

Special Report

Affordability Review Project: Inventory of City Programs and Initiatives

March 2017



This special report includes an inventory of City programs and initiatives that affect affordability for Austin residents, as well as a list of affordability-related literature. Also included are themes we noted that may affect the quality and effectiveness of the City's efforts to improve affordability. These themes are:

- the City has historically lacked an organizational vision or strategy for making Austin more affordable;
- information on City programs and initiatives may not be easily accessible;
- available data is inconsistent and may be unreliable or incomplete;
- programs may have unanticipated effects on affordability; and
- market forces may counter City efforts to address affordability.

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Why We Did This Report

In February 2016, City Council requested that the Office of the City Auditor identify factors, as well as City programs and initiatives that affect affordability for Austin residents. The Office of the City Auditor presented information about demographics and key affordability-related cost drivers to Council in December 2016. In this report, we present an inventory of City programs and initiatives that affect affordability for residents, as well as trends that emerged as we assembled the inventory.

Inventory Results

We identified 85 City programs and initiatives that affect affordability for Austin residents. A complete inventory can be found on page 9.

Excerpt from Inventory

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
1	City/County Child Care Program	Austin Public Health	Child care	The City connects income eligible families to subsidized and direct child care.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
2	Dove Springs Youth Services (DSYS) program or 78744 Community Youth Development Program	Austin Public Health	Child care	DSYS provides a neighborhood safe place and learning center for children in the 78744 zipcode.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
3	After School Programs	Parks and Recreation Department	Child care	The Austin Parks and Recreation Department offers after school programs for the community that foster youth development in a safe	Cultural & Learning Opportunities

Our inventory focused on programs and initiatives that are currently underway, and does not include some notable initiatives that are currently in development, such as CodeNext, the 2016 Mobility Bonds, the expedited building permit process, and the Music and Creative Ecosystems Omnibus.

The majority of these programs and initiatives (about 74%) are provided by the following City departments: Austin Public Health, Neighborhood Housing and Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Austin Public Library, and Development Services.

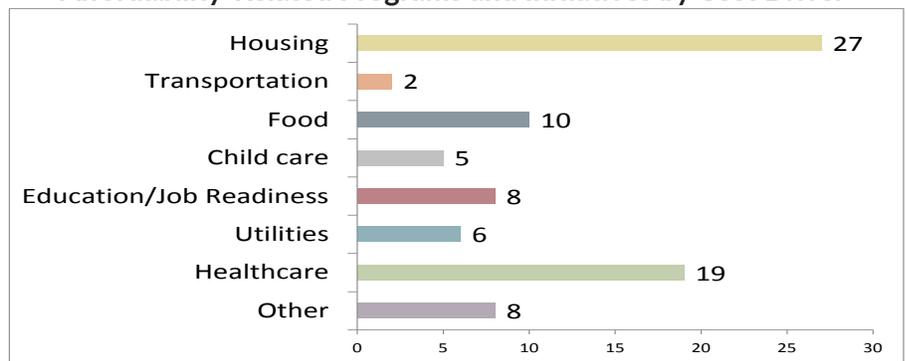
While these five departments manage the largest number of affordability-related programs and initiatives, a large number of programs does not necessarily indicate a large impact on affordability. A single program may reach a large number of households, or may reach comparatively fewer households but nevertheless have a substantial economic effect. For example, Austin Energy reported that the Customer Assistance Program serves approximately 40,000 income-eligible customers a year by providing a 10% discount on their utility bills, among other savings. On average, families saved about \$800 in fiscal year 2015 according to a

press release from Austin Energy. ¹ Conversely, the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department reported that 75 individuals received help through the Tenant Rental Assistance Program in fiscal year 2016. Average assistance amounted to about \$6,300 per person, according to the department.

We also looked at the number of affordability-related programs and initiatives in terms of the cost drivers identified in our 2015 Council District Profiles², as shown below. The District Profiles identified housing, transportation, and food costs as the largest expenses for households citywide and in each district. Again, number of programs is not a measure of impact, but it does indicate that many of the City’s affordability-related programs and initiatives are focused on housing.

Examples of programs that fall under each cost driver category are

Affordability-Related Programs and Initiatives by Cost Driver



NOTE: “Other” refers to programs and initiatives that affect multiple cost drivers.

provided below. A full inventory of programs, and their associated cost drivers, is included at the end of this report.

Sample Programs by Cost Driver

Cost Driver	Sample Programs
Housing	Down Payment Assistance Program
	Developer Incentives and Agreements
Transportation	Transportation Services for Senior Citizens
Food	After School Meals
	Fresh Food for Families
Child Care	City/County Child Care Program
Education/Job Readiness	Workforce Development Contracts
	Employment Assistance Centers
Utilities	Customer Assistance Program
	Utility Rebate Programs
Healthcare	Immunization Program
	Community Health Paramedic Program
Other	Alternatives to Incarceration

¹ “City Customer Assistance Program Provides \$20 Million for Help with Utility Bills”, 7/11/2016. <http://austinenergy.com/wps/portal/ae/about/news/press-releases/2016/cap-provides-help-with-utility-bills/>

² For the complete report detailing factors that affect affordability in each district, see: <http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Auditor/AS16101.pdf>.

Major Themes

As we assembled this inventory, we noted the following themes that may affect the quality and effectiveness of the City's efforts to improve affordability:

1. The City has historically lacked an organizational vision or strategy for making Austin more affordable.
2. Information on City programs may not be easily accessible.
3. Available data is inconsistent and may be unreliable or incomplete.
4. Programs may have unanticipated effects on affordability.
5. Market forces may counter City affordability efforts.

The City Has Historically Lacked an Organizational Vision or Strategy for Making Austin More Affordable

The City offers many programs and initiatives that are aimed, directly or indirectly, at improving affordability for residents. Notably, City Council recently established citywide strategic outcomes and began several affordability initiatives. However, the City has historically lacked an organizational vision or strategy on how to address affordability.³ Also, the City has not defined "affordability", and there is currently no citywide criteria or goals to guide departments' work in this area.

Without a unified vision, strategy, or criteria, departments often operate in isolation or within silos on affordability-related issues. This could result in duplication of services between departments, or between the City and counterparts such as Travis County, the Austin Independent School District, or area non-profits. This could also result in gaps that cause specific populations to be underserved. Without an organizational strategy, the City may not be able to identify what needs are being addressed, what gaps exist, or how City resources can be used most effectively to improve affordability in Austin.

Additionally, a lack of vision, strategy, and criteria may limit the City's ability to define relevant performance measures. Therefore, assessing what progress has been made to make Austin more affordable over time is challenging.

Information on City Programs May Not be Easily Accessible

The City lacks a comprehensive, centralized tool or webpage for residents to use to find programs that could help them with affordability issues. Residents may be discouraged from trying to access affordability programs if they have to search many different pages and sites to obtain the information they need.

The main search function on the City website does not always produce helpful results for residents who are researching affordability-related programs. For example, searching "help utilities" does not return any information on the Customer Assistance Program or weatherization programs within the first page of results. If the user does not know the name of the program they are looking for, or the name of the department that may offer a certain kind of program, they may struggle to find what they need.

³ External groups have examined strategies for making Austin more affordable, such as the recent Liveable City report on "Reclaiming Affordability in Today's Austin".

Even if the user navigates to the correct departmental website, they may find that eligibility information is not always available or easily accessible. For example, while the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development website frequently references median family income (MFI) percentages as eligibility criteria, determining what that means in dollar terms may require clicking through multiple pages.

In many cases, residents cannot apply for assistance programs online. Requiring residents to mail in applications or visit a department in person may act as a barrier to accessing these programs. This may be particularly true for residents who are interested in multiple programs that are operated by different departments, or whose work schedule prevents them from meeting with City staff in person during city business hours.

Austin 3-1-1 can be an excellent source to learn about available programs, especially for residents who do not have access to, or the requisite skills to use, a computer. However, the user experience for people calling 3-1-1 may depend on the institutional knowledge of the customer service agent. Customer service agents may have trouble finding all the pertinent programs for a caller, because the City does not have a comprehensive tool or list of all programs affecting affordability. Additionally, residents will still need to access the City's website or visit departments in order to apply for programs.

Available Data is Not Consistent and May Be Unreliable or Incomplete

The effect of City efforts to address affordability cannot be consistently determined due to limitations with available data and the quality of that data. Data on affordability-related programs and initiatives is not collected in a consistent manner, and thus cannot currently be used to assess city-wide efforts. For instance, the City does not always track or report on the number of unique individuals served by its programs and initiatives. Some departments report unique individuals served while others may rely on statistics that reflect repeated visits or interactions. For example, the immunization program run by Austin Public Health tracks the number of immunizations rather than the number of unique individuals that were immunized. It is not always clear whether a reported performance measure reflects unique individuals or not.

The inconsistency in data collection has multiple potential effects. First, the City may have difficulty producing an accurate count of the number of individuals or households assisted through programs.⁴ Additionally, because programs report impact in different ways, policymakers may not be able to make meaningful comparisons between programs. Finally, because impact is inconsistently reported, determining the City's return on investment – or value received in exchange for the dollars spent – would be onerous.

⁴ Departments reported that because different contractors use different databases, departments are not always able to determine the number of unique individuals that have received assistance. Additionally, some contractors may not track unique individuals served at all.

Calculating impact or return on investment is also limited by available cost information. It was not always possible to associate funding with specific program activities. For example, the cost of staff time for certain programs offered or coordinated by Austin Public Library and Austin Public Health was not available. If program cost cannot be estimated, analyzing return on investment or comparing alternative programming options cannot be done.

Additionally, some of the data provided during this special project was incomplete, or reported in such a way that may be misleading to decision-makers. For example, the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department reported that 13 affordable units had been completed in connection with Planned Unit Developments, which is supported by the City's online Affordable Housing Inventory.⁵ However, the reported number leaves out affordable units that had been completed in projects such as the Mueller development. Mueller was created as a Planned Unit Development but the units are coded in the Affordable Housing Inventory under the "Master Development Agreement" and "S.M.A.R.T. Housing" programs.⁶

As reported in previous audits, data reliability is a serious risk and may undermine the City's affordability efforts.⁷

Programs May Have Unanticipated Effects on Affordability

Virtually all policy decisions may affect affordability, and it may not be possible to fully identify or understand the ramifications of these decisions when policy decisions are made. Furthermore, evaluating whether a program ultimately does more to help or hurt affordability is difficult due to the data limitations previously discussed. This is particularly true for programs and initiatives that may indirectly affect affordability. Although it was not feasible to examine all City policies and their potential effect on affordability during this project, some examples demonstrating this issue are discussed below.

First, the City co-sponsors many large special events. In addition to directly benefiting the residents who attend these events, co-sponsoring special events often generates hotel occupancy tax revenue, boosts sales for local businesses, and provides revenue-generating opportunities for residents able to rent their living spaces to out-of-town guests. However, this same economic benefit may negatively impact other Austin residents. Specifically, some residents may see their rent or property taxes increase

⁵ Data was pulled from the version of the Affordable Housing Inventory that was publicly available on 2/14/2017.

⁶ Note: The S.M.A.R.T. Housing program is categorized under "Developer Incentives and Agreements" in the inventory located on page 9.

⁷ The November 2015 "Prioritization of Affordable Housing Development Audit" found that key information needed to evaluate program effectiveness within NHCD was incomplete, inaccurate, or unavailable. Further, the December 2015 "Building and Development Fees Audit" found that 40% of tested transactions were not assessed in accordance with Council-approved fee schedules. The October 2015 "Austin Energy Low-Income Weatherization Audit" found that program goals and objectives were not consistently stated or measured and some data needed for program evaluation was not readily available. Finally, the September 2016 "Parks and Recreation Department Resource Allocation Audit" found that some program information is not complete and accurate.

beyond affordable levels due to the increased desirability of their living space, which may compound over time as more special events are co-sponsored by the City.

A second example of a program that may have an unintended effect on affordability for residents is the City's development review process. This process is vital to ensure resident safety, as well as to ensure development occurs in accordance with Imagine Austin. However, the length and complexity of the current development review process has been cited as a limitation to the housing supply, which may ultimately increase housing costs for residents.⁸

Even City programs and initiatives that are deliberately targeted at improving affordability for some residents may result in increased costs for others. For example, the increased prevalence of accessory dwelling unit (or "granny flat") permits may provide a valuable source of income for households that own and rent out the dwelling. However, properties with an accessory dwelling unit are highly desirable for that same potential income, which may contribute to increased home values in the area. Consequently, other residents may have difficulty paying increased property taxes or purchasing a home in their desired neighborhoods.

Market Forces May Counter City Affordability Efforts

Throughout this project, it became clear that certain affordability-related expenses – principally housing costs – are largely outside of the City's control. The City's tools to counter these forces are limited.

Housing was the largest affordability-related household expense in every district, per the Council District Profiles.⁹ Due to the high demand for housing in the Austin area and the comparatively limited supply, housing costs will likely continue to rise. Although the City has control over its own property tax rates and has instituted a homestead exemption, City taxes make up only 20% of the median City homeowner's estimated property taxes in Travis County.¹⁰

Furthermore, Texas state law prevents the City from using strategies that are used in other states to generate or preserve affordable housing in significant quantities. For example, state law does not allow for the alleviation of property taxes for low income or senior households through the use of property tax circuit breakers.¹¹ Similarly, although the City can encourage the voluntary development of some affordable housing through

⁸ The development review process is cited as a constraint on the housing supply by the Household Affordability Code Prescription prepared for CodeNext, as well as by numerous external sources.

⁹ Annual spending on housing costs was estimated at \$12,430 for renters and \$23,690 for owners in the 2015 city-wide profile. The profiles also include district-level spending estimates.

¹⁰ In comparison, Austin Independent School District estimated taxes constituted 52% of the median City homeowner's estimated property taxes in Travis County. These statistics are based on 2015 property information and tax rates.

developer incentives, state law limits the City's ability to create such units through mandatory inclusionary zoning.¹² Given the current housing market, the volume of developers who elect to participate in the incentive programs may not sufficiently fill the affordable housing gap.

Alternative tools for generating affordable housing include community land trusts and land banks. Community land trusts work by allowing a non-profit corporation to retain ownership of a piece of land while selling homes on the site. The homeowner holds a long-term lease on the land from the non-profit. Because the land is separated from the home, housing prices are lower. Additionally, the land may have tax-exempt status. A land bank is an inventory of properties, usually acquired through foreclosure or private sale. Municipalities and counties may develop or resell properties in the land bank, so long as the property is used for the development of affordable housing.¹³ However, these tools are not frequently used by the City or are still in development.

Although the City's ability to make Austin more affordable for residents is limited, in part, by market forces and State law, the City has created many City programs and initiatives to tackle affordability. The following inventory reflects the many affordability-related City programs and initiatives currently underway.

¹¹ Property tax circuit breakers generally work by preventing an "overload" of property tax bills for individuals within specified income or age categories. In one common variation, if property tax exceeds a pre-defined percentage of an individual's income, the individual is only responsible for paying the tax up to that percentage. A 2010 study by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy found that two-thirds of states use property tax circuit breakers in some form, although they are predominately restricted to elderly homeowners.

¹² Portland, OR, San Francisco, CA, and Boston, MA use some form of mandatory inclusionary zoning. The latter two cities allow developers to substitute a fee in lieu of the required affordable units.

¹³ Some limitations exist on where land banks may be implemented in Texas. See Local Government Code §373A.201 and §379C.002.

Inventory of City Programs and Initiatives that Affect Key Affordability Cost Drivers

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
1	City/County Child Care Program	Austin Public Health	Child care	The City connects income eligible families to subsidized and direct child care.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
2	Dove Springs Youth Services (DSYS) program or 78744 Community Youth Development Program	Austin Public Health	Child care	DSYS provides a neighborhood safe place and learning center for children in the 78744 zip code. Youth services are offered at the Dove Springs Recreation Center.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
3	After School Programs	Parks and Recreation Department	Child care	The Austin Parks and Recreation Department offers after school programs for the community that foster youth development in a safe environment.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
4	Financial Aid for Youth Programs	Parks and Recreation Department	Child care	PARD subsidizes 50% of the cost of out-of-school programs and summer camps for eligible youth.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
5	Summer Playgrounds Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Child care	Summer Playgrounds is a free drop-in program for children to participate in supervised activities during the summer months.	Health
6	Library Computer Training Services	Austin Public Library	Education/Job Readiness	The library offers classes on various subjects, including using email, searching for jobs, and creating a resume.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
7	Library Public Internet and Computer Access	Austin Public Library	Education/Job Readiness	Austin Public Library locations offer workstations with free internet access, and also offer free Wi-Fi access.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
8	Play, Read, Grow	Austin Public Library	Education/Job Readiness	A free workshop that teaches parents about early literacy, and teaches parents how to help children read.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
9	Tutoring	Austin Public Library	Education/Job Readiness	Austin Public Library partners with Austin Independent School District to provide free tutoring at certain branches of the library. Tutoring is available for students in grades 1-12.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
10	Workforce Development Contracts	Economic Development Department, Austin Public Health, & others	Education/Job Readiness	Austin Public Health, the Economic Development Department, and other city partners provide an array of services to improve self-sufficiency and increase household income, such as ESL classes, GED classes, and job readiness training. The majority of these services are provided through contracts with social service organizations.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
11	Employment Assistance Centers	Human Resources Department	Education/Job Readiness	The Human Resources Department operates centers across the city to assist members of the community in finding employment. The centers help with job searches, resume development and critiquing, interviewing coaching, skills testing, and offender workforce development	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
12	Youth Initiatives Office	Human Resources Department	Education/Job Readiness	The Youth Initiatives Office coordinates the Get Ready! and Emerging Leader internship programs as well as working with the community to identify and support the needs of Austin's youth and families.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
13	Section 3 Employment Opportunities	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Education/Job Readiness	The Section 3 program provides employment opportunities for low and very low-income individuals.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
14	Fresh Food for Families	Austin Public Health	Food	Austin Public Health partners with the Central Texas Food Bank to distribute food at neighborhood centers.	Health
15	Healthy Options for the Elderly	Austin Public Health	Food	Austin Public Health staff distributes food to qualifying seniors. The food is provided by the Central Texas Food Bank.	Health
16	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Outreach	Austin Public Health	Food	SNAP outreach efforts are designed to make more eligible people aware of SNAP, and to aid them in enrolling in the program.	Health

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
17	Sustainable Food Policy Board	Council	Food	The Board advises both the Austin City Council and Travis County Commissioners' Court on the need to improve the availability of safe, nutritious, locally and sustainably grown food for all residents.	Health
18	After School Meals	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	PARD works with the Central Texas Food Bank to distribute meals to children participating in after school programs.	Health
19	Community Gardening Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	City-supported community gardens provide residents the opportunity to grow their own food on City-owned and managed property, or to obtain waivers for water taps for gardens on privately-owned property.	Health
20	Congregate Meals Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	Senior congregate meals offer an opportunity for seniors to socialize and eat a nutritionally healthy meal. Participants have access to health and welfare counseling as well as nutrition education and free food.	Health
21	Kids' Café Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	The Café provides free hot meals to youth ages 18 and under at 3 recreation center locations with commercial kitchens through a partnership with the Central Texas Food Bank.	Health
22	Summer Food Service Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	PARD and the Central Texas Food Bank provide free meals to all children aged 18 years old and under at PARD recreation centers during summer months.	Health
23	Weekend Backpack Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Food	The backpack program provides eligible children with supplies for weekend meals at all summer camp and playground sites. This is a partnership with the Central Texas Food Bank.	Health
24	Affordable Care Act enrollment outreach	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	Enrollment outreach is offered through a contract with local non-profits that help educate and enroll individuals in health insurance plans.	Health

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
25	Family Health Programs	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	Austin Public Health manages a collection of initiatives, including family planning, sexuality education, and skills training.	Health
26	HIV Resource Administration Unit and Prevention and Care Services	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	This unit connects citizens to HIV/AIDS services, most of which are provided by third parties.	Health
27	Immunization Program	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The program's primary focus is on offering immunizations to children who are uninsured or on Medicaid, but it also offers immunizations to uninsured adults.	Health
28	Lactation Centers	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The Lactation Support Center is a specialized clinic where mothers can receive free breastfeeding assistance, child weight checks, and health education.	Health
29	Monthly Clinic at Turner Roberts Recreation Center	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The clinic provides community health services in an effort to help fill a service gap in the northeast area of Austin. PARD and Austin Public Health have worked closely with the community to provide this clinic.	Health
30	Programs associated with the 1115 Medicaid Waiver	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	1115 Waiver programs are designed to transform healthcare for safety net populations. There are a variety of programs that target different populations, including diabetes education, smoking cessation, training for health-care workers, and support for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.	Health
31	Refugee Health Screening Clinic	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The Refugee Health Screening Clinic provides services to refugees relocating to Austin, as well as to asylees and certified victims of human trafficking.	Health

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
32	Senior Services	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	Senior services offered by Austin Public Health include: access to food, daytime support services, and other case management activities. Services are provided through contracts with third-party agencies.	Health
33	Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Clinic	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	Austin Public Health provides testing, diagnosis, and treatment of STDs, as well as outreach, education, and case management.	Health
34	Tuberculosis Clinic	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The clinic evaluates clients for latent and active tuberculosis. The clinic provides free treatment, but skin tests are \$20.	Health
35	Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program	Austin Public Health	Healthcare	The WIC program provides nutritional and preventative health services to eligible women and children, including nutrition education, breast feeding support, and assistance to purchase nutritious food.	Health
36	My Library Keeps Me Healthy	Austin Public Library	Healthcare	The “My Library Keeps Me Healthy” program offers health screenings and health-related information at library locations, including Faulk Central Library, Little Walnut Creek Branch, Terrazas Branch, and Yarborough Branch.	Health
37	Plan4Health	Austin Transportation Department	Healthcare	The Plan4Health pilot program seeks to increase physical activity and improve the sustainable food system through increased use of multimodal transit systems, community engagement, and outreach. The program is supported by a grant from the American Planning Association.	Health
38	Community Health Paramedic Program	Emergency Medical Service	Healthcare	This program is designed to reduce avoidable trips to the ER by providing outreach and education in the community.	Health
39	Community Relations and Injury Prevention Programs	Emergency Medical Service	Healthcare	This collection of outreach programs includes infant safety, car seat safety checks, CPR training, and more.	Health

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
40	"Walk with a Doc" Program	Parks and Recreation Department	Healthcare	Held at parks or trailheads, sessions involve a health professional leading a discussion on specific health topics with community members, providing free blood pressure checks and cholesterol screenings, and engaging in exercise with the group by going on a walk together.	Health
41	Free Facilities Access	Parks and Recreation Department	Healthcare	PARD offers free access to select gymnasiums, pools, fitness and weight rooms, community gardens, and health promotion programs.	Health
42	Swim Safe	Parks and Recreation Department	Healthcare	PARD provides free swimming lessons to at-risk Austin youth. This is a partnership between the Austin American-Statesman, the YMCA of Austin, and PARD.	Health
43	Short-Term Rental Regulations	Austin Code Compliance	Housing	Eligible homeowners can rent a portion of their home to generate an alternative income stream.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
44	Austin Housing Finance Corporation	Austin Housing Finance Corporation	Housing	The Austin Housing Finance Corporation issues single- and multi-family bonds that finance affordable housing, and provides federal grant money to the City to increase affordable housing.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
45	Emergency Shelter Grants	Austin Public Health	Housing	These federal grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development are used to rehabilitate and operate homeless shelters, provide social services, and prevent homelessness.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
46	Housing Assistance Program	Austin Public Health	Housing	Austin Code works with Austin Public Health to connect individuals with community resources to aid with home repairs, social services, and more.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
47	City of Austin Homestead Exemption	Council	Housing	Homestead exemptions reduce the taxable value of a person's primary residence (homestead) by a specified amount. Austin's homestead exemption is currently at 8%. The 8% exemption was first applied for the tax year beginning January 1, 2016.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
48	City of Austin Property Tax Rate	Council	Housing	The City of Austin levies a property tax in order to support City operations. City property taxes account for approximately 20% of the median homeowner's estimated property tax burden.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
49	Accessory Dwelling Units	Development Services Department	Housing	Accessory dwelling units, or "granny flats", may allow residents to either rent out space on their property or to house family members.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
50	Development Fee Waivers for Accessible Ramps	Development Services Department	Housing	The plan review fee, building permit fee, and development surcharge are waived for the construction of accessible ramps on existing single-family and duplex residential units by non-profit organizations that use volunteer teams.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
51	Development Permit and Review Process	Development Services Department	Housing	The goal of the City's development permit and review process is to ensure that development follows all applicable codes and regulations.	Safety
52	Express Permits	Development Services Department	Housing	Non-structural work to residential homes can be permitted quickly and at less cost than a formal plan review application.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
53	Self-Certification for Certified Building Designers and Texas-licensed Architects	Development Services Department	Housing	Registered Architects and Certified Building Designers may certify compliance with City Code and Ordinances, meaning that staff do not have to review some aspects of the plans.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
54	Affordability Impact Statements	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	Staff prepare an Affordability Impact Statement for decision makers when a proposed ordinance, rule or other City Council action could impact housing affordability. A negative determination requires City Manager approval to move forward.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
55	Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The City administers these federal grant funds, which can be directed towards a variety of activities including housing, job creation, and public services such as tenant counseling and child care.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
56	Community Land Trust (CLT) program	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a non-profit entity that acquires and retains ownership of the real property and sells the improvements via a long-term ground lease to a homeowner, another non-profit, or a cooperative housing corporation. By separating the land from the improvements, a CLT can ensure a property is used for affordable housing in perpetuity, lower the up-front costs of acquisition, and reduce the tax burden of residents. Austin currently has two community land trusts.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
57	Developer Incentives and Agreements	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	Developer incentives and agreements may produce affordable units and/or fees-in-lieu with a focus on low- to middle-income households and people with disabilities. Developer incentive programs encourage the voluntary creation of affordable rental and owned units in private developments. Examples of incentive programs include the S.M.A.R.T. Housing Program and the Downtown Density Bonus Program.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
58	Down Payment Assistance Program	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	This program covers the down payment and closing costs via a deferred 0% interest loan for eligible first-time home buyers in Austin.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
59	HOME Investment Partnerships	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The City administers these federal funds for affordable housing activities, such as tenant-based rental assistance, assistance to home buyers, and new construction of housing.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
60	Homelessness Services	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The purpose of the Homeless Services activity is to prevent homelessness and to provide a continuum of services to help the homeless. Interventions include helping homeless individuals attain sustainable housing.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
61	Homeowner Assistance Program	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	NHCD offers home repair assistance through a variety of programs, including foundation, plumbing, electrical, heating/air systems, roofing, lead abatement, and accommodations and modifications to make homes more accessible.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
62	Homestead Preservation Districts	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	A Homestead Preservation District is a designated geographic area in which local governments can use special tools to preserve and promote affordable housing, such as Homestead Preservation Reinvestment Zones, homestead land trusts, and homestead land banks. The City currently has one Homestead Preservation District.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
63	Housing Developer Assistance Program	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The City, through a wholly-owned and operated subsidiary called the Austin Housing Finance Corporation, operates an application-based direct financial assistance program for housing development using a mixture of available local and federal funding sources with a wide range of priorities. Funds are provided to third parties through forgivable loans in exchange for units of housing with restrictive covenants, such as income restrictions for a defined period of time.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
64	Housing Trust Fund	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	This fund assists with preserving and creating affordable housing within Austin.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
65	HousingSmarts	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The HousingSmarts program provides free educational services, including home buyer training and foreclosure prevention counseling. Graduates from the program receive one-on-one counseling and may be eligible for the Down Payment Assistance program.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
66	Permanent Supportive Housing	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	The Permanent Supportive Housing program provides housing and wrap-around services, with the goal of reducing annual healthcare and criminal justice costs for homeless individuals.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
67	Tenant Relocation Assistance Policy	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	This program establishes requirements for tenant notification and tenant relocation assistance for development projects that may displace tenants from eligible multi-family structures and mobile home parks.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
68	Tenant-based Rental Assistance	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Housing	NHCD's tenant-based rental assistance program provides rental subsidies and case management services to help families struggling with rent and/or utility bills.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
69	Flood Buyout Program	Office of Real Estate Services	Housing	As a public safety measure, the Watershed Protection Department buys flood-prone homes in the Onion Creek Watershed and Middle Williamson Creek Watershed. Homeowners and tenants displaced by the project are offered advisory and financial assistance in relocating to a new home.	Safety

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
70	Neighborhood Centers	Austin Public Health	Other	Neighborhood centers allow residents to access a range of social services at once. Common services provided by the City include food pantries, clothing, notary services, case management, referrals, and application assistance. The centers also provide access to licensed social workers. Three centers provide health services via registered nurses, including immunizations, WIC referrals, and blood pressure checks.	Health
71	Quality of Life Programs	City Manager's Office	Other	Quality of Life programs involve evaluation and community engagement, with the goal of improving conditions for Austin's African American, Asian, and Hispanic populations.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities
72	Business Workshops	Economic Development Department	Other	The Economic Development Department hosts a variety of classes to help residents start and run their own businesses.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
73	Living Wage and Local Workforce	Financial Services	Other	The Council has passed a living wage policy for all full-time regular employees, seasonal lifeguards, temporary employees, and employees of firms operating under Chapter 380 agreements.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
74	Alternatives to Incarceration	Municipal Court	Other	Austin Municipal Court offers a variety of alternatives to incarceration including: payment plans, community service, and waivers of fines and fees for indigent defendants.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
75	Downtown Austin Community Court	Municipal Court	Other	The Downtown Austin Community Court is a "problem solving" court that works primarily with defendants who are homeless and/or repeat offenders. The court offers referrals to supportive services as well as alternative sanctions, such as community service and rehabilitation services.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
76	Youth Services Juvenile Program	Municipal Court	Other	This program contains a variety of services aimed at juveniles (ages 10 to 16) who have been charged with a Class C misdemeanor. The goal is to "hold youth accountable for their actions and reduce the likelihood of future interaction with the criminal justice system" by offering counseling, sentencing recommendations, and referrals to community organizations.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
77	Matched Savings Accounts	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development	Other	The City of Austin provides a match of \$4 for every \$1 saved, with a 6-month minimum savings period and with \$1,000 as the maximum savings that will be matched. Savings through this program can be used for higher education, purchasing a home, or small business development/expansion.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
78	Transportation Vouchers	Austin Public Health	Transportation	Taxi and bus vouchers help clients access key services including HIV and STD services, and WIC programming.	Health
79	Transportation Services for Senior Citizens	Parks and Recreation Department	Transportation	The Senior Transportation program provides curb to curb service for seniors. Seniors may request rides to the congregate lunch program, for non-medical errands, medical appointments, group travel, and elsewhere throughout Austin.	Mobility
80	Austin Energy Rebate Programs	Austin Energy	Utilities	Austin Energy provides a variety of rebate programs aimed at helping property owners reduce electricity bills. These include appliance efficiency rebates, electric vehicle rebates, green building rebates, thermostat programs, and the weatherization program.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
81	Customer Assistance Programs	Austin Energy	Utilities	These are a series of programs that help utility customers facing temporary and long-term financial difficulties, as well as serious medical problems.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability

#	Name of Program or Initiative	Responsible Department	Cost Driver	Summary	Council Strategic Outcomes
82	Kill a Watt Energy Detectors	Austin Public Library	Utilities	The Kill a Watt program allows residents to check out wattmeters from Austin Public Libraries. The wattmeter allows residents to easily see how much various appliances cost to run by hour, day, week, month, and year.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
83	Rebate Austin	Austin Public Library	Utilities	Rebate Austin is a directory that provides information about rebates offered by the City of Austin and Texas Gas Service. Austin Library also helps to coordinate an information fair with participation from the utilities.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
84	Austin Water Rebate Programs	Austin Water	Utilities	Austin Water provides rebate programs aimed at helping property owners reduce water bills. These include drought abatement rebates, irrigation rebates, rain harvesting rebates, free shower heads and aerators, and water landscape rebates.	Economic Opportunity & Affordability
85	Digital Inclusion Initiative	Telecommunications and Regulatory Affairs	Utilities	The City's digital inclusion initiatives consist of conducting a survey of residential technology usage, a Grant for Technology Opportunities program, financial and staff support for Austin Free-Net (a nonprofit organization working to bridge the digital divide), and working with various private sector partners (such as Google Fiber) to facilitate community access to digital services.	Cultural & Learning Opportunities

Appendix A - Affordability-Related Literature

As part of this project, City Council requested that the Office of the City Auditor develop a list of affordability-related literature. We reviewed numerous studies examining issues affecting household affordability at the state and local levels. These studies address issues such as different approaches to property taxation, eviction, and the intersection of housing and transit costs. We also reviewed innovative peer city initiatives, such as Denver's efforts to employ social workers in libraries and establish a transit-oriented development fund. Finally, we included some tools that may be helpful in identifying and comparing key data points in different geographic areas.

Cross-cutting Research and Studies

1. Johnson, Matthew. "Stepping Up: How Cities Are Working to Keep America's Poorest Families Housed." Urban Institute, June 16, 2015. <http://www.urban.org/features/stepping-how-cities-are-working-keep-americas-poorest-families-housed>.

SUMMARY: The article reviews the differences in Boston and Austin's ability to generate and preserve affordable housing, and traces some of the key policy drivers and historical patterns at work. Critical differences include a legacy of federal and state support in Boston, as well as a network of developers, lenders, and other groups that have worked on housing preservation since the late 1980s. Notably, Suffolk County, MA was able to provide "affordable and adequate" housing for almost 51% of its extremely low-income households in 2013 (approximately 37,000 units). Austin was able to provide substantially fewer units, housing 15% of extremely low-income households in 2013.

2. "Building Economic Security in America's Cities: New Municipal Strategies for Asset Building and Financial Empowerment." Corporation for Enterprise Development, January 2011. <http://cfed.org/assets/pdfs/BuildingEconomicSecurityInAmericasCities.pdf>.

SUMMARY: This report examines financial empowerment strategies that are currently being piloted by local governments. The report argues that traditional local efforts targeting economic security focus on increasing household income, but this is not sufficient without providing households with appropriate financial services, education, and incentives to encourage savings. Major recommendations including access to financial information and counseling, increasing access to income supports and tax credits, connecting households to safe financial services that facilitate saving, creating opportunities to convert emergency savings into assets, and ensuring sufficient consumer protections exist.

3. "American's Rental Housing: Expanding Options for Diverse and Growing Demand." Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, December 9, 2015. <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/americas-rental-housing>.

SUMMARY: The report identifies the pressures that a sustained, high demand for housing places on low-income renting households, and identifies some policy approaches. The report emphasizes that a high demand for housing frequently results in the loss of affordable rental housing stock, as these units are either demolished or converted to higher-priced rentals. Consequently, there is a gap in supply, and more renting households are cost-burdened. The report identifies the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program as a primary means of expanding the supply of affordable rental housing, but also acknowledges the importance of land use regulations and non-federal sources of financing.

4. King, Christopher T., Cynthia J. Juniper, Rheagan Coffey, and Tara C. Smith. "Promoting Two-Generation Strategies: A Getting-Started Guide for State and Local Policy Makers." Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, August 2016. <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/40967>.

SUMMARY: This report details a two-generation strategy for breaking the cycle of poverty, and is an update of a report that was originally issued in 2013. The program addresses several different

two-generation programs, and identifies key factors that support the success of these programs: supportive policy frameworks, leadership, program administration, integrated and flexible funding streams, and evidence oriented culture.

5. "50-State Property Tax Comparison Study." Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and Minnesota Center for Fiscal Excellence, June 2016. <http://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/other/50-state-property-tax-comparison-study-0>.

SUMMARY: The report compares different local property tax rates in 2015 across all fifty states, and provides some explanation for the degree of variation (such as the presence, or absence, of local sales and income taxes). Both large cities and rural areas are considered. The report includes information on homestead, commercial, industrial, and apartment properties, and includes data on both net tax bills and effective tax rates. Among other issues, the report emphasizes the difference between tax rate and home values: some areas may have a high tax rate but low home values, resulting in a comparatively low tax bill.

6. Lipman, Barbara. "A Heavy Load: The Combined Housing and Transportation Burdens of Working Families." Housing Affordability Series. Center for Housing Policy, October 2006. http://www2.nhc.org/media/documents/pub_heavy_load_10_06.pdf.

SUMMARY: The author identifies housing and transportation as the two largest expenses for most metropolitan-area households. The report reviews 28 metropolitan areas and argues that households may make trade-offs in housing and transportation costs. For example, a household may pay less for housing in a more rural area, but pay higher transportation costs compared to a household closer to the city core. The report argues that a lack of affordable housing close to the center of a city may result in increased traffic congestion, as households are spread further away from their locations of employment. The report also looks at the use of different modes of transport in the analyzed regions.

7. McKernan, Signe-Mary, Caroline Ratcliffe, Breno Braga, and Emma Cancian Kalish. "Thriving Residents, Thriving Cities: Family Financial Security Matters for Cities." Urban Institute, April 21, 2016. <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/thriving-residents-thriving-cities-family-financial-security-matters-cities>.

SUMMARY: The report focuses on the connection between economic security of residents and the economic stability of the city in which they live. For example, households with savings are less likely to use government subsidies, and households who earn a secure wage are more likely to contribute to local property, sales, and income taxes. The report argues that households with savings are less likely to be evicted or miss a utility payment, and more likely to weather income disruptions without long-term effects.

8. Puentes, Robert, and Elizabeth Roberto. "Commuting to Opportunity: The Working Poor and Commuting in the United States." Transportation Reform Series. Brookings Institution, February 2008. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/commuting-to-opportunity-the-working-poor-and-commuting-in-the-united-states/>.

SUMMARY: In this analysis of the connection between housing and commuting expenses of the working poor, the authors find that the working poor spend a higher percentage of their income on commuting costs than other households, and that the combination of housing and commuting costs take up a larger percentage of the budget of the working poor than other households. The authors also find that the cost burden of commuting is greater for the working poor than the national median in many large metropolitan areas.

9. "The Effects of Inclusionary Zoning on Local Housing Markets." NYU Furman Center, November 2007. <http://furmancenter.org/research/publication/the-effects-of-inclusionary-zoning-on-local-housing-markets>.

SUMMARY: This study uses panel data to analyze the effect of inclusionary zoning on local housing

markets. The authors find that the amount of affordable units produced by inclusionary zoning is most closely associated with the length of time that inclusionary zoning has been in place. The authors also found some negative effects on the housing supply in certain markets, such as increased housing prices and lower rates of housing production, but these effects were not consistent across all of the studied markets.

10. Stromberg, Brian, and Mindy Ault. "Paycheck to Paycheck: More than Housing." National Housing Conference, January 2017. <http://www.nhc.org/morethanhousing>.

SUMMARY: This analysis reviews household spending within the context of housing affordability. The research finds that housing and transportation are the biggest expenses for most households, and that renters typically spend a greater proportion of their budget on housing than owners. The analysis identifies the difficulties that low-income renter households may have in saving up for a down payment, particularly when the cost of rent leaves little room for extra savings. The analysis includes graphics identifying what percentage of the area median income is needed to afford fair market rate or to buy a median priced home in major markets across the United States.

11. Chau, Vicky, and Jessica Yager. "Zoning for Affordability." Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, June 2016. <http://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/working-papers/zoning-affordability>.

SUMMARY: This article uses recent attempts at mandatory inclusionary zoning in New York City as a lens for examining potential legal limitations on local land use regulation. The authors consider state case law as well as constitutional challenges.

12. Desmond, Matthew. "Forced Out." *The New Yorker*. Accessed March 7, 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/08/forced-out>.

SUMMARY: This article outlines the growing problem of evictions and how a single eviction can create a cascade of other problems for affected households. It also notes that evictions can take many forms, both formal and informal. Informal evictions lack the protection of the law. However, tenants in formal evictions are often unable to effectively existing legal protections, because they lack the right to counsel (as evictions are a civil action).

13. "The cost of affordable housing: does it pencil out?" The Urban Institute, (2016). <http://apps.urban.org/features/cost-of-affordable-housing/>.

SUMMARY: This infographic illustrates the extent and the causes of the affordable housing gap that is currently affecting cities across the United States. It also allows the user to simulate how changes in a variety of factors (rents, vacancy rates, taxes, fees, etc.) affect the existing gap.

Locally-based Affordability Initiatives

1. Dovey, Rachel. "Seattle Renters Could Get Stronger Voice at City Hall." *Next City*, February 27, 2017. <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/seattle-renters-get-stronger-voice-at-city-hall>.

SUMMARY: Seattle city council members are working to develop a commission of 15 tenants who would weigh in on, and suggest, policies that address renters' interests. The commission was suggested by community members who believed that renters – who make up 54% of Seattle households – did not have sufficient representation at City Hall.

2. McGhee, Tom. "Homeless Spending Days at Denver's Libraries Find Help in the Stacks." *The Denver Post*, January 29, 2017. <http://www.denverpost.com/2017/01/29/homeless-assistance-denver-libraries/>.

SUMMARY: Homeless individuals frequently visit Denver public libraries. The library's Homeless Services Action Committee recommended hiring social workers to help connect this population

to social services, based on previous success in San Francisco and Washington. (Note – Dallas has adopted similar practices.) In addition to working directly with the homeless, the social workers also provide de-escalation training for library and security staff. The library also employs three part-time “peer navigators” who work on building relationships with the homeless population and to help provide referrals to community services.

3. “Historic Victory: \$100 Million for Affordable Homes in Washington DC,” 2015. <http://housingtrustfundproject.org/100-million-for-affordable-homes-in-dc/>.

SUMMARY: In 2015, the Washington, D.C. city council voted unanimously to dedicate at least \$100 million on an annual basis to the city’s Housing Production Trust Fund. An appropriations act was passed for this purpose. Per a 2016 Washington Post article (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/digger/wp/2016/10/10/d-c-mayor-targets-another-106-million-for-affordable-housing/?utm_term=.f9e5fcfcbaae), the city is on track to spend almost \$1 billion on affordability projects by 2017.

4. Beekman, Daniel. “City Council Approves Limits on Renters’ Move-in Costs, Taking Aim at Housing Crisis.” *The Seattle Times*, December 12, 2016. <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/council-takes-aim-at-high-seattle-rents-by-trying-to-limit-move-in-costs/>.

SUMMARY: Seattle passed legislation that limits the move-in fees that landlords can charge to new tenants, in an effort to reduce barriers to housing. The ordinance requires that the combination of security deposits and nonrefundable fees cannot exceed the value of the first month’s rent, and that pet deposits cannot exceed 25% of the first month’s rent. Additionally, tenants can now pay their move-in costs in installments. Landlords who live on the premises are exempted from the ordinance.

5. Chan, Cheryl. “B.C. Premier Christy Clark to Lift Foreign Buyers Tax for Those with Work Permits.” *Vancouver Sun*, January 29, 2017. <http://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/b-c-premier-christy-clark-lifts-foreign-buyers-tax-for-those-with-work-permits>.

SUMMARY: In 2016, Vancouver instituted a foreign buyer’s tax in an effort to slow the pace of growth in the housing market. In 2017, the British Columbia premier announced that an exemption would be introduced for individuals who have work permits and are living in the province.

6. “Welcome.” *New Generation Fund*. Accessed March 3, 2017. <http://newgenerationfund.com/>.

SUMMARY: The New Generation Fund is a partnership between the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department, local foundations, and private lenders. The fund offers interest rates that are lower than the market standard to developers of affordable housing. As of March 2017, the fund had invested \$110 million in Los Angeles and had created or preserve 2,077 units of affordable housing.

7. “Denver Transit Oriented Development Fund.” *Urban Land Conservancy*. Accessed March 3, 2017. <https://www.urbanlandc.org/denver-transit-oriented-development-fund/>.

SUMMARY: The Urban Land Conservancy, in partnership with the City and County of Denver, Enterprise Community Partners, and other private investors, operates an affordable housing acquisition fund. The focus of the fund is identifying and acquiring parcels of land along future transit corridors, with the goal of securing the land for affordable housing before the market value becomes prohibitively high. The Bay Area Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing Fund is a similar project.

8. Wells, Carrie. “Five Years In, City Vacants to Value Program Showing Mixed Results.” *Baltimoresun.com*, November 12, 2015. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-vacants-to-value-20151112-story.html>.

SUMMARY: The “Vacants to Value” program, operated by the City of Baltimore, partners with

developers to rehabilitate or demolish some of the numerous vacant properties in Baltimore. While the focus of the program is primarily on reducing blight, some affordable housing developments have been built, and there are companion programs targeted at making homeownership more affordable (such as offering buyers \$10,000 towards closing costs). Developer interest and financing appear to be primary limitations for the program.

9. Smart, Christopher. "Park City Making Gains with Workforce Housing, but Still Has a Long Way to Go." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 9, 2016. <http://www.sltrib.com/home/4435483-155/park-city-making-gains-with-workforce>.

SUMMARY: Park City is not eligible for many federally subsidized housing programs, but the resort-based economy means that many workers cannot afford housing in the area. In an effort to combat this, the city has instituted inclusionary zoning requirements that requires developers of commercial projects to create or provide housing for the "equivalent" of 20% of the commercial entity's employees, and that requires some developments to dedicate 15% of their units to workforce housing. The city also provides short-term loans to developers that are building workforce housing.

Comparison Tools

1. "GIS Mapping and Geographic Information System Data." *PolicyMap*. Accessed March 7, 2017. <https://www.policymap.com/>.

SUMMARY: This tool allows the mapping of a wide variety of data sources (such as the U.S. Census, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Consumer Financial Protection Bureau) at the ZIP code level. Policymakers can use the tool for inter- and intraregional comparisons.

2. Center for Neighborhood Technology, "The H+T Affordability Index," Accessed March 7, 2017. <http://htaindex.cnt.org/>.

SUMMARY: This index allows for new calculations of housing affordability that account for reductions or increases in transportation costs. For example, a house that is ten miles from the city center may have a lower rent. However, living further out may impose transportation costs that make the total budget impact of that home comparable to a house that is closer to the city center with higher rent, but lower transportation costs.

3. "Peer City Identification Tool - Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago." *Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago*. Accessed March 7, 2017. <https://www.chicagofed.org/region/community-development/data/pcit>.

SUMMARY: This tool allows for the identification of peer cities and the ability to compare statistics in four major areas: equity, resilience, outlook, and housing.

Appendix B - Affordability-Related Housing Programs in Peer Cities

In completing this project, we also reviewed affordability-related programs that may assist households with housing costs in Texas peer cities. Research on these programs is detailed by peer city below.

Dallas

The City of Dallas has an urban land bank program that acquires tax foreclosed vacant lots for affordable single-family housing development in addition to increasing local government revenues. The bank also can sell surplus city land to nonprofit groups for the development of affordable housing. This process is being implemented by means of tax foreclosure. The land bank will purchase the properties from a private Sheriff's sale, maintain the properties and assemble groups of parcels for sale to for-profit and nonprofit developers.

Other affordability-related housing programs offered include:

- The Homebuyer Assistance Program, which provides up to \$14,000 to income-eligible first-time homebuyers to assist with principal reduction, down payment, and closing costs.
- The Reconstruction/Share Loan Program, which demolishes and builds a new home on the same residential site when an income-eligible homeowner's home is not repairable. The maximum financial assistance per project is \$103,000.
- The Major Systems Repair Program, in which eligible homeowners select a contractor to complete eligible repairs using federal funds. The maximum fund amount per project is \$20,000.

Fort Worth

Fort Worth has created Neighborhood Empowerment Zones (NEZ) to promote affordable housing, economic development, and expanded services in the Fort Worth central city. Municipal property tax abatements, fee waivers and release of city liens are available to property owners who build or rehabilitate property within a NEZ.

Other affordability-related housing programs offered include:

- The Homebuyer Assistance Program, which assists income-eligible first-time home buyers.
- The Cowtown Brushup, which is a volunteer-based program that repaints houses for income-eligible homeowners.
- The Priority Repair Program, which helps income-eligible homeowners with emergency or mechanical system home repairs up to \$5,000.

Houston

The goal of Houston's Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority (LARA) is to provide affordable housing by obtaining and developing properties that have been acquired through foreclosure.

Other affordability-related housing programs offered include:

- The Home Repair Program, which assists elderly or disabled income-eligible households with repairs including roofing, plumbing, electrical, and heating repairs.
- The Homebuyer Assistance Program, which provides income-eligible participants with financial assistance to make a down payment on a home, pay closing costs, and buy down principal.

San Antonio

San Antonio's land bank activities were established in 2010 to stimulate residential development in support of the Inner City Reinvestment Infill Policy (ICRIP) and the Strategic Plan for Community Development. Activities include the acquisition, maintenance, and disposition of real property to reduce the total number of vacant properties in San Antonio, and also to dispose of City-owned properties. All land bank activities are managed by San Antonio Affordable Housing, Inc., the non-profit affiliated with the Office of Urban Redevelopment.

Other affordability-related housing programs offered include:

- The Homeownership Incentive Program, which provides assistance to income-eligible first-time homebuyers by granting a \$1,000 to \$12,000 zero interest loan to assist with down-payment and additional costs incurred when purchasing a home.
- The Green and Healthy Homes Program, which provides assistance to owners and landlords of residential properties in creating healthy, safe, energy-efficient, and sustainable homes for income-eligible families and children.

Scope

We reviewed information on current City programs and initiatives that affect affordability. Programs that are pending or still in development, such as CodeNEXT or the 2016 Mobility Bonds, were not included in our inventory.

Methodology

To complete this project, we:

- analyzed City records relating to relevant programs and initiatives, including
 - City budgets for fiscal years 2016 and 2017,
 - Council and Council Committee meeting records, and
 - departmental web pages;
- reviewed media reports to identify programs, initiatives, and pertinent background information;
- compiled an inventory of City programs and initiatives that affect affordability;
- verified this inventory with departments and requested information on any programs and/or initiatives not included in the inventory;
- evaluated the ease of searching the City's website for affordability-related resources;
- reviewed peer city websites with respect to ease of access to affordability-related resources; and
- reviewed research and publications in regards to affordability studies and innovations.

Due to the nature of this special project and a desire to produce a timely result, we did not perform detailed testing of the information found in City records or provided by departments.

Audit Standards

Special request projects conducted by the Office of the City Auditor are considered non-audit projects under Government Auditing Standards and are conducted in accordance with the ethics and general standards (Chapters 1-3).

The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services.

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