



ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20240717-004

Date: July 17, 2024

Subject: “Green Fee” for Environmental Investment Plan

Motion by: Haris Qureshi

Second by: David Sullivan

WHEREAS, the responsibility of the Environmental Commission is “to review and analyze the policies relating to the environmental quality of the City, act in an advisory capacity on all projects and programs which affect the quality of life for the citizens of Austin and to make recommendations for standards”;

AND WHEREAS, on August 8, 2019, the Council unanimously approved Resolution No. 20190808- 078 declaring a climate emergency in the City and calling to accelerate the timeline for achieving the City's climate goals;

AND WHEREAS, the climate crisis continues to worsen each year and the window of opportunity to preserve a livable climate is rapidly closing due to climate tipping points are likely already being reached;

AND WHEREAS, the greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal established by the Austin City Council in the Climate Equity Plan is to achieve “net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2040, utilizing a steep decline path followed by negative emissions” that translates to approximately 75% reduction in emissions by 2030;

AND WHEREAS, it is a scientific fact that greenhouse gas emissions reductions made sooner will yield climate benefits sooner and are therefore more valuable in avoiding tipping points that could make preserving a livable climate impossible;

AND WHEREAS, land acquisition, increasing the use of solar energy and battery storage, and tree planting are strategies that are adopted within multiple City of Austin plans (including the Climate Equity Plan, Water Forward, Austin/Travis County Food Plan, Watershed Protection Strategic Plan, and PARD Land Management Plan and Long Range Plan, and Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan) created with substantial public input and adopted by the Austin City Council;

AND WHEREAS, increasing pressures on the city budget and utility rates will make funding the identified sustainability needs very difficult without a new source of revenue;

AND WHEREAS, other cities have implemented dedicated fees to fund sustainability needs;

AND WHEREAS, the City of Austin already utilizes dedicated fees to fund certain sustainability needs, including at Austin Energy, Austin Water and Austin Resource Recovery;

AND WHEREAS, funding from existing fees is insufficient in magnitude to fund all existing needs and existing fees can only be used to fund certain programs.

THEREFORE, the Environmental Commission recommends that the Austin City Council adopt Item 93 on the July 18 Council agenda after amending it to include a bond package be put before voters on the November 2024 ballot that will provide funds to implement existing climate and environmental plans. An Environmental Investment Plan bond of \$250-350 million that funds a combination of land acquisition, solar and batteries for city buildings and operations, and tree planting is appropriate and needed. The Austin City Council and the City Manager should actively pursue establishing a new Green Fee to help fill the funding gap for implementing the Austin Climate Equity Plan and associated city plans, including:

- Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan
- Austin Strategic Mobility Plan
- Austin Resource Recovery Master Plan
- Water Forward
- Watershed Protection Strategic Plan
- Austin/Travis County Food Plan
- One Austin: Climate Resilience Action Plan
- Central Texas Regional Air Quality Plan
- Urban Forest Plan

This new fee should be structured to be equitable and responsive to Austin’s wealth gaps and the fee should provide predictable revenue. A legal analysis of options that could be paid for by residents, businesses, corporations, and/or visitors should be conducted and presented to the City Council for consideration as soon as possible.

The Environmental Commission recommends the city form a Citizen Board Advisory Board as soon as possible to make recommendations for the bond package. The Citizen Board Advisory Board should engage with the community, assess needs, and work with staff to create a comprehensive bond package.

Vote: 8-0

For: Perry Bedford, Jennifer Bristol, Richard Brimer, Hanna Cofer, Mariana Krueger, Haris Qureshi, Melinda Schiera, and David Sullivan

Against: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Peter Einhorn and Colin Nickells

Attest:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Perry Bedford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Perry Bedford, Environmental Commission Chair