

Austin Spent \$54 Million Converting Hotels into Housing for the Homeless: What the Program Delivered and What Comes Next

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — After years of public debate, lawsuits, neighborhood pushback, and shifting political winds, Austin’s \$54 million effort to purchase and convert six hotels into housing for people exiting homelessness is now largely complete. Newly released city data shows how each property is being used, how many people are being housed, and how the investment fits into Austin’s broader homelessness strategy.

A multi year effort shaped by backlash and urgency

Between 2020 and 2022, Austin leaders approved the purchase of six hotels and motels across the city, aiming to rapidly expand shelter capacity and create permanent supportive housing. The plan drew intense opposition from some neighborhood groups and business owners, who raised concerns about crime, safety, and property values. Several projects faced threats of litigation, and one — the Candlewood Suites in Anderson Mill — became a flashpoint for county commissioners and nearby residents.

Despite the resistance, city officials argued that hotel conversions were the fastest and most cost effective way to add units during a period of rising homelessness and limited affordable housing stock.

What the \$54 million bought

City records show the six properties now serve a mix of functions:

- **Bridge shelters**, offering temporary rooms for people transitioning out of encampments or crisis situations.
- **Permanent supportive housing**, providing long term units with onsite services for residents with high needs.
- **Specialized facilities**, including age re-

stricted housing for older adults exiting homelessness.

The conversions collectively provide hundreds of rooms, significantly expanding Austin’s non congregate shelter capacity — a model that has proven more stable and safer for many residents than traditional mass shelters.

A turning point in the city’s homelessness strategy

The hotel conversions are now being integrated into Austin’s 2027 homelessness strategy, which emphasizes permanent housing, coordinated case management, and measurable outcomes. City leaders say the hotel program is a cornerstone of that plan, offering ready made buildings that can be renovated faster than new construction.

Advocates note that the properties have already helped move dozens of people from encampments into stable housing, including at the Northbridge and Southbridge shelters, which now serve as key “bridge” facilities for people preparing to transition into permanent homes.

Community tensions remain

Even with the conversions complete, some neighborhoods remain uneasy. The Candlewood Suites site continues to draw criticism from residents who argue the city pushed the project through without adequate consultation. Others say the hotels were placed disproportionately in areas already struggling with affordability and infrastructure strain.

Supporters counter that the city’s homelessness crisis requires bold action — and that the hotel program has delivered more units, more quickly, than any other recent initiative.

What comes next

With the initial \$54 million investment spent, Austin is now exploring funding for **hundreds more**

Where Austin’s \$54M Hotel Conversions Stand Now

Austin acquired six hotels between 2020–2022, spending a combined \$54 million to rapidly expand shelter and permanent supportive housing capacity.

What Each Property Is Used For

- **Northbridge Shelter (IH-35 North)** — Bridge shelter for individuals exiting encampments; provides short-term rooms and case management.
- **Southbridge Shelter (Ben White Blvd.)** — Bridge shelter with on-site services; key intake point for people transitioning into permanent housing.
- **Berkman Drive Hotel (Northeast Austin)** — Permanent supportive housing with long-term units and wraparound services.
- **Candlewood Suites (Anderson Mill)** — Permanent supportive housing for high-needs residents; site of significant neighborhood opposition.
- **Pecan Gardens (East Austin)** — Age-restricted supportive housing for older adults exiting homelessness.
- **Additional motel conversions** — Used for a mix of temporary shelter, stabilization, and long-term housing depending on renovation timelines.

supportive housing units in the coming years, building on the hotel conversion model while also pursuing new construction and nonprofit partnerships.

City officials say the next phase will focus on long term sustainability: ensuring the converted hotels remain fully staffed, adequately funded, and integrated into the city’s broader housing and health services network.

Austin’s hotel conversion program is now a defining test of whether the city can scale permanent solutions fast enough to meet rising need — and whether communities across the metroplex are willing to support the infrastructure required to make homelessness rare, brief, and non recurring.

Six Major Events Set to Energize the Austin Area Feb. 27–March 1

By Villager staff

(AUSTIN, TX) — Central Texas is heading into one of its busiest late winter weekends, with six major events scheduled across the Austin metro area from Feb. 27 through March 1. From national level motorsports to local artisan markets and Hill Country art showcases, the lineup reflects the region’s growing cultural and recreational footprint.

NASCAR Returns to COTA With Cup Series and O’Reilly Auto Parts Races

The biggest draw of the weekend will be the return of **NASCAR at Circuit of the Americas**, where the **NASCAR Cup Series** and **O’Reilly Auto Parts Series** will compete on the 17 turn, 2.4 mile National Course. The event includes a full fan zone with entertainment acts, driver appearances, and interactive activities, making it one of the largest sports gatherings in the region this season.

Leander Vendor Market Brings Local Makers Together

North of Austin, Leander will host a community vendor market featuring local artisans, small

businesses, and food vendors. The event offers a family friendly environment and continues the city’s push to support hyperlocal entrepreneurship.

Dripping Springs Artists Showcase Regional Talent

In the Hill Country, Dripping Springs will feature a curated display of local artists, giving visitors a chance to explore regional painting, sculpture, ceramics, and mixed media work. The event highlights the area’s growing reputation as a creative hub outside Austin’s urban core.

Spicewood Vineyards Hosts the Claret Chili Cook Off

Just west of the city, Spicewood Vineyards will hold its annual **Claret Chili Cook Off**, where more than 20 competitors will serve their best chili alongside live music, food trucks, and wine tastings. Attendees receive a complimentary glass of wine with admission, and organizers encourage advance ticket purchases for discounts.

HAAM Benefit Concert Featuring Aaron Behrens

Austin’s music community will rally for a **HAAM**

(Health Alliance for Austin Musicians) benefit concert featuring Aaron Behrens of Ghostland Observatory, joined by Kelly Green of Madam Radar and Marco Gutierrez of West Texas Exiles. The intimate performance blends philanthropy with Austin’s signature live music culture.

Additional Adult Focused Events Round Out the Weekend

February’s final weekend also includes a slate of adult focused entertainment across the city — from shows and nightlife to seasonal activities — as highlighted in regional event roundups. These offerings complement the larger anchor events and reflect Austin’s packed late winter calendar.

A Weekend That Reflects Austin’s Cultural Range

Together, these six events illustrate the breadth of Austin’s cultural identity: high octane sports, hyperlocal markets, Hill Country arts, charitable music performances, and culinary traditions. With warm weather expected and festival season approaching, the Feb. 27–March 1 window marks an early preview of Austin’s spring surge.

Event Times, Locations & Ticket Details (Feb. 27–March 1)

NASCAR at Circuit of the Americas

- **Dates:** Feb. 28–March 1
- **Location:** Circuit of the Americas, 9201 Circuit of the Americas Blvd.
- **Details:** NASCAR Cup Series + O’Reilly Auto Parts races on the 2.4-mile National Course; fan zone, driver meet-and-greets, live entertainment.
- **Tickets:** Tiered pricing; advance purchase recommended.

Leander Vendor Market

- **Date:** March 1
- **Location:** Old Town Leander district
- **Details:** Local artisans, small businesses, food vendors, family-friendly activities.
- **Admission:** Free.

Dripping Springs Local Artists Showcase

- **Dates:** Feb. 28–March 1
- **Location:** Dripping Springs Ranch Park & Event Center
- **Details:** Regional painters, sculptors, ceramicists, and mixed-media artists; indoor/outdoor exhibits.
- **Admission:** Free or low-cost depending on vendor area.

Spicewood Vineyards Claret Chili Cook-Off

- **Date:** March 1
- **Location:** Spicewood Vineyards, 1419 Co Rd 409
- **Details:** 20+ chili competitors, live music, food trucks, wine tastings; includes a complimentary glass of wine.
- **Tickets:** Discounted advance tickets available; higher at the gate.

HAAM Benefit Concert

- **Date:** Feb. 27
- **Location:** Austin venue (varies by HAAM programming)
- **Details:** Performances by Aaron Behrens (Ghostland Observatory), Kelly Green (Madam Radar), and Marco Gutierrez (West Texas Exiles); supports healthcare access for Austin musicians.
- **Tickets:** Donation-based or ticketed depending on venue.