



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Economic Prosperity Commission

Recommendation Number: 20240717-005:

Message Board for Use by Boards and Commissions

WHEREAS, the City Council Message Board is running on software whose last major update was in 2007, the time before smartphones. The software is named “phpBB”, where “BB” stands for “bulletin board”, a technology from the era of dial-up modems.

WHEREAS, Austin is known as a technology city. We are home to chip manufacturers like IBM, NXP, AMD, and Samsung.

WHEREAS, Austin has a significant presence of technology companies such as Apple, Google, Dell, and Meta and Indeed.

WHEREAS, Austin is home to the University of Texas at Austin, one of the top technology universities in the world.

WHEREAS, Technology is part of Austin’s brand and our city’s government should be using the most modern applications available.

WHEREAS, the city council message boards of Port Aransas and Amarillo are using WordPress, a newer software than Austin’s.

WHEREAS, there is a new generation of collaboration software based on instant messaging and designed with smartphones in mind. This includes such proprietary apps such as Slack and Discord, as well as open-source alternatives like Zulip and Matrix. This innovative technology is being used by the boards of for-profit and nonprofit organizations to communicate and collaborate.

WHEREAS, our Mayor, Kirk Watson, when in the Texas Senate, authored and championed changes to the Texas Open Meetings Act. The addition of Section 551.006 to the Texas Government Code permits government bodies to use online real-time communication that is visible to the public. Thus enabling the Austin City Council Message Board which now has thousands of posts and millions of views.

WHEREAS, the City of Austin’s Boards and Commissions play an important role in city government. They are vital in adjudication, monitoring rights, monitoring the environment, and oversight of critical industries. They improve Austin by cherishing amenities, fostering the arts, and providing expert advice to City Council and serve as the inclusive interface for communities that are often overlooked by the government.

WHEREAS, the City of Austin’s Boards and Commissions do not have message boards and, therefore, still suffer under the restrictive provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act prior to the addition of Section 551.006 by then Senator Kirk Watson.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Economic Prosperity Commission recommends the City of Austin:

1. Research and implement modern technology solutions for the current City Council Message Board.
2. Develop and provide access to a similar message board technology for use by Boards and Commissions, enabling members to openly discuss business in-between meetings.

Date of Approval: _____

Record of the vote:

Attest: _____

(Staff or board member can sign)