

Joint Sustainability Committee

RECOMMENDATION 20240228-XXX



Date: February xx, 2025

Subject: Joint Sustainability Committee Budget Recommendations

Motioned By:

Seconded By:

Recommendation

Description of Recommendation to Council

Sustainable Purchasing: The City of Austin Climate Equity Plan Food & Product Consumption Goal 2 says “By 2030, greenhouse gas emissions from institutional, commercial, and government purchasing are reduced by at least 50%.” Strategy 2 to achieve that goal is “Strengthen the City’s sustainable purchasing program.” Recent analysis by the Office of Sustainability shows that over 80% of the City of Austin’s greenhouse gas emissions come from the products and services that the city purchases. It is essential that the City establish a comprehensive Sustainable Purchasing Plan that sets minimum standards for all products and services the City procures, and the City must prioritize ongoing staff support to educate all departments on sustainable purchasing and ensure that purchasing decisions comply with the Sustainable Purchasing Plan. This work is also foundational for achieving Climate Equity Plan goals for private sector sustainable purchasing in the Austin Community. Current staff in the Office of Climate Action and Resilience and the Purchasing Department have been making efforts to accomplish this goal while also doing their other work, but the volume of work needed is beyond what existing staff have capacity for. **The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that \$110,000 be allocated to adding a full-time Sustainable Purchasing Program Manager position to the Purchasing Department.**

Pro-Climate/Pro-Health Food Implementation: The City of Austin Climate Equity Plan Food & Product Consumption Goal 1 says: “By 2030, ensure all Austinites can access a food system that is community- driven, addresses food insecurity, prioritizes regenerative agriculture, supports dietary and health agency, promotes plant-based foods, and minimizes food waste.” The Austin/Travis County Food Plan includes “Goal 8: Pro-climate, Pro-health Raise awareness of the benefits of foods that nourish our bodies and reduce the overall environmental impact of our food system while addressing barriers to access.” A key need for the plan is for community education and outreach. Partners have developed some materials but there is no budget for community outreach to share information and opportunities. **The JSC recommends that \$75,000 be allocated to the Office of Climate Action and Resilience for community outreach and education on benefits and opportunities to eat more pro-climate/pro-health foods.**

Circular economy and waste diversion programs: The City of Austin Climate Equity Plan Food & Product Consumption Goal 3 says : “Aggressively pursue waste reduction, organics composting, and recycling to achieve a new zero-waste goal following adoption of the new Austin Resource Recovery Zero Waste Plan.” In 2011, Austin’s City Council adopted a Zero Waste Goal that challenges our city to divert 90% of material away from the landfill by 2040. Achieving this goal requires diverting significant amounts of waste from our landfill, but unfortunately, the diversion rate has stagnated at or below 40% for many years. Because such a large portion of greenhouse gas emissions is attributable to products and materials we use, reducing waste is essential to achieving the community net-zero goal. Also, Austin-area landfills are near capacity and building additional landfills would be unpopular and costly in today’s expensive real estate market. Many of the circular economy and waste diversion programs can also reduce costs for residents and spur local economic development. This is a challenging goal that will require a multi-pronged effort. A commensurate amount of resources is not being deployed to meet established goals. **Thus, the JSC recommends that the Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) waste diversion and circular economy budget should be increased by approximately \$750,000 to support the following waste reduction initiatives:**

1. **MoveOutATX:** This program helps students donate unwanted, gently used items at organizations that can use them, rather than sending them to a landfill. The current \$15,000/year budget only allows for this event to take place in July in West Campus, but students live in other parts of the city, including the E. Riverside area. **Increase the budget to \$45,000/year to allow for more events in areas where students live.**
2. **Fix-It and Repair Clinics:** The current \$7,650/year budget only allows for 3 Fix-It Clinics and 8 Repair Clinics per year, which isn’t much given how many different types of items can be repaired and the size of the city. **Increase the Fix-It and Repair Clinics budget to \$50,000/year to allow for more frequent events in more parts of the city.**
3. **Zero Waste Business Incentives and Rebates:** This program provides incentives to businesses to reduce waste, including switching from plastic or Styrofoam containers to reusable or compostable alternatives. The current program has a \$25,000/year budget to provide a one time incentive up to \$3,000, but only about \$5,000/year is actually being

spent because the program structure doesn't align with costs. **The incentive should be increased and expanded to be a multi-year incentive to help businesses address ongoing costs. Increase budget to \$250,000/year to provide \$5,000 per year to 50 businesses.**

4. **ARR zero waste education:** Multifamily properties are now required to provide both composting and recycling collection, but the education provided by the private sector is minimal compared to what ARR provides to its customers. **The Direct Mail and Postage budget should be doubled from \$257,000 to \$514,000 and the Advertising, publication and educational outreach budget should be doubled from \$163,000/year to \$326,000/year (for a total increase of \$419,000) to allow ARR reach the full Austin community, including in residents in multifamily homes. ARR should also consider using some of these funds for paid canvassing in neighborhoods where diversion rates are lower than average.**

Electric Mower: The City of Austin Climate Equity Plan Food & Product Consumption Goal 2 says: "By 2030, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from institutional, commercial, and government purchasing by at least 50%." Electric mowers have no direct exhaust emissions, eliminate oil runoff from engine leaking and the spilling of oil which harms water quality, and have lower maintenance costs than fossil-fuel riding mowers. Additionally, the use of battery electric landscaping equipment will help protect the health of city staff and the public from air and noise pollution. The city has yet to purchase an electric mower and would gain valuable information by piloting this equipment. **The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends that \$75,000 be allocated to the Parks and Recreation Department or the Transportation Public Works Department for the purchase of one commercial-grade battery electric riding lawn mower and the building or upgrading of the necessary charging infrastructure.**