



## URBAN RENEWAL BOARD RECOMMENDATION 20240318-005

Date: March 26, 2024

Subject: FY25 Budget Recommendation

Motioned By: Commissioner Watson

Seconded By: Commissioner Motwani

### **Recommendation**

Approve the base budget for the Urban Renewal Board (the “Board”) consistent with the approved FY 2023-24 budget, including a 5% increase for inflation, and providing an additional \$100,000 to support an initial year of strategic planning initiatives, additional planning, engagement and outreach relating to the African American Cultural Heritage District, for a total FY 2024-25 budget of \$152,000.

### **Description of Recommendation to Council**

The Board’s budget for FY 2023-2024 is \$47,956. For FY 2024-2025, the Board requests this base funding amount be increased for inflation and supplemented with funds to support strategic planning initiatives for the Board as well as additional planning, engagement and outreach related to activation and implementation of district specific improvements within the Urban Renewal Plan area related to and supportive of the African American Cultural Heritage District (the “District”) and the vibrancy of a commercial corridor that reflects the heritage and future of the District, building upon the initial engagement accomplished and programs that have been identified for the multi-use project proposed for Blocks 16 and 18.

### **Rationale:**

#### *Strategic Planning*

The Board has diligently pursued the tasks assigned to it by City Council when the Urban Renewal Plan (the “Plan”) was renewed in 2018, and has completed its work on the updates to the Plan and the neighborhood conservation combining district documents relating to the Plan area. As the Board has already launched and continues to progress through the RFP process for the development of Blocks 16 and 18 – the final item assigned to it by City Council – the Board desires to explore how it may best support the Plan area and the City of Austin in the future. Many similarly situated urban renewal agencies and boards across the country have transitioned over time into other district support organizations once the goals of their original urban renewal plans have been accomplished. The Board would like to build on the engagement accomplished in the work to date and potentially help transition the momentum into a longer-term district support organization as has been done by similar bodies nationwide. The Urban Renewal Board would like to engage in a strategic planning process to determine its best path forward, from district support specific activities/purposes to potential governance models and requests funding to engage with consultants as it begins that process. It is intended that this work will be in coordination and collaboration with various City departments undertaking district policy work

such as the City Planning Department and the Economic Development Department, as well as area nonprofit organizations such as Six Square and other area stakeholders.

### *Activation and Implementation of the African American Cultural Heritage District*

City Council approved a resolution creating an African American Cultural and Heritage District on December 13, 2007 (Resolution No. 20071213-058). City Council reaffirmed support for the District in a resolution dated September 2, 2021 (Resolution No. 20210902-048). In that resolution, City Council directed specific actions relating to the District, including without limitation the creation of maps relating to the district, the development of way-finding signage within the District, and funding a placemaking program within the District. In that resolution, City Council also directed the Urban Renewal Board to consider in the request for proposals for Blocks 16 and 18 a variety of cultural and arts-related uses, including a cultural venue.

The Urban Renewal Board is in the second phase of a two-phase request for proposals process for Blocks 16 and 18. The public presentations from proposers have included a cultural venue and other cultural and arts-related uses, as was requested in the resolution. As this multi-use project continues to be developed, the Urban Renewal Board believes this will be an excellent opportunity to build off of the momentum created thus far through the RFP process, coordinate its efforts within the Urban Renewal Plan area and with respect to the project with the City's other efforts to activate and implement the larger District. The Urban Renewal Board would like to engage in a planning, engagement and outreach process relating to the activation and implementation of the District within the Urban Renewal Plan area and with respect to the project in coordination with the City departments that have been working on aspects of the District.

With this modest single year allocation, the Urban Renewal Board can begin a multi-year process of continued engagement to help lay the foundation for the future of the District, as well as collaborate with other agencies and departments to help deliver a fully realized District in line with the goals of the 2021 resolution. Although final scope will be aligned with available budget, the intended work could include (final scope to be developed in tandem with other City agencies and departments):

- Continued engagement with stakeholders (including the existing stakeholder working group) to identify opportunities within the District to provide complementary placemaking activities, and/or future development that could support/assist District goals.
- Assembly of opportunity maps of the District to review of potential future development opportunities based on public- or stakeholder- owned property in the District.
- Inventory of existing retail and service-based businesses in the District
- Economic analysis of business makeup and potential opportunities for complementary businesses to retain and support area residents, students, businesses and visitors.
- Review conceptual organizational strategies for the district including but not limited to a transition of the Urban Renewal Board to a commercial corridor stewarding or managing organization, and the potential effective collaboration models between Six Square, ARA, area institutions such as the Churches and Huston Tillotson University to maintain the vision for the Plan area as established in the Block 16 & 18 RFP process.

As described in the resolution, initiating planning around the Project site could serve as one of the first placemaking efforts within the District during the period prior to Project construction, and could potentially assist in the development of the initial concept identity for the District that could later evolve into more concrete items identified in the 2021 resolution such as wayfinding and signage for the District.

The Urban Renewal Board requests funding to engage with consultants to assist in this process.

**Vote 6-0**

For: Chair Escobar, Vice Chair Pierce, Commissioner Watson, Commissioner Motwani, Commissioner Tetey, Commissioner Hawkins

Against: N/A

Abstain: N/A

Absent: N/A

Attest: Chair Manuel Escobar



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