

City Manager Proposes Balanced Budget to Invest in Community While Minimizing Impact on Austin Taxpayers

(CITY OF AUSTIN) - The Austin City Manager’s Proposed Budget for the Fiscal Year 2021-2022 would maintain high-quality services and invest in critical infrastructure while utilizing the smallest increase in tax and fees in the past five years.

Spencer Cronk, who presented his recommendations to City Council today, July 9, 2021, at Community First! Village Unity Hall in East Austin, said while this was “a time of unprecedented challenge in our community, across our country, and around the world,” the City was able to propose a budget that: Continues to deliver core services and programs at current levels.

Implements critical reforms that residents and Council have prioritized. Ensures minimal year-over-year impact on Austinites with tax and fee increases kept below 1% for the typical tax and rate payer. Achieves the Council’s policy of keeping the equivalent of 14% of annual General Fund requirements in reserve.

“The good news is that, economically, Austin, Texas has come through the many challenges of the past year in as good, or better shape, than any big city in America,” said Cronk.



Austin City Manager Spencer Cronk

“Our local economy is fundamentally strong and performed unexpectedly well during the COVID pandemic, with more positive impacts for our budget than we anticipated even a few months ago.”

The Proposed Budget is based on a combined tax and fee increase of only 0.85% for the typical Austin tax and rate payer – equivalent to just over \$3 per month. The last time a lower increase was adopted by Council was in 2015.

The City Manager said staff had worked hard to keep the combined tax and fee increase below 1% because, despite the rela-

tively good economic news overall, many Austinites still found themselves in financial difficulty as a result of the pandemic.

He acknowledged recent Council actions to increase the homestead exemption to 20% and to increase the exemption for seniors and disabled residents, which made “a huge difference” to Austinites under pressure. And he praised the many years of commitment – on the part of both Council and staff – to responsible money management, which enabled the City to enter the pandemic in a strong financial position with a healthy level of reserves.

systemic stressors, and strengthen the City’s foundational infrastructure

Investing tens of millions of City dollars to address our shared commitment to end chronic homelessness in Austin – on top of Council’s substantial allocation of federal funds.

Continuing to reimagine public safety to ensure policing in Austin reflects the community’s core values.

Budget Highlights: \$79.0 million in voter-approved planned spending to reach key affordable housing goals.

\$65.2 million in continued funding for the City’s response to the homelessness crisis, with specific funding allocated for preventing homelessness, crisis response, housing stabilization, and public space management.

\$29.1 million to maintain and advance progress on Reimagining Public Safety.

\$27.7 million to construct new sidewalks and improve existing sidewalks citywide.

\$8.5 million in planned capital spending on the City’s Safe Routes to School program.

\$6.2 million to fund the 144th class and future classes of the reimagined Austin Police

Department Training Academy.

Impact on Taxpayers: The proposed property tax rate is 3.5% above the projected ‘no-new-revenue operations and maintenance tax rate’. The last time a lower increase was approved was in fiscal year 2004-2005. As a result of property tax exemptions approved recently by City Council, a typical homeowner can expect to see a reduction of about \$9 in the City’s portion of their annual property tax bill.

When combining tax, rates and fees, a typical tax and rate payer would pay an additional 0.85%, equivalent to \$37.98 per year or \$3.17 per month – the lowest increase since 2015-2016. This includes no change to Austin Energy and Austin Water rates and increases to the Transportation User Fees and Austin Resource Recovery charges.

The coming weeks will provide time for community input and budget work sessions. City Council will have the opportunity to review and initiate amendments to the Proposed Budget before final adoption, which is scheduled for August 11.

To learn more about the City’s Budget development process, and get involved, go to AustinTexas.Gov/Budget.

White House Releases Gun Reduction Strategy



by **Stacy M. Brown**
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(NNPA) - In June, President Biden unveiled a comprehensive strategy to combat gun violence. This strategy implements preventative measures that are proven to reduce violent crime and attacks the root causes – including by investing in effective community policing and addressing the flow of firearms used to commit crimes. Combined, the Administration’s comprehensive strategy will: Stem the flow of firearms used to commit violence, including by holding rogue firearms dealers accountable for violating federal laws; Support local law enforcement with federal tools and resources to help address summer violent crime; Invest in evidence-based community violence interventions; Expand summer programming, employment opportuni-

ties, and other services and supports for teenagers and young adults; and Help formerly incarcerated individuals successfully reenter their communities.

The core of the President’s plan is a partnership with cities and states, equipping local leaders with historic levels of federal funding and a range of tools to address the multifaceted challenge of gun violence. In particular, the strategy uses the American Rescue Plan’s \$350 billion in financial support and clear guidance to provide state, local, territorial, and tribal governments the money they need to put more police officers on the beat – including hiring above pre-pandemic levels in communities experiencing an increase in gun violence associated with the pandemic – as well as the other resources, training, and accountability they need to

engage in effective community policing.

Since the President’s plan was launched, leaders across the country have already responded by taking up or supporting the take-up of these American Rescue Plan dollars for violence prevention efforts. Already we’ve seen state and local governments utilize the funding they’ve received to put more cops on the beat, invest in community violence intervention programs, bolster community programs and economic opportunities, and acquire technology like gunshot detection systems that will help them better confront crime head-on.

In his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2022, the President asked for \$300 million more for the COPS program to boost federal assistance for community policing, and he called for over \$750 million more for federal law enforcement agencies.

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport Announces Most Extensive Airport Improvement Program in Central Texas History



(CITY OF AUSTIN) – Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS) is upgrading the travel experience with the announcement of its launch of the most extensive improvement program in its history. Following significant COVID-19 impacts to air travel, AUS re-strategized its original expansion program to meet the needs of post-pandemic air travel. The Airport Expansion Development Program (AEDP) includes critical components of the 2040 Master Plan that meet the immediate needs of AUS passengers and airlines.

The airport is experiencing significant and consistent passenger growth since March 2021. According to the latest available data, summer 2021 air travel activity at AUS is on track to match or surpass 2019 air travel activity. As AUS continues to experience a rebound in passenger activity levels, the improvements will be scalable to meet a range of forecasted growth profiles and provide a foundation for future growth and development.

The below rendering reflects the Program’s elements, which will include: Optimization of the Barbara Jordan Terminal
Enabling airfield and utility work to include building a new Central Utility Plant and removing existing structures to prepare for construction activities

Preparing for a new Midfield Concourse with 10+ new gates and two new taxiways

The improvements will be funded through traditional airport development funding sources, such as airport cash reserves, current and future airport revenues, future revenue bond proceeds, and Federal Aviation Administration grants.

Contracting opportunities to support AUS improvements will be released late this summer, while opportunities for environmental review public participation will begin this fall. To learn more about the AEDP and to stay updated on these opportunities, visit AustinTexas.gov/AEDP.