



**EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2024**

**The Early Childhood Council convened in a regular meeting on Wednesday, February 14, 2024, at City Hall, Board & Commission Room #1101, 301 West Second Street in Austin, Texas.**

**Chair McHorse called the Early Childhood Council Meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.**

**Board Members in Attendance: Chair McHorse, Vice Chair Green-Otero, and Members Cormie, Hamilton, Hedrick, Menard, and Navarro**

**Board Members in Attendance Remotely: Members McCollum, Gordon, Jaime, Schennum, Selig, and Vargas**

**Staff in Attendance: Caitlin Oliver, Cindy Gamez, and Rachel Farley**

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL**

The first five speakers to register prior to the meeting being called to order will each be allowed a three-minute allotment to address their concerns regarding items not posted on the agenda.

**Michelle Mejia, representing the ATX Early Childhood Grassroots Coalition, provided a list of budget recommendations to support parents, families, and child care providers, specifically nontraditional care and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care.**

**Loretta Johnson, a child care home provider in 78744 provided comments requested funding in the city budget to support home-based child care providers.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

1. Approve the minutes of the Early Childhood Council Regular Meeting on January 10, 2024

**The minutes from the meeting on 1/10/2024 were approved on Member Navarro's motion and Vice Chair Green-Otero's second, on an 11-0 vote. There was one abstention from Member Hedrick. Member Gordon was not present at time of the vote.**

### **DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS**

2. Presentation from April Geruso, Planning Department, about updating the 2012 Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, and possible action to appoint a representative to support the development and implementation of the Imagine Austin comprehensive engagement process

**April Geruso, Planning Department Division Manager, presented an overview of the community update process for the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan*. Currently, the department is in the pre-planning process. *Imagine Austin* is the City's comprehensive plan dictated by the city charter. The plan is a 30-year vision for land use, growth, and other opportunities. The plan seeks to make Austin a city of "Complete Communities," defined as "areas that provide amenities, transportation, services, and opportunities that fulfill all residents' material, social, and economic needs." The Planning Department is working with other City departments on their equity-driven public participation plan for the update process. The department is creating a list of key stakeholders in collaboration with the Equity Office. They will initiate the first engagement this summer and then periodically until the updated plan is adopted. The department has also asked the Equity Office, the Office of Resilience, and Office of Sustainability to review the plan and provide feedback on equity. Geruso requested one member from the ECC to serve as a liaison through the development and implementation of the update process. The department estimates liaisons will spend 3-5 hours per quarter on the project, now through early 2026.**

**ECC Members requested that the Planning Department return to the ECC in the spring to present the engagement plan; that they consider offering some engagement opportunities in Spanish and other languages, so that people do not need to request interpretation; that the department shares a demographic snapshot of who they are engaging with along the way to ensure that they are not leaving key group(s) out during the engagement process; and that they collect data on the number of families with children that they are engaging with.**

**Member Navarro volunteered to serve as the ECC liaison. The motion to approve Member Navarro as liaison for the *Imagine Austin* update process was approved on Member Menard's motion, Vice Chair-Green Otero's second, on a 12-0 vote. Member Gordon was not present at time of the vote.**

3. Discussion and possible action to change the meeting date for the ECC regular meeting in April  
**There is a statewide convening of early childhood leaders that conflicts with the April 11 regular meeting date. Chair McHorse and Vice Chair Green-Otero will be attending that event. Vice Chair Green-Otero moved to cancel the regular meeting on April 11, 2024, and hold a special called meeting on April 16, 2024. Member Hedrick provided a second, and**

**the motion was approved unanimously on a 12-0 vote. Member Gordon was not present at time of the vote.**

4. Discussion about the budget recommendation process and possible action to establish the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget Workgroup

**Members discussed the city budget process. Budget recommendations are due to the Joint Inclusion Committee for consideration in March. Final recommendations are due to the City Budget Office at the end of March. The ECC plans to approve budget recommendations at the regular March meeting. Historically, the ECC establishes a budget workgroup to get input from community stakeholders, such as the SX6 Coalition, on the budget and consider public comment on the budget. Chair McHorse, Vice Chair Green-Otero, and Members Hedrick and Menard volunteered to serve on the ECC Budget Workgroup. The motion to immediately commence a budget workgroup that will be in place until August 2024, or until the City budget is approved, was approved on Vice Chair Green-Otero's motion, Member Menard's second, on an 11-0 vote. Members Selig and Gordon were not present at time of the vote.**

#### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

5. Updates from related groups (as needed), including Austin Chapter of the Texas Association for the Education of Young Children, Austin ISD, Child Care Regulation, Child Inc, E3 Alliance, Success By 6 Coalition, Workforce Solutions Capital Area, Travis County and other groups in attendance

**Brooke Freeland shared Success By 6 Coalition updates on behalf of the United Way for Greater Austin. The coalition has hired a new director, Barabra Grant Boneta. The coalition is working to gather budget recommendations by the end of February, to share with the ECC Budget Workgroup. Member Cormie shared an update that Travis County's Early Childhood RFS release date has been delayed to late March or early April. Contracts will still start in October 2024. Vice Chair Green-Otero shared that AISD is preparing for regular pre-K registration, which begins on April 1.**

**Member Gordon joined the meeting at 9:39 a.m.**

6. Update from Brooke Freeland, United Way for Greater Austin, about the 2024 Best Place for Working Parents initiative

**Brooke Freeland, representing Early Matters Greater Austin, shared information about the Best Place for Working Parents initiative, to educate and promote family-friendly workplace policies and support caregiving needs of employees. Examples of workplace policies that support families are parental leave, lactation support, and child care. Early Matters Greater Austin can provide tips and resources to help local businesses wanting to strengthen their family-friendly practices. The City of Austin has been designated as a Best**

**Place for Working Parents 4 years in a row. Freeland has contacted City Council members to let them know of this designation, and some council members have shared information about the initiative with their constituents. Freeland asked the ECC members to share information about this initiative with their council member's office.**

**Member Selig left the meeting at 9:53 a.m.**

7. **Presentation and discussion regarding the Fiscal Year 2024-2029 Consolidated Plan Community Needs Assessment**

*Presenters:*

- Chris Duran, Housing Department Senior Research Analyst
- Julie Smith, Housing Department Community Engagement Specialist
- Jamey May, Housing Department Housing & Community Development Officer
- Helen Howell, Austin Public Health Social Services Funding Specialist Senior

**Chris Duran, along with colleagues from the Housing Department and Austin Public Health, presented information about the consolidated, or strategic, plan for federal funding that the Housing Department executes every 5 years. The department is seeking community input regarding federal funding priorities. The following were topics of the presentation:**

**Where Does Funding Come From?**

- **Consolidated plans funding sources include:**
  - **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG),**
  - **HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME),**
  - **Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), and**
  - **Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG).**
- **Austin Public Health (APH) and the Economic Development Department (EDD) administer some of the CDBG funding, and APH administers HOPWA and ESG funding.**

**How are Funding Decisions Made?**

- **The plan is informed by:**
  - **A community needs assessment,**
  - **A housing needs & market analysis,**
  - **Available use of funding sources, and**
  - **Other planning efforts, like the Austin Strategic Housing Blueprint and the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice**

**Fair Housing Issues**

- **Potential upcoming "Equity Plan" related to fair housing**
  - **The department is seeking input and surveying on fair housing issues and experiences but is waiting for more guidance from the federal government on what needs to be included in the "Equity Plan."**
  - **In the meantime, the department is still viewing activities through an equity lens and has anti-displacement efforts.**

**Top Community Needs**

- **Feedback themes from community engagement in the last couple of years include:**

- “I need immediate help.”
- “I need a more accessible process.”
- “I want the opportunity to build wealth and long-term stability.”
- “I need help maintaining stability.”
  - Child care was a specific need listed under this feedback theme.
- During the planning for the previous 5-year plan, the department launched a community survey that found that the top 5 needs reported by the community were availability of affordable housing; services to prevent homelessness; job training, job opportunities, or a living wage; mental health and counseling; and affordable child care.

#### **Programs and Activities**

- Helen Howell, APH, shared that child care services are included under special needs assistance for the CDBG funding. In the last 5-year plan, Child, Inc.’s Early Head Start program and the AISD teen parent child care program were funded. APH also managed the CDBG funds for youth (ages 0-21) mental health services through Integral Care.
- The FY 22-23 Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) shows that the consolidated plan served over 3,000 households last year. Most served (64%) are extremely low income (less than 30% median family income. Additional demographic data is available in the appendix in the presentation slide deck. The department has heard from the ECC in the past and from other boards and commissions that there is a need to collect more demographic information, including the ages of those served.

#### **Community Input**

- The Housing Department is currently seeking input from the community via [www.SpeakUpAustin.org/MyCommunityNeeds](http://www.SpeakUpAustin.org/MyCommunityNeeds) and by the following methods:
  - Email [housing@austintexas.gov](mailto:housing@austintexas.gov)
  - Call: 512-974-3155
  - Text “MyCommunity” to 73224
  - Mail:  

**Housing Department**  
**Attn: City of Austin FY24-29 Consolidated Plan**  
**P.O. Box 1088**  
**Austin, TX 78767**
- The department is hosting 35 in-person engagement meetings between now and March 15.
- The public comment period on the first draft of the plan is from May 7 - June 5, 2024.

ECC members requested additional information and provided feedback. First, the members requested more specificity on what Workforce Solutions Capital Area is spending of the CDBG child care funds, for the ECC Budget Workgroup to consider. Second, a member asked what is being done to improve cross-departmental collaboration to make housing programs more accessible. Housing Department staff shared that cross-departmental collaboration is a priority, since there are several programs led by different departments and community members are not always aware

**of which department or office is responsible for a specific program. Third, members requested information about the family business loan program and home-owner repair programs. Chair McHorse volunteered to revise the ECC letter regarding the previous 5-year consolidated plan, for members to review at the next ECC meeting.**

8. Updates from the Joint Inclusion Committee (JIC) ECC representative, Leonor Vargas, regarding the discussion at the last JIC regular meeting about a resolution to combat anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab sentiments in Austin
- Member Vargas shared an update on a recommendation discussed at the JIC meeting, calling for City Council to address anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab sentiments in the City. The JIC will likely vote on a recommendation at the next JIC meeting. Member Vargas requested input from the ECC on whether the members would endorse a recommendation like that. Some members expressed that the recommendation aligns with the ECC charge to support Austin families. One member shared that they did not agree that the ECC should support the recommendation.**

#### **STAFF BRIEFINGS**

9. Updates from Caitlin Oliver, Austin Public Health (APH), regarding updated security measures for City of Austin email accounts and a new required training for commissioners
- Staff did not share updates.**

#### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

**Members did not list future agenda items.**

**Chair McHorse adjourned the meeting at 10:43 a.m., without objection.**

**The minutes were approved at the March 20, 2024, meeting on Vice Chair Green-Otero's motion and Member Hamilton's second, on an 8-0 vote. Members Navarro and McCollum not present at time of the vote.**