



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: July 31, 2012

Prepared By/Phone Number: David A. Salazar 854-4107

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Sherri E. Fleming,
County Executive for Health and Human Services and Veterans Service

Commissioners Court Sponsor: County Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

Consider and Take Appropriate Action on Request To Ratify County Judge's Approval of the Following Regarding the St. John's Promise Neighborhood Initiative:

- A. Letter of Support for the Project; and
- B. Memorandum of Understanding with Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY).

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

Based on the successes of Harlem Children's Zone, President Obama and the Department of Education created a federal initiative to replicate the model in up to 20 other cities across the country. The planning projects will be supported by \$10 million in funding from the 2010 federal budget, providing \$250,000 planning grants to create the necessary sustainable community infrastructure to replicate the successes of HCZ. In subsequent years, neighborhoods will be eligible for additional Federal money to implement and sustain programming. Local funders will be required to match federal funding.

In late April, the Federal Request for Proposals (RFP) for planning was released. While the local effort was not awarded a planning grant, a Steering Committee was created and committed to moving the project forward in hopes of securing future Federal funding. Travis County, together with residents from the St. John's community, the City of Austin

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials must be submitted as a pdf to Cheryl Aker in the County Judge's office, Cheryl.Aker@co.travis.tx.us by **Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.** for the next week's meeting.

and Austin Independent School District officials agreed to transition to a 501c3 organization and form a Board of Directors.

The Austin Achievement Zone Initiative was designated to improve graduation rates, employability and self-sufficiency for families in the St. John's Community. The project has been underway for over one year with community members and representatives from the City of Austin, Travis County and the Austin Independent School District, working together to create an organization positioned to encourage, support and implement viable and effective programs for the benefit of the neighborhood. It is hoped that program implemented the St. John's Community will one day be a model for neighborhood development and action across Austin and Travis County. The St. John's Community has a distinguished history of mobilizing to meet the needs of its residents with this project building on that tradition.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the Commissioners Court ratify the County Judge's approval regarding the St. John's Neighborhood Promise Initiative in the form of A.) a letter of support for the project, and B.) the proposed memorandum of understanding between Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY).

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The St. John's neighborhood, as well as the surrounding Northeast Austin area, was chosen in January 2010 to be the focus of the Austin Achievement Zone. Initially, a Data Working Group assessed which neighborhoods would fit the federal criteria, balancing a high level of childhood poverty and educational need with the capacity and infrastructure to replicate the model. The Data Working Group included representatives of United Way Capital Area, E3 Alliance, CAPCOG, Seton Family of Hospitals, and the City of Austin. The team gathered input from the community (via community leaders and neighborhood meetings), collected information about community needs (especially child poverty rates, immigration data, and school performance data) and evaluated neighborhood assets (existing services and networks).

The St. John's Community has a long history of finding ways to assist members of its own community. Founded by African-American Baptist pastors in the late 1800's, the community built its own housing and

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials must be submitted as a pdf to Cheryl Aker in the County Judge's office, Cheryl.Aker@co.travis.tx.us by **Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.** for the next week's meeting.

orphanage. In the 1970's, with unpaved streets and no city utilities, the community worked with partners to gain equality in services with other Austin neighborhoods. In the 90's, neighbors worked together to reduce crime and bring a new school and community center to replace the demolished St. John Elementary.

During the past four years, the community has given rise to a new generation of partnership - the St. John Community School Alliance, with 55 partner institutions, including churches, four local schools, city and county agencies, nonprofits and community groups, has won the " Best Communities for Youth in America" award from the America's Promise Alliance from 2006-2009. The community rallied to turn around Webb Middle School, when it was on the brink of closure in 2007, and has seen Webb move into the top quarter of Austin's middle schools. Community work at Reagan High School has also helped turn that school into an academically acceptable school in 2010.

The spirit of the community and its partners is evident in events like HopeFest, Dia de los Niño's, Unity Walks and frequent community dinners. The St. John Neighborhood Association has won numerous awards from Keep Austin Beautiful. In addition, local churches play a big role in the cohesiveness and success of the community with Iglesias Familiar Ebenezer housing an emergency furniture and clothing warehouse, and Austin Stone Community Church building the "For the City" non-profit center, which opened in August 2010. Austin Stone also contributes hundreds of mentors and other volunteers to Reagan and Webb.

St. John brings many services to its families and children. All three schools have strong after-school programs and numerous student support organizations, including Communities in Schools, Boys and Girls Club and the Council for At-Risk Youth. The St. John Community Center is one of a handful of school/ community facilities in the country, with Pickle Elementary housed in the same building as City of Austin services departments – Health and Human Services, Parks and Recreation, a branch library, and a police substation. Both Webb and Reagan have innovative community-sponsored Family Resource Centers that connect hundreds of St. John's families to housing, food, employment, adult education and other services.

AGENDA REQUEST DEADLINE: All agenda requests and supporting materials must be submitted as a pdf to Cheryl Aker in the County Judge's office, Cheryl.Aker@co.travis.tx.us by **Tuesdays at 5:00 p.m.** for the next week's meeting.

While it is evident that many people work to support St. John, the challenges are also significant. The demography of the area has shifted from an all African-American community of approximately 1,000 people, just 30 years ago, to a neighborhood of 20,000, of which 75% are Hispanic, today. Many immigrant families in the area have at each of the three neighborhood schools but are not proficient in English.

St. John has the highest rate of child poverty (43%) in Austin. Its schools have the highest student mobility in Austin, indicating family instability. Asthma, obesity and low graduation rates (47% in 2008) are also issues. And, although improving, St. John's area schools have struggled for years and have been among the weakest in AISD.

The Austin Achievement Zone wants to model solutions for one of St. John's biggest problems – coordination of services. With an unprecedented network of community partners willing to work together to address area needs, there is, currently, little in the way of connection between schools, local government and nonprofit services. AAZ hopes to bring integrated planning and data collection between service providers, meaning that limited resources can be used more effectively.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

This item does not increase the current County Budget.

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

Mary Etta Gerhardt, Assistant County Attorney



SAMUEL T. BISCOE

COUNTY JUDGE

TRAVIS COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
P.O. BOX 1748 ROOM 520
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78767
(512) 854-9555

July 24, 2012

TO: Whom It May Concern

RE: Letter of Commitment for St. John Promise Neighborhood Initiative and Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY)

This letter is written in support of the Promise Neighborhood planning grant proposal being submitted by Austin Voices for Education and Youth, with the goal of creating a Promise Neighborhood in the St. John community of northeast Austin.

Travis County (County) has been an active part of the planning and development of a Promise Neighborhood plan for the St. John Neighborhood since October of 2009, and a long-term supporter of schools in the St. John community. The County's goal has been to increase coordination of County services that support youth and families with services offered by the City of Austin, Austin Independent School District, and external service providers. The Promise Neighborhood concept of a connected cradle-to-college pipeline of academic and support services and programs is an idea that is both efficient and effective, and the County supports the belief that the St. John Promise Neighborhood will be a model for other local communities of how to increase college and career readiness and success.

As part of the County's support of the Promise Neighborhood effort in St. John, and subject to the actual receipt of grant funding by the applicant, approval of funding by the Travis County Commissioners Court during the applicable budget process for each fiscal year, and negotiation of the appropriate contractual agreements setting forth the specifics of the obligations of all parties involved, Travis County commits to the following:

1. Provide staff time of four hours per month for the entirety of the initial term (estimated value: \$3,379) subject to approval of funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioners Court.
2. Make an after school investment in Webb Middle School (estimated investment: \$90,000) pursuant to an approved agreement and subject to continued funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioner Court.
3. Provide support through the Joint Subcommittees student mobility and truancy task forces, including \$12,000 for implementation of a data system (Efforts to Outcomes) through the Family Resource Centers at Webb Middle School and Reagan High School.

4. Provide support for the African-American Youth Resource Center in the St. John Promise Neighborhood (estimated investment: \$257,000) pursuant to an approved agreement and subject to continued funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioner Court
5. Provide a designee to serve as a non-voting representative to the Austin Achievement Zone Board of Directors.
6. Respond in a timely manner to reasonable requests for program-related information and data.

Travis County's current investment in services and programs in the St. John's Community is \$362,379.

Travis County also has an intermodal agreement with the Austin Independent School District and the City of Austin to work together on issues and programs that support youth and family development. The St. John Promise Neighborhood will benefit from this cooperative agreement, and will be part of the cooperative planning through the Joint Subcommittees process.

Travis County believes that the St. John Promise Neighborhood and the Austin Achievement Zone offer a way to move from a troubled past with low-performing schools and a large percentage of young people unable to connect with a successful future, to a community galvanized around making sure that its entire young people are well-equipped for life. Travis County supports the theories and understandings set forth in the Statement of Understanding attached to this Letter of Commitment as Exhibit 1.

This Letter of Commitment is signed by Samuel T. Biscoe, Travis County Judge, and is subject to ratification by the Travis County Commissioners Court.

Sincerely,

Samuel T. Biscoe
Travis County Judge

Date

Preliminary Memorandum of Understanding
St. John Promise Neighborhood

This Preliminary Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will serve to establish the terms and conditions under which Austin Voices for Education and Youth (AVEY), which is serving as the lead applicant, and other partners of the St. John Promise Neighborhood in Austin, Texas, will support the Promise Neighborhoods proposal being submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). The initial period of this Agreement is effective for the time period of January 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013, pending USDOE approval and funding of the project.

WHEREAS, all parties recognize that the St. John community is high-need as it is beset by the highest child poverty rate in Austin, high student mobility, a high Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population, and less than half high school graduates being at college and/or career readiness;

WHEREAS, all parties support the local Promise Neighborhood effort, called the St. John Promise Neighborhood, and its goal of replicating the success of the Harlem Children's Zone model in the St John community of Austin, Texas;

WHEREAS, all parties share a vision where all children in the St. John community have access to effective schools and strong coordinated systems of support that will provide an excellent education and lead to a successful transition to college and career;

WHEREAS, all parties subscribe to a Theory of Change, based upon Harvard Family Research Project's Complementary Learning Approach and the community schools concept promoted by the Institute for Educational Leadership, in which all parties understand that successful schools cannot "do it alone," but must integrate school and non-school supports in order to give youth

multiple opportunities to grow-at home, in school and in the community.

WHEREAS, all parties understand and support the growth of effective schools, supportive families and opportunities for family engagement, early childhood programs, out-of-school time activities, health and social services, strong engagement with community-based institutions and partnerships with colleges and universities.

WHEREAS, all parties support a Theory of Action that serves the entire St. John community comprehensively and at scale; creates an effective pipeline of cradle to college and career programs and supports; fosters authentic community and collaboration among residents, institutions, and stakeholders; evaluates program outcomes and cycles data back to management to improve and refine program offerings; and cultivates a college-going culture throughout all community institutions.

WHEREAS, all parties support a Theory of Change in the Promise Neighborhood planning year that identifying child, family, and student needs in the St John Community; estimating levels of unmet need; identifying existing best practices and potential solutions in the target community; developing and implementing a process for evaluating the effectiveness of available or potential solutions; developing standards for selecting solutions; and developing guidance for solutions selected to participate in the St. John Promise Neighborhood initiative;

WHEREAS, all parties share a desire to improve the outcomes of children, families and students in the St John Neighborhood by providing solutions that are grounded in what is known about effective practice, that have a demonstrated evidence base that can be independently verified or replicated, and that address an identified community need;

WHEREAS, all parties agree that the St. John Promise Neighborhood Planning Committee,

comprised of planning team leaders, local community members, representatives of the St. John Community School Alliance and St. John Neighborhood Association, external service providers, and the Austin Achievement Zone Board of Directors, will participate in monthly meetings with the Project Director from Austin Voices for Education and Youth to plan, problem solve, and pursue project goals; and that the Austin Achievement Zone Board of Directors, including representatives from AISD, City of Austin, Travis County, project funders, and key community stakeholders will provide guidance on a regular basis on all aspects of the project;

WHEREAS, all parties recognize the success of “grassroots” community engagement in the St. John community as community members have brought significant improvements to their schools and supports for youth, as evidenced by the “100 Best Communities for Youth in America” award from America’s Promise Alliance given to the community in 2006-2011, and therefore see strong community involvement in the Promise Neighborhood planning process as a key element for success and sustainability;

WHEREAS, all parties agree that local, state, and federal sources of support, financial and otherwise, will be necessary to success; that reliably collected data used responsibly and with intent represents the most compelling basis for demonstrating success; that a given solution (or pipeline of solutions) may work better for some families, children, or students than for others or may be more effective in some conditions compared to others; and that reliably aligning locally-identified solutions with the wide diversity of local, regional, and national circumstances will be a central task in efforts at "scaling up" the St. John Promise Neighborhood;

WHEREAS, County has the authority to provide for the care of indigents and other

qualified recipients (Tex. Loc. Gov't Code, Section 81.028, and other statutes), and to provide services to youth in need of protection and care (Tex. Family Code Ann., Section 264.006), and providing such services constitutes a public purpose.

NOW THEREFORE, by this Agreement it is mutually understood and agreed by the parties as follows:

TERM OF AGREEMENT

Initial Term. Subject to the receipt of USDOE approval of funding and award of the grant ("Grant"), this Agreement shall be for an initial term which commences on January 1, 2013 and terminates on December 31, 2013.

**TRAVIS COUNTY SIGNATURE PAGE
PRELIMINARY MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ST. JOHN PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD**

Subject to: the actual receipt of the grant by the applicant; the formal commitment by necessary partners to contractual agreements including necessary obligations of funding and services by those partners; the negotiation and approval by the Commissioners Court of written contracts containing the specific obligations of Travis County for all commitments; the approval of necessary funding by the Travis County Commissioners Court during the applicable budget process; and the ratification of this MOU by the Travis County Commissioners Court, Travis County indicates its support of the St. John Promise Neighborhood and its efforts to provide efficient and effective academic and social supports to youth and families through a cradle to college pipeline.

As a partner of the St. John Promise Neighborhood, and subject to the limitations set forth in the paragraph above, Travis County agrees to the following:

- Provide staff time of four hours per month for the entirety of the initial term (estimated value: \$3,379) subject to approval of funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioners Court.
- Make an after school investment in Webb Middle School (estimated investment: \$90,000) pursuant to an approved agreement and subject to continued funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioners Court.
- Provide support through the Joint Subcommittees student mobility and truancy task forces, including \$12,000 for implementation of a data system (Efforts to Outcomes) through the Family Resource Centers at Webb Middle School and Reagan High School.
- Provide support for the African-American Youth Resource Center in the St. John Promise Neighborhood (estimated value: \$257,000) pursuant to an approved agreement and subject to continued funding for the applicable budget period by the Commissioners Court.
- Provide a representative to serve as a member of/representative to the Austin Achievement Zone Board of Directors.

BY: _____

Samuel T. Biscoe
Travis County Judge

Date: _____