from a need to provide City Council Members an opportunity to solicit clarifying information from City Departments as it relates to requests for council action. After a City Council Regular Meeting agenda has been published, Council Members will have the opportunity to ask questions of departments via the City Manager's Agenda Office. This process continues until 5:00 p.m. the Tuesday before the Council meeting. The final report is distributed at noon to City Council the Wednesday before the council meeting.

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCIL

Item 6

Authorize an amendment to the 2023 Chilled Water Construction in the Right-of-Way Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity construction contract with DeNucci Constructors to increase the amount by \$6,250,000, for a revised total contract amount not to exceed \$31,250,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER RYAN ALTER'S OFFICE

1) It's noted that additional funding is being provided due to additional customer demand for chilled water connection projects. Please provide additional details on the level of customer demand and how much capacity this item will help achieve.

Additional customer demand stems from existing or planned construction projects that was not known when the contract's volume was initially estimated. One example that will impact customer demand is the Austin Convention Center Renovation project. Currently there are two district energy cooling chilled water pipes buried underneath the convention center that must be removed due to the renovation. To safeguard the distribution system's ability to support connected customers, Austin Energy (AE) must connect the 6th Street pipes to the distribution network before the demolition begins. This will ensure continuous chilled water service capacity for downtown customers. The AE project will have a cumulative effect on other projects and department customers, creating additional demands on this contract. As to the additional projects are not fully realized at this time, it's not possible to provide a reasonable estimate of the additional capacity that will result.

Item 14

Approve a resolution updating the Austin Climate Equity Plan regarding telework policies and per capita waste disposal rate goals.

COUNCIL MEMBER VANESSA FUENTES' OFFICE

1) What is the status of implementing the "Flexible Work Arrangement" policy laid out by the HR memo on Dec 1, 2023?

The [Administrative Bulletin](#) went into effect on January 1, 2024. As part of the implementation, employees were able to request an exemption from the minimum standard of 50% telework within a two-week period. These requests are evaluated by the Workforce Guidance Committee (WGC). The WGC anticipates the review of exceptions will be completed by the end of February, and all new schedules will be implemented by the end of March.

2) What is the total number of employees eligible for telework? (per department)?

We currently do not have data by department. Initial data was based on titles and we have aggregate data by title. The City has approximately 7,500 employees eligible for a telework schedule.

3) What is the total number of employees utilizing telework as an option? (per department)?

Approximately 6,000 employees utilized the telework earn code (TLC) on their timesheet during Pay Period 4 (January 28-February 10.) Data by department is below:

Department Name	# of Employees Coding TLC
Animal Services	15
Austin Energy	1,188
Austin Public Health	400
Austin Public Library	63
Austin Resource Recovery	108
Austin Water	564
Aviation	112
Building Services	39
Capital Delivery Services	203
Communications & Public Inform	27
Communications & Tech Mgmt	277
Convention Center	95
Development Services	378
Economic Development	69
Emergency Medical Services	65
Financial Services	300
Fire	120
Fleet Mobility Services	37
Forensics	17
Housing and Planning	81
Human Resources	113
Information Security Office	27
Law	79

Department Name	# of Employees Coding TLC
Management Services	89
Mayor and Council	38
Municipal Court	92
Office Of The City Auditor	29
Office of the City Clerk	20
Parks and Recreation	289
Police	386
Small & Minority Business Rsrc	28
Transportation & Public Works	361
Watershed Protection	249

Item 16

Approve an interlocal agreement with Travis County on a planning and implementation partnership for the Northeast Planning District.

COUNCIL MEMBER RYAN ALTER'S OFFICE

1) Please provide a copy of the draft interlocal agreement and indicate if this has already been approved by Travis County.

This item is being postponed.

Item 17

Approve an ordinance amending the Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Austin Police Department Operating Budget Special Revenue Fund (Ordinance No. 20230816-008) to add six full-time equivalent grant funded positions for the Austin Police Department Victim Crisis Intervention Project.

COUNCIL MEMBER ALISON ALER'S OFFICE

1) Please provide any available detail on the particular focus these 6 staff positions will have, such as client population or particular need. The RCA states that "converting these temporary grant positions to full-time grant positions will enhance the opportunity for the City to hire and retain personnel for the duration of the project, which is currently funded through September 30, 2024". What are the current plans to retain these personnel past September 30th and how will Council be made aware of that determination?

The new Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) program, which includes two Counselor and four Victim Navigator positions, is currently funded by the state through September 30, 2024.

Counselors provide mental health support and practical intervention to victims of crime immediately following an incident. Their services include crisis counseling and stabilization, justice support, personal advocacy, emergency placement in shelter, safety planning, and information and referrals to other helpful providers.

- FTE 1 & FTE 2: Counselors focus on hate crimes, elder abuse, identity theft, fraud, and financial crimes.

Victim Navigators help victims/survivors traverse the criminal justice system by coordinating with investigators and prosecutors, and by completing crime victim compensation applications and advocating with the Texas Attorney General's Office. They provide crisis intervention when needed and in addition, assist clients with basic needs, such as shelter, clothing, food, and transportation, and with plans to track their progress toward healing.

- FTE 3 & FTE 4: Victim Navigators focus on domestic violence and sexual assault.
- FTE 5: Victim Navigator focuses on youth violence and teen dating victimization.
- FTE 6: Victim Navigator focuses on hate crimes (Chief Henderson recently added this sixth position).

On February 8, the City submitted a grant application requesting funds to continue all six positions through September 30, 2025. The VOCA fund source is highly competitive and, similar to last year, we will likely not know the award decision until after the start of the next fiscal year. That said, the state has been incredibly supportive of APD's Victim Services programing for decades and we are hopeful for a positive outcome.

Please note, VOCA applications are reviewed and prioritized at the regional level (through CAPCOG) and regional rules currently in place restrict the number of years a project administered by a unit of local government may operate with state grant support. If the City receives an award for FY25 and/or FY26, the funding level may be reduced by 20% each year, in line with the regional rules.

As soon as the City receives notification of the application status, the City Manager's Office will provide an update to Mayor and Council.

Item 21

Approve a resolution authorizing the submission of an application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Mitigation Assistance grant program to fund flood education and outreach services.

COUNCIL MEMBER VANESSA FUENTES' OFFICE

1) *When will award notifications take place for this grant program?*

We anticipate FEMA issuing award notifications in Fall 2024, followed by funding awards in Winter 2024-Spring 2025.

Item 25

Approve a resolution establishing the City's intent to act urgently to address local causes of climate change, enhance the sustainability of City operations, and develop community resiliency to the impacts of extreme weather; directing the City Manager to post a public hearing of the Joint Sustainability Committee to gather public input and make recommendations; further directing the City Manager to prepare an environmental investment plan, including recommendations for appropriate funding sources; and setting a public hearing. (Suggested date and location: May 16, 2024, Austin City Hall, 301 W. 2nd Street, Austin, Texas)

COUNCIL MEMBER MACKENZIE KELLY'S OFFICE

1) *Since the status of each of 74 Austin Climate Equity Plan strategies is currently only reported through August 2022, when can the public expect an update of the status of each of these strategies? Without this update it will be quite difficult for citizens to meaningfully participate in the public process described in this resolution.*

Office of Sustainability staff is working on a full update to the Climate Equity Plan Implementation Dashboard, including transitioning to a new website format (much more user

friendly). We anticipate having all updates from departments complete and published by Friday March 1st. Once the new site is published, we will notify stakeholders and be available for any questions.

- 2) *Given that there are at least these plans to be considered: Austin Climate Equity Plan Water Forward Watershed Protection Strategic Plan One Austin: The Climate Resilience Action Austin Strategic Mobility Plan Austin Resource Recovery Comprehensive Plan Austin Energy Resource, Generation, and Climate Protection Plan, Is there a comprehensive list of the adopted goals and/or strategies of all of these plans? If not, would it be helpful for council to prioritize new funding options to accomplish additional goals council sets out to do?*

We do not have a current comprehensive list of all adopted goals / strategies across the 11 plans mentioned in the resolution. One of our first steps after adoption of this resolution will be to pull together this comprehensive inventory and could make it available to the public.

- 3) *Given the matching grant or special loan opportunities in the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the Texas Energy Fund (TEF), what current efforts are being made by the City, and its Water, Energy & Airport Enterprise Funds, to maximize Austin's benefit from these Federal and State opportunities?*

The City, including AWU, AE, and ABIA, is pursuing the opportunities that local government are eligible for in these pieces of legislation as described below.

Aviation:

- The Department of Aviation (DOA) is working with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to identify grant opportunities for upcoming Airport expansion and development projects. Both the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as well as the Inflation Reduction Act allocated funding for airports across the U.S. The FAA announced the Airports Climate Challenge and did provide supplemental discretionary funding specifically for climate related projects for FY22. We are monitoring this closely through the FAA and are waiting to see if a second round will be announced later this year. We are also meeting with the FAA to discuss other sustainability funding opportunities.

- The Department is continuing to assess possible tax incentives through the Inflation Reduction Act.

Austin Water:

Austin Water has been regularly receiving federal and state low-interest loans for drinking water, wastewater and reclaimed water infrastructure projects from the Texas Water Development Board since 2010. We continue to seek new federal loans through the Texas Water Development Board's (TWDB's) State Revolving Fund programs through annual project submittals. The majority of IIJA for water is passed through the state's TWDB's State Revolving Fund loan programs. We are hopeful the TWDB will receive a larger share of the additional IIJA funding in the future. We are also researching possible projects that might qualify for the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding as well as the federal Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan program, and grant funding through the Bureau of Reclamation.

Austin Energy:

Austin Energy began pursuing IIJA and IRA funds when grant programs began accepting applications in Spring 2023, including the following:

- **EPA's Solar for All Program:** AE participated in a coalition application with other Texas local governments and is currently awaiting a decision, likely to be issued in late spring or early summer. The funds would be used to expand access to community and rooftop solar for low-income AE customers.
- **DOE's Grid Resilience Innovation Partnerships (GRIP) Program:** AE applied for a grant to support distribution resiliency in 2023 and was not selected. Two GRIP concept papers have been submitted for DOE's consideration in 2024, and further applications are possible this year depending on the agency's feedback and internal resource availability.
- **DOT's Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (CFI) Program:** AE applied for a grant to invest in DC fast charging in 2023 and was not selected. The EV team is currently considering pursuing CFI funds again in the 2024 round.

Austin Energy has been awarded several smaller federal grants including an \$855,000 Energy Efficiency Block grant, which will be spent on municipal resiliency; a \$250,000 DOT grant, which will be spent on repairs of EV charging stations; and a DOE Clean Energy Innovation Fellowship, which is administered by Oak Ridge Associated Universities and pays for one year's salary of the fellow with an option to extend salary payment for a second year. Most IRA programs are likely to disperse funds before the end of this year. IIJA programs are funded through 2026, and thus there are expected to be further rounds in which the utility can compete, absent a major shift in federal policy.

4) *Is there any current coordination and cooperation between the city units to maximize the benefit of the efforts?*

City departments are working together and collaborating with local community based organizations (CBOs) to maximize federal and state funding opportunities. For example, the Office of Sustainability has been serving as convener and collaborative lead for efforts to pursue opportunities offered by the IRA as well as other opportunities for climate/environment funding, including IIJA grants. The OOS holds monthly meetings with over 20 City departments to identify opportunities in the IRA, update staff on pending efforts to secure funding, and provide departments with a collaborative space to discuss opportunities and best practices. Additionally, the OoS convenes regular meetings with CBOs to identify opportunities, facilitate collaboration, and has held internal workshops for City staff as well a workshop for staff and CBOs to identify potential projects and collaborations. Over 20 city departments have participated in these efforts as well as pursue their own initiatives, as described below.

Aviation:

Since June of last year, the Department of Aviation (DOA) has participated in the multi-departmental workshops organized by the Office of Sustainability who, with the assistance of a consultant (AECOM), has aimed to organize an interdepartmental effort to identify, prioritize, and apply for federal grant funding that can support projects that address climate change. While primarily focused on IRA grant opportunities, this work also examined funding opportunities associated with the IIJA and the Chips & Sciences Act. The stated purpose of these workshops was to identify projects, partners, and priorities in advance that could then set

up successful grant applications under compressed timelines. This work also serves to identify unfunded projects and emerging needs that could be part of other future grant applications by the City. The DOA added several projects associated with the upcoming Airport expansion and development program, and have been closely monitoring the process, but have since learned no specific opportunities were identified that matched our offered projects.

DOA recently received an award of \$400,000 from Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for the purchase of 10 new compressed natural gas shuttle busses to replace older propane buses in our fleet. This came from the Texas Government Alternative Fuel Fleet (GAFF) Grant Program. DOA partnered with the COA Fleet Dept. on their grant application. These new buses will utilize 100% carbon neutral renewable natural gas (RNG) further reducing the Airport's scope 1 emissions and the related carbon footprint. The buses are to be purchased in FY24.

Additionally, DOA staff will be having meetings with Austin Energy and Austin Water to explore possible grant, rebate, or other incentive opportunities that might align with the new Central Utility Plant project.

The DOA has been tracking and providing workshops and information to our onsite stakeholders and airlines for the Volkswagen Grant opportunity implemented through the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for electrification of their own fleets and ground service equipment.

Austin Water:

Austin Water has been working closely with Capital Delivery Services and Austin Energy on federal funding for a series of flood mitigation projects for Falwell Lane and the AW and AE facilities located there (South Austin Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant and AE's Sandhill power plant). We also plan to apply for state loan funding from the Texas Water Development Board's new flood program. We are also coordinating with the Office of Sustainability on the development and implementation of related climate plans.

- 5) *Regarding the possibility of a using General Obligation Bond election in 2024 to provide funding for any of the Environmental Investment Plan projects: Has the City Manager or Chief Financial Officers position against this timing changed since it was stated last April in the Austin Monitor article and the Council's Audit and Finance Committee's meeting?*

Based on the current level of authorized but unissued bonds (\$1.6 Billion), credit concerns related to the ratio of total liabilities to total revenue, and estimates from the Capital Delivery Services (CDS) Department regarding the projected timing for the delivery of projects authorized by voters in prior bond elections, the Financial Services Department continues to recommend November 2026 for the next bond election.

- 6) *Given that the city has approximately \$1.8 Billion in unappropriated GO bond authority, if new GO bond authority were approved by voters in 2024, when would the first of these new bonds be sold?*

CDS staff would need to prioritize any new capital projects authorized through a prospective 2024 bond program against other projects approved through earlier bond programs. The timing of beginning design work on any new projects approved through a 2024 bond would be a determining factor in the timing of bond issuances. If a 2024 bond program were to include funding for land acquisitions, the timing of those acquisitions would be a another determining

factor. The earliest that Finance staff projects issuing debt resulting from a 2024 bond program is September 2025, with the sizing being subject to the aforementioned factors.

- 7) *Given the all local GO bond propositions have to be approved by the Texas Attorney General for their legality, what state statutory authority exists to authorize local GO bonds for Environmental Investment Plan projects?*

Section 1331.052 of the Texas Government Code authorizes a home rule city to call a bond election to make public improvements or for another public purpose in the amount and to the extent provided by charter. The City will need to verify with its bond counsel regarding the eligibility of an Environmental Investment Plan as an authorized public purpose under state law.