

Joint Sustainability Committee
Sustainable Buildings Working Group
DRAFT 2025 Budget Recommendations

1. **Outreach and Engagement for Sustainability Incentives:** The City of Austin has numerous sustainability incentive programs aligned with the goals of the Climate Equity Plan. However, many of these programs are underutilized, especially among low-income households. A part of the challenge is awareness. The city should host a user-friendly website that consolidates information on all sustainability incentives offered by the City of Austin (i.e., home weatherization and repair, water conservation, rainwater collection, landscape and green infrastructure programs), as well as state and federal incentives that align with the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan and other city sustainability plans. Additional community outreach by the city and trusted organizations can increase the effectiveness of these programs. A new Community Engagement Specialist FTE in the Office of Sustainability is needed to coordinate community outreach and partnership activities associated with promoting sustainability incentives, with a focus on building relationships with low-income communities, communities of color, and related organizations and service providers. This employee would manage grants, contracts and stipends for community leaders and community-based organizations to do direct outreach to promote sustainability incentive programs in targeted Austin communities, in partnership with the Office of Sustainability.
 - a. Benefits: GHG reduction, water conservation, more equitable participation in programs
 - b. Cost: \$500,000 to the Office of Sustainability for:
 - i. one additional Community Engagement Specialist FTE
 - ii. outreach grants, contracts, and stipends to Climate Ambassadors
 - iii. website construction and maintenance
 - c. Plan Alignment: Austin Climate Equity Plan; Water Forward Plan; Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan
2. **Refrigerant Leak Reduction:** Funding for the Office of Sustainability to contract with an entity to develop a plan to manage refrigerants at city buildings responsibly on an ongoing basis, and develop a plan and develop recommendations for programs, policies and other strategies to address refrigerant leakage and proper disposal in the Austin community.
 - a. Benefits: GHG reduction
 - b. Cost: ?
3. **Air sealing task force and training program:** According to RMI and DOE air sealing is the lowest cost path to lowering operational carbon. Air sealing is a sequencing and trade knowledge problem, not a technical or product problem, so training up our trade base is the best way to ensure higher quality, more air sealed buildings. Under this new program, Austin Energy would publish air sealing results of all new buildings and retrofits and host trainings for trades on how to execute tight building envelopes. Research grants and federal funds for trainings and air sealing knowledge and skills

- a. Benefits: GHG reduction, air pollution reduction (and health benefits), affordability/bills reduction (for program participants and non-participants), improved indoor air quality, improved grid resilience
 - b. Cost:
- 4. **Water leak detection programs:** In 2023, Austin Water loss was 8,678,000,000 gallons of water which equates to a 21.68 gallons per capita per day of water loss.
 - a. Benefits: water conservation; GHG reduction (Reducing water loss in the water will preserve this water for productive use and will reduce energy use for pumping and treatment.)
 - b. Cost: current leak detection budget is \$1.14 million/year; increase to ?
- 5. **Improve rebates for residential and commercial landscape conversion:** During summer months, the use of water dramatically increases, mainly due to the watering of landscapes. Turf areas in particular require the most water per square foot in any landscape. While ordinances for new construction can help reduce the amount of turf areas, existing properties don't have requirements to adapt their landscapes to conserve water. Reducing the amount of turf grass that requires a lot of water to survive will help conserve water. Austin Water should offer more substantial and accessible rebates for landscape conversions. Currently, Austin Water offers a landscape conversion rebate of \$100 per 100 square feet, up to a maximum rebate of \$3000. Most conversions will be smaller areas and thus, the currently offered rebate amounts don't incentivize many customers to implement landscape conversions. In 2023, only 19 rebate applications were submitted to Austin Water. Austin Water should implement a tiered rebate structure that offers more rebate money for smaller areas of landscape conversion and should substantially increase the maximum rebate offered. As suggested by the [Get Fertilizer Wiser campaign](#), there should also be incentives that are more easily accessible to individuals who may not need to fully remove turf grass in order to reduce or eliminate watering.
 - a. Benefits: water conservation; GHG reduction (Reducing water use for landscaping irrigation will preserve this water for productive use and will reduce energy use for pumping and treatment.)
 - b. Cost: \$400,000
- 6. **Sustainable Construction Procurement Coordinator:** The City of Austin has multiple departments that issue requests for proposals (RFPs) for building and other construction projects and purchase construction materials, including concrete. There is currently a lack of consistent emphasis on sustainable construction materials and practices. There is also a need for additional coordination and leadership to implement low-carbon concrete standards for City of Austin projects to reduce emissions as quickly as possible. A new full-time Sustainable Construction Procurement Coordinator position within the Office of Sustainability is needed to review RFPs and purchasing requests for construction materials and lead the development and implementation of clear local standards for low-carbon construction materials in a timely manner. If a full-time position isn't granted, a temporary position should be added, although this will be an ongoing need, so a permanent position will serve the city best.
 - a. Benefits: GHG reduction

b. Cost: ?

7. Austin Civilian Conservation Corps: Funding should be allocated to support the continuation and expansion of the green workforce training through the Austin Civilian Conservation Corp (ACCC) program. The following tracks should be fully funded: Natural Systems (protecting critical ecosystems on preserves and parkland); Environmental Education; Zero Waste (should be expanded beyond computer refurbishment); Clean Energy (solar, energy efficiency, demand response, batteries). Providing permanent funding to support and expand these programs is important in order to train people to provide needed environmental services in Austin. The ACCC should connect program participants with relevant programs at Austin Community College (such as the solar technology program and sustainable agriculture program) whenever possible.

a. **Benefits:** The Austin Civilian Conservation Corp invests in people and projects that have a direct impact on climate action and climate justice and builds more equitable pathways to employment, organizational leadership, entrepreneurship and strengthens networks of support for those most impacted by a changing climate. Local workforce can enable cheaper and faster transition to clean energy. Training programs can improve equity in accessing and excelling at clean energy jobs and support local businesses and increase local economic benefits, including job creation and sales tax revenue.

b. Cost: \$1 million?