



Zero Waste Advisory Commission

April Meeting Minutes

April 24, 2024

The Meeting of the Zero Waste Advisory Commission (ZWAC) convened at AE Headquarters and through Video Conference on Wednesday, February 7th, 2024. The following are the meeting highlights. For detailed information please visit: <https://austintx.new.swagit.com/videos/303845>

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Gerry Acuna called the Commission Meeting to order at 6:11 pm

**Board Members in Attendance:** Gerry Acuna, Melissa Caudle, Craig Nazor, Cathy Gattuso, Ian Steyaert, Melissa Rothrock, Caitlin Griffith, and Amanda Masino.

**Board Members not in Attendance:** Madeline Jasper, & Katrina Scheihing

**Staff in Attendance:** Richard McHale, Theodore Horton, Gena McKinley, Ron Romero, Amy Slagle, Jason McCombs, Victoria Rieger, Marcus Gonzalez, Keri Greenwalt, Elizabeth Nelson, Claudia Quiroz, and Gustavo Valle.

### **1. Approval of the April 24th, 2024, Meeting Minutes (00:38)**

Chair Acuna entertained a motion for approval from Commissioner Nazor, seconded by Commissioner Gattuso. The board approved the minutes in a 6-0 vote with Commissioner Masino abstaining.

### **2. Approve a recommendation for Zero Waste Youth Education Program – Keri Greenwalt (01:40)**

PIO Program Manager Keri Greenwalt with Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) requested ZWAC's recommendation for the Zero Waste Youth Education Program contract renewal. The contract will provide students from kindergarten through 12th grade an interactive and educational outreach program that focuses on zero waste concepts and sustainability in support of Austin's Zero Waste Initiative. Keri explained that if the contract was not awarded, ARR will miss the opportunity to provide consistent engaging programs to young austinites through their schools and community groups. The current contract is set to expire on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024 and the recommended contractor is the current

contractor (Keep Austin Beautiful).

- I. Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders reviewed and discussed the current Zero Waste Youth Education Program. Commissioner Nazor asked what the cost of the former contract was. Keri replied that was approximately \$878,000. Commissioner Nazor also wanted clarification on who the previous contractor was. Keri explained that it was KAB (Keep Austin Beautiful)
- II. Commissioner Masino asked where the supporting documentation was. Keri noted that she was out of office and believed she had supplied the office with them. However, Keri mentioned she currently had the supporting documents and can share them with the board. While Commissioner Mansion acknowledged that the current vendor has done an excellent job, she wants time to review the supporting documents out of due diligence.
- III. Since the item is going to council on May 30, 2024, Commissioner Acuna deferred the matter to the following ZWAC meeting (5/8/2024) to allow the board more time to review the Zero Waste Youth Education Program contract renewal.

### **3. Presentation and Discussion of Austin-Travis County Food Plan – Sergio Torres-Peralta (07:22)**

Food Policy Coordinator Sergio Torres-Peralta from the Office of Sustainability provided a presentation regarding the Austin-Travis County Food Plan. In the presentation, Sergio discussed food insecurity in the county and various methods of tackling the challenge through food recovery. Furthermore, Sergio reviewed their data collection methodology regarding how to best address food insecurity within Travis County.

- I. Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders reviewed and discussed the current Austin-Travis County Food Plan. Commissioner Steyaert reiterated the importance of education as a means of promoting food recovery as well as tying it in with other goals such as reducing carbon emissions and waste in general. Sergio agreed with this and explained that his office was working with various departments and that education was one of the strategies to eliminate food insecurity.
- II. Commissioner Masino inquired which departments the Office of Sustainability was working with and the estimated budget for the Food plan. Additionally, Commissioner Masino asked who will be responsible for evaluating results as the project is implemented. Sergio clarified that although the Office of Sustainability will be act as the liaison for the food plan, it will be the community who will lead the project. In addition, the Office of Sustainability is working on obtaining exact figures for the budget as well finding the right staff to implement the food plan.
- III. Commissioner Acuna asked how large grocers responded to the food plan proposal. Sergio explained that it has been difficult to engage the private sector, but they have been successful in surveying 2000 food workers. Survey results show that there is a large demand for labor as its necessary to address food waste. Nonetheless, Sergio stressed that they need more engagement with large retail companies.
- IV. Commissioner Rothrock asked how big of a strategy are plant-based diets within the food plan. Sergio referred the Commissioner to goal number eight within the food plan as it discusses plant-based diets.
- V. Commissioner Griffith asked how compost would fit into the food plan. Sergio said that while there is not a concrete outline within the plan, he would take feedback to the office of Sustainability.

#### **4. Review and Discussion of Director's Report (34:48)**

Director Richard McHale presented the Director's Report that provided updates on the following:

- FEMA Reimbursement
- Refuse, Recycling, and Organic Carts (CO-OP)
- Brownie Drive Follow Up
- Brandt Road Encampment Cleanup
- Onion Creek Street Sweeping
- Solicitations Update
- Performance Reports
- Statistical Reports

#### **5. Presentation and Discussion FY25 Budget –Victoria Rieger (53:58)**

Finance Division Manager Victoria Rieger of Austin Resource Recovery presented ARR's Five Year Financial Forecast. The presentation covered an overview of residential rates, current year projects and an update on the city's budget development timeline.

- I. Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders reviewed and discussed the current FY25 Budget. Commissioner Nator asked if ARR was going to use TCEQ grants to purchase electric vehicles for trash collection. Director Richard McHale responded by the department is currently in talks to expand their electric vehicle fleet and charging stations.
- II. Commissioner Gattuso wanted clarification on what fuel ARR vehicles use. Director McHale explained that trucks use different kinds of diesel depending on the time of the year and light-duty pickups use unleaded gasoline. He added that ARR also uses electric sedans, and that the department aims to decrease their reliance diesel powered vehicles. Commissioner Gattuso followed up with how URO (Universal Recycling Ordinance) was enforced. Strategic Initiatives Division Manager Jason McCombs discussed how they've increased staffing for enforcement and how they travel around the city in electric vehicles to visit non-compliant properties. Jason also mentioned how ARR will soon start enforcing the ordinance on construction and demolition properties.
- III. Commissioner Masino had questions regarding data collected regarding percentage of curbside collected materials diverted from landfills compared to percentage of URO affected properties reporting access to recycling. Jason clarified that both are separate types of waste streams. The changes in percentage could be attributed to changes made on operations. ARR is working on expanding their compliance staff and increase overall compliance rates with URO properties.
- IV. Commissioner Acuna inquired whether ARR contributes to the general fund. Victoria confirmed that ARR does.

#### **6. Approve a recommendation for Northeast Service Center Negotiations – Richard McHale (1:24:56)**

Austin Resource Recovery Director Richard McHale sought favorable recommendation from the commission to begin negotiations with the selected vendor since it would soon head to council for official approval. Director McHale outlined how they selected the vendor and the importance of expanding ARR's infrastructure.

- I. Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders reviewed and discussed negotiations for the Northeast Service Center. Commissioner Acuna suggested that the item could be deferred to the next ZWAC meeting on May 8, 2024, should the commission meet quorum. Commissioner Nator asked what additional information the commission would have if the item were deferred until the next ZWAC meeting. Director McHale confirmed

that by next meeting they will know the name of the vendor plus a rough cost estimate of the project. Commissioner Steyaert wanted to know whether there was a vetting procedure in place for vendors. Director McHale confirmed that there was such a process in place and that the selected vendor was not only a local business but had also constructed several city facilities in Austin.

- II. Commissioner Rothrock asked what the benefits were of a building that could be deconstructed. Director McHale explained that it allows for the building to be relocated if need be. It would reduce waste and add to the building's functionality.
- III. Commissioner Acuna suggested for the item to have a provisional approval from the commission. Commissioner Steyaert motioned to provisionally approve the item with Commissioner Nazor seconding it. The commission unanimously approved the item on a preliminary basis.

**7. Approve a recommendation for Administrative Rules City Code Revisions RCA – Richard McHale (1:38:36)**

Austin Resource Recovery Director Richard McHale requested approval from the commission in regards to amending the Austin City Code. ARR is seeking this amendment to allow the ability to change administrative rules consistent with the city charter. In addition to complying with the city charter, such changes would reduce work for staff as they currently must prepare for city council and the commission. Further, it will allow for greater transparency as it permits more public participation. As it currently stands, ARR is the only department that must go to council to change its administrative rules instead of running through the city manager as the other city departments do.

- I. Vice President of Texas Disposal System James Adam Gregory commented on the item by requesting the commission to reject the request, as he claims approving the amendment would reduce accountability over ARR, that it would not reduce staff workload, and that the reason why the current rules were in place was over ARR mismanagement in 2012. He also argued that it would be unfair as ARR is a competitor and regulator.
- II. Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders reviewed and discussed the requested approval for Administrative Rules City Code Revision. Commissioner Masino wanted clarification as to what occurred in 2012 and why the item needs to be approved so quickly without give the commission time to review. Director McHale explained that in 2012 and Hauler Ordinance was passed where vendors could appeal unfavorable decisions to policymakers, not the city manager. Director McHale also emphasized while ARR might be a competitor to some extent, they are not regulators. That would be the city's responsibility. As for the urgency, the item would be going to council on 5/2/2024 so there would not be sufficient time to schedule a presentation.
- III. Commissioner Nazor asked whether this rule change would affect the bylaws, how long this rule has been in effect and why did ARR not say anything to council at the time. Director McHale said that it would not affect the bylaws and that it has been in effect since 2012. The ARR Director at the time mistakenly believed that the rule change would not affect the department. Commissioner Gattuso inquired whether amending the administrative rules would impact policy making and why ARR hasn't attempted to change the rules since its inception. Director McHale reiterated that it would only be applicable to daily operations and that he was the first director to try to change it. Commissioner Masino asked what the impetus for this rule change was. Director McHale said that it had occurred four months earlier at a city hall meeting when he was asked why he needs to take administrative rules

to council.

- IV. The council voted 7-1 against recommending the item with Commissioner Masino motioning it and Commissioner Gattuso seconding it. Commissioner Rothrock voted in favor of it.

**Future Agenda Items (2:24:09)**

- Recommend ARR's FY2025 Budget Proposal.
- Equity-Based Preservation Plan – Cara Bertron
- Northeast Service Center
- Residential Cart Cleaning
- Zero Waste Youth Education Program