



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: October 23, 2012

Prepared By/Phone Number: Juanita Jackson – 854-4467

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

Commissioners Court Sponsor: Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

Consider and Take Appropriate Action Regarding the Request to Appoint Travis County Residents to the Joint Subcommittee's Family and Children School Task Force.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

On September 28, 2012, the members of the Joint Subcommittee of the Austin City Council, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees, and Travis County voted to request that each governing body appoint representatives to the Family and Children School Task Force. It was envisioned that the group would be charged with the review and implementation of the recommendations of the City of Austin's Family and Children Task Force Report to address the problem of chronic absenteeism in schools and the related effects impacting our community.

As City of Austin Council Members Kathie Tovo and Laura Morrison have put forth a list of names for approval by the Joint Subcommittee, both Travis County and the AISD Board of Trustees will be responsible for submitting a list of names for consideration as its representatives to the Task Force.

The Joint Subcommittee, made up of representatives from Travis County, the City of Austin and the Austin Independent School District, is a collaborative group that exists to examine and make recommendations concerning factors which may adversely impact the community and its governing bodies.

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

Travis County and the Commissioners Court have been committed, along with its community partners, to creating a safer, healthier community for its young people through youth and workforce development programs and its participation in the Travis County Afterschool Network with activities focused on keeping students engaged in education, increasing academic achievement, and improving life skills.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff seeks direction from the Court regarding the appointment of County representatives to the Joint Subcommittee's Family and Children School Task Force.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

The Family and Children School Task Force will be focused on generating policy recommendations aimed at supporting neighborhood schools and retaining families with children in Central Austin and Travis County by revisiting past recommendations and unmet goals, reviewing national best practices, and conducting interviews and focus groups with staff and community members. Areas of exploration will include consideration of current and potential future policies and practices related to collaborative/joint use of civic facilities.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Providing direction on this agenda item will not increase the County Budget.

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

Mary Etta Gerhardt



**TRAVIS COUNTY HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES
and VETERANS SERVICE**
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P. O. Box 1748
Austin, Texas 78767

Sherri E. Fleming
County Executive
(512) 854-4100
Fax (512) 854-4115

DATE: October 16, 2012

TO: Members of the Commissioners Court

FROM: _____
Sherri E. Fleming, County Executive for
Health and Human Services and Veterans Service

SUBJECT: Recommendations from Travis County/City of Austin/Austin Independent School District Joint Subcommittee Regarding Chronic Absenteeism in Public Schools

Proposed Motion:

Consider and Take Appropriate Action Regarding the Request to Appoint Travis County Residents to the Joint Subcommittee's Family and Children School Task Force.

Summary and Staff Recommendation:

On September 28, 2012, the members of the Joint Subcommittee of the Austin City Council, Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees, and Travis County voted to request that each governing body appoint representatives to the Family and Children School Task Force. It was envisioned that the group would be charged with the review and implementation of the recommendations of the City of Austin's Family and Children Task Force Report to address the problem of chronic absenteeism in schools and the related effects impacting our community.

City of Austin Council Members Kathie Tovo and Laura Morrison have put forth for approval by the Joint Subcommittee the names of following persons as possible representatives: Susan Moffet, Heather Way, Kevin Foster, Ed Wendler, Nadia Barrera and Maureen Montoya.

Both Travis County and the AISD Board of Trustees will be responsible for submitting a list of names for consideration as its representatives to the Task Force.

Background:

In 2007 – 2008, the City of Austin Families and Children Task Force made recommendation to address declining enrollment in several central city schools due to a lack of affordable housing for families with children, which would have a wide reaching negative impact. This led to the City of Austin's and AISD's collaboration in the development of a joint plan in 2009 and the presentation of priorities to the Joint Subcommittee in the form the Educational Impact Statement which became the basis of ongoing initiatives including the Student Stability Work Group.

In 2009, Joint Subcommittee entities passed a resolution “to assist in the development of policies and programs that are supportive of families and children, and neighborhoods and schools. The Joint Subcommittee, made up of representatives from Travis County, the City of Austin and the Austin Independent School District, is a collaborative group that exists to examine and make recommendations concerning factors which may adversely impact the community and its governing bodies.

Travis County and the Commissioners Court have been committed, along with its community partners, to creating a safer, healthier community for its young people through youth and workforce development programs and its participation in the Travis County Afterschool Network with activities focused on keeping students engaged in education, increasing academic achievement, and improving life skills.

Budgetary and Fiscal Impact:

Consideration and direction to staff regarding this item will not affect the County Budget.

Issues and Opportunities:

In 2009, the Joint Subcommittee created two task forces, *Truancy +* and *Student Mobility*, to research and formulate recommendations to present to the governing bodies of its partners focusing on student attendance rates and mobility.

The Family and Children School Task Force will be focused on generating policy recommendations aimed at supporting neighborhood schools and retaining families with children in Central Austin and Travis County by revisiting past recommendations and unmet goals, reviewing national best practices, and conducting interviews and focus groups with staff and community members. Areas of exploration will include consideration of current and potential future policies and practices related to collaborative/joint use of civic facilities.



FAMILIES AND CHILDREN TASK FORCE

AUSTIN, TX

Report Recommendations

June 24, 2008

June 24, 2008

Mr. Mark Ott
The Honorable Will Wynn
Mayor Pro Tem Betty Dunkerley
Council Member Sheryl Cole
Council Member Jennifer Kim
Council Member Lee Leffingwell
Council Member Brewster McCracken
Council Member Mike Martinez
In-Coming Council Member Laura Morrison
In-Coming Council Member Randi Shade

Re: City of Austin Families and Children Task Force Final Report

Dear City Manager, Mayor and Current and In-Coming Members of the City Council:

Enclosed is the report to the City Council from the Families and Children Task Force. As members of the Task Force, we were honored to serve the city in this capacity. We recommend the report to Council for further consideration and action.

The Task Force has worked diligently for nine months reviewing and identifying best practices, alternative strategies, potential incentives, and other methods to improve the quality of life for families with children in Austin. We reached common ground on a set of recommendations that will provide a voice for families with children in Austin, with the goal of making our city the “most family friendly city” in the nation.

The Task Force was comprised of a diverse group of volunteers, representing housing groups, business leaders, child care advocates, neighborhood leaders, planning organizations, licensing representatives, and AISD, among others. We met with leaders from various community sectors to give us their input into the crafting of the recommendations. We believe that the product of this effort is a step forward in addressing the critical issue of the exodus of families from the central core of Austin.

We submit these recommendations to the Council and we remain willing to participate in dialogue and review these items as the City works to make Austin the best city for families with children. We submit that the appropriate next step would be to provide a public hearing and time for public comment on the Report, which we had hoped to do before final publication.

In closing, we want to acknowledge the hard work of the city staff, in particular, Jason Garza, Steve Barney, Ron Hubbard and Jacob Browning, for their assistance in our efforts. We also extend grateful appreciation to TBG Partners for the formatting of the report.

Sincerely,

City of Austin Families and Children Task Force

Families and Children Task Force Members

Al Beavers	Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Cathy Echols	Liveable City
Kara Garst	Austin Apartment Association
Lou Guerard	Child Care Licensing Division, TX Department of Family Protective Services
Greg Keyes	Fire Marshall
Rhonda Paver	Austin Child Care Council
Jennifer Peters	Community Volunteer (Co-Chair)
Thuy Phan	HousingWorks
Robert Pilgrim	Real Estate Council of Austin; TBG Partners
Robert Schneider	Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees (Co-Chair)
Marcelo Tafoya	Director, LULAC District 12; Co-Chair, National Civil Rights Commission
Kathie Tovo	Austin Neighborhoods Council
Laura Warren	Mayors Commission for People with Disabilities
Heather Way	Director, Community Development Clinic, University of Texas School of Law

City Staff Liaisons to the Task Force

Steve Barney	Neighborhood Housing and Community Development
Jacob Browning	Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department
Jason Garza	City Manager's Office
Ron Hubbard	Health and Human Service Department

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Families and Children Task Force was formed by the Austin City Council on June 21, 2007 (Ordinance No. 20070621-097). The Task Force was created in recognition that families and children are critical to the vitality of our community. At the same time, the growth pressures that Austin is experiencing have been particularly challenging for families with children. These difficulties are especially pronounced for families attempting to secure quality child care and affordable family-sized housing.

TASK FORCE MISSION AND VISION

The mission of the task force was the following:

Development of policy recommendations that promote and integrate “family friendly” housing, childcare, and other amenities throughout the city for families of all income levels, with a clear plan for implementation.

Based on input received from experts, best practices in other cities, a city-wide survey, and focus groups, the task force developed the following vision of a family-friendly city:

Austin will be a city in which:

- (1) Families of different sizes, needs, and income levels can afford to live in neighborhoods throughout the city, in homes designed to accommodate families.
- (2) All families, including those with children with disabilities, have access to high-quality child care that they can afford near homes or workplaces.
- (3) All children attend excellent public schools that they can reach safely by walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation.
- (4) Pocket parks and playgrounds are interspersed throughout the City, such that all families can walk safely to a park using sidewalks and crosswalks.
- (5) In downtown and throughout the city, public spaces contain amenities that attract and engage children and that serve as gathering places for children and families.
- (6) Recreational activities, events, restaurants, and stores that cater to families with children are found throughout the city and in areas that families with children can safely access by walking or biking.

In keeping with this vision, the task force adopted recommendations in the areas of (A) City Vision and Planning; (B) Child Care Services; (C) Housing; (D) Parks, Recreational Spaces and Cultural Amenities; (E) Schools; and (F) Transportation. A summary of the recommendations follows:

CITY VISION AND PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

A first recommendation, that served to guide most of the others, is that the City of Austin mission statement be amended to include the following:

“Austin is committed to being the most family-friendly city in the country and will ensure that its policies and decisions support and enhance the quality of life for Austin’s families with children.”

The other recommendations in this section support this mission by incorporating the perspective of families with children into city process and every major planning decision. Recommendations include:

- (a) forming a Families with Children Commission to examine city policies for their impact on families with children;

- (b) establishing a Families with Children Ombudsperson to ensure that the perspectives of families with children are taken into consideration in city decision-making;
- (c) adding a representative for families with children to each of the relevant city commissions and task forces;
- (d) focusing on the needs of families with children in current and future planning efforts, including the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, Transit-Oriented Developments and Neighborhood Planning;
- (e) development of Family-Friendly Design Standards;
- (f) creating a map of current amenities for families with children that could guide future planning.

CHILD CARE SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force views child care as an economic development issue, and not only a social service issue. This perspective leads to the following recommendations:

- (a) the City of Austin should adopt a statement endorsing the importance of child care to economic development;
- (b) the City of Austin should hire a consultant to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic plan for child care services;
- (c) a portion of the non-housing in-lieu of fees from density bonuses should be targeted to child care, as should additional city revenues.

The task force also recommends that City Council continue to utilize the Child Care Council for policy recommendations in the area of child care.

HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that affordable, family-sized housing is a basic requirement for attracting and retaining families in Austin, the task force recommended that the City target subsidized housing and housing that receives development incentives to families with children.

As a key part of this effort, the City of Austin should create and assist with the funding of a model family-friendly development.

The City also should develop a temporary rental assistance program to keep school-age children in their neighborhood schools, increase the marketing of affordable housing, and partner with local colleges and universities to develop affordable housing for students.

PARKS, RECREATIONAL SPACES AND CULTURAL AMENITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Parks and cultural amenities create a climate that is inviting to families, attracts families to a neighborhood, promotes healthy life-styles, and can foster a sense of community through the opportunities for social interaction that they afford.

To make parks accessible to all families, the task force recommends that the City set of goal of having a park or public open space, even if it is a small pocket park or urban play space, within a quarter mile of residences within the central city and a half-mile in suburban areas. This goal could be achieved in part through partnerships with private developers and entities such as AISD.

Parks and recreation facilities should include activities for a wide range of ages and abilities. Additional destination parks should be developed, as should safe bicycle and pedestrian paths to public open space.

The City, with various partners, should expand cultural offerings downtown and encourage cultural events throughout the city. A monthly Downtown Family Night could attract families to downtown.

SCHOOLS RECOMMENDATIONS

The schools recommendations highlight the importance of quality neighborhood-based schools and support collaborations between AISD, the City, and other organizations. They support the following positions:

- (a) Neighborhood schools can best serve families with children in the City of Austin.
- (b) Collaborative planning among the City of Austin, AISD and other area school districts is in the best interest of all parties, and the families and children that they serve.
- (c) Financial collaborations represent a valuable opportunity for the City of Austin and the school districts.
- (d) Collaborative facility use should be a cornerstone principle for the school district and City of Austin.

TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

To be truly family-friendly, the City of Austin must increase the efficiency and safety of its transportation network, including pedestrian and bicycle routes.

The Task Force recommendations focus on increasing the availability of safe sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and bicycle routes—particularly in the vicinity of schools, parks and transit stops—and making public transit more usable for families with children.



I. INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The Families and Children Task Force was formed by the Austin City Council on June 21, 2007 (Ordinance No. 20070621-097). The Task Force was created in recognition that families and children are critical to the vitality of our community. At the same time, the growth pressures that Austin is experiencing have been particularly challenging for families with children. These difficulties are especially pronounced for families attempting to secure quality child care and affordable family-sized housing.

The Task Force, composed of representatives of diverse stakeholder groups and areas of expertise, was charged with identifying concerns in the areas of child care, housing, and transportation; identifying and evaluating best practices from other cities and the literature; and developing a set of recommendations for the Austin City Council.

The Task Force first met on September 26, 2007, and proceeded to work diligently over a period of nine months to identify the relevant challenges, issues, and best practices. The Task Force divided into two subcommittees: a child care subcommittee, and a housing and planning subcommittee.

The Task Force identified a set of problems and issues that confront families with children through consultations with experts and practitioners in the City of Austin, discussions among stakeholders, a web-based survey developed by Task Force members, and several focus group sessions. Members of the Task Force reviewed existing city policies and current family-friendly features, consulted with local and national experts, and analyzed best practices from cities that have sought to create family-friendly environments. Based on these sources of input, the Task Force developed a vision of a community that would be welcoming for families with children. The input and vision were used to develop a set of recommendations that would make Austin into a truly family-friendly city. The Task Force completed its work in June 2008, and now presents this report to the Austin City Council, the Austin Independent School District, and the Travis County Commissioners Court.

SCOPE AND VISION

During initial meetings, the subcommittees developed mission statements which, when combined, undertook the following:

Development of policy recommendations that promote and integrate “family-friendly” housing, child care, and other amenities throughout the city for families of all income levels, with a clear plan for implementation.

The Task Force defined the scope to mean “families with children” and,



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more specifically, families with children under the age of 18 currently residing in the household. Although families without minor children also are important to the character of the community, families with minor children (18 and under) face a unique set of issues. Because the time frame was limited, the Task Force members decided to focus on families with non-adult children.

The Task Force also discussed the geographic scope of its mission. The members elected to develop recommendations to improve the family-centered character of Austin city-wide. However, in recognition that living in the central city imposes particular pressures on families with children, special effort was directed toward improving opportunities for families within the urban core of Austin. The Task Force defined the urban core as consisting of the area bordered by Highway 71 on the south, Highway 1 (Mopac Expressway) to the west, and Highway 183 on the east and north.

Based on the input received from experts, best practices in other cities, the survey, and focus groups, the Task Force developed the following vision of a family-friendly city for Austin.

VISION STATEMENT

Austin will be a city in which:

- (1) Families of different sizes, needs, and income levels can afford to live in neighborhoods throughout the city, in homes designed to accommodate families;
- (2) All families, including those with children with disabilities, have access to high-quality child care they can afford near homes or workplaces;
- (3) All children attend excellent public schools that they can reach safely by walking, bicycling, or taking public transportation.
- (4) Pocket parks and playgrounds are interspersed throughout the city, such that all families can walk safely to a park using sidewalks and crosswalks.
- (5) In downtown and throughout the city, public spaces contain amenities that attract and engage children, and serve as gathering places for children and families.
- (6) Recreational activities, events, restaurants, and stores that cater to families with children are found throughout the city and in areas that families with children can safely access by walking or biking.

The Task Force believes that this vision can be achieved by making a commitment to families with children as one of the top city priorities. A first step is for the City of Austin to adopt the following mission statement:

“Austin is committed to being the most family-friendly city in the country and will ensure that its policies and decisions support and enhance the quality of life for Austin’s families and children.”

This commitment should then be realized through structures and policies that ensure every major city policy is evaluated for its effect on families with children.

The Austin Independent School District (AISD), other school districts that serve Austin children, and Travis County are also responsible for policies and services which affect families with children in Austin. The Task Force believes Austin’s children and families can best be served through the active collaboration of these entities and has developed recommendations to promote such efforts. Several recommendations are directed specifically to AISD, given the school district’s large impact on children and neighborhoods in Austin.

THE ISSUE: KEEPING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN THE CITY

As stated in findings by the Austin City Council, families hold the key to much of what makes Austin unique and special. Families are an integral part of our community fabric and sustain our city's creative energy and creative capital. Yet, families with children face unique and growing challenges to live in the urban core of Austin. These challenges include access to quality child care that is affordable, appropriately designed affordable housing, and transportation.

As Austin's urban core undergoes rapid densification, housing and other amenities for families with children are failing to keep pace and, indeed, are being lost. New condominium developments are displacing child care facilities and affordable housing, and the new developments are being designed for singles, childless couples, and empty nesters—not families with children. While many families with children do want to live downtown and in the urban core, these areas offer few affordable options and amenities for families.¹

"[T]he very things that attract people who revitalize a city—dense vertical housing, fashionable restaurants and shops and mass transit that makes a car unnecessary—are driving out children by making neighborhoods too expensive for young families."

Timothy Egan, "Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children,"
New York Times (March 24, 2005)

One of the biggest challenges for families in Austin is housing. According to Ryan Robinson, City of Austin demographer, "The steep increase in the cost of housing within the city over the past few years has put intensified pressure on urban families and could result in driving these households out of the city."² In some areas of the City of Austin, housing values more than doubled in just the five-year period between 2000 and 2005. Austin is at risk of following Portland's fate, where average housing costs doubled over the course of ten years from \$158,000 to nearly \$332,000. During this time period, the Portland public schools suffered an enrollment drop of more than 11,000 students, or an average of 10 children per school each year. As a result, the school district has had to close eight schools in the past four years alone.

Although Austin has not yet seen the exodus of families from the city that Portland has experienced, the total share of families with children in the City of Austin has been declining, from a high of 38 percent in 1970, to 27 percent of the population in 2000. On the share of families with children measure, Austin lags behind the statewide average (37 percent) and the national average (33 percent). Among families with children, in Austin 69 percent are two-parent households, while 31 percent are single-parent households. Accompanying the reductions in percentages of families with children is a decline in the percentage of middle class families in the city. Nationwide, the percentage of middle income neighborhoods in the 100 largest metropolitan areas dropped from 58 percent to 41 percent between 1970 and 2000.³ Austin is showing the same trend, though perhaps to a lesser degree (decreasing from 40 percent to 36 percent over the past ten years). The loss of families and, in particular, the loss of middle class families can have profoundly negative effects on the stability of the city, eroding support for core institutions such as schools and important city services such as parks, libraries, and public safety.⁴

The City of Austin's planning processes do not currently ensure that the interests of families with children are considered and incorporated into new city plans. For example, the city's neighborhood planning process does not require consideration of the particular needs of families with children, nor does a menu of options exist that would help neighborhoods encourage design features and amenities which are attractive to families with children. Likewise, the 2008 Phase One of the Downtown Plan includes no discussion on how to ensure that the Austin downtown is an accessible and attractive place for children. Similarly, the most recent annual and five-year consolidated plans of the Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department do not include any housing production goals that are specific to families with children. As yet another example, the most recent draft of the Parks and Recreation Department's Town Lake corridor plan does not take into consideration any special interests of families with children.

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A family-friendly city will not come about on its own: For Austin to succeed in attracting and retaining families, the City will have to make this goal a central focus of its planning efforts and develop specific procedures to ensure that the interests of families with children are considered in every major planning decision. A clear commitment to families, accompanied by focused and collaborative planning efforts, is essential if families with children are to find the housing, child care, quality schools, parks, and other amenities that will make Austin attractive to them.



REASONS FOR CREATING A FAMILY-FRIENDLY CITY

Families with children are critical to the growth, diversity, vibrancy, and economic vitality of a city. On the economic front, a recent analysis shows that the strongest job growth has consistently been in regions with the largest net in-migration of young, educated families ranging from their mid-20s to mid-40s.⁵ Married families with children tend to be the people who make economies go. As Joel Kotkin writes in the Wall Street Journal, “[I]f you talk with recruiters and developers in the nation’s fastest growing regions, you find that the critical ability to lure skilled workers, long term, lies not with bright lights and nightclubs, but with ample economic opportunities, affordable housing and family-friendly communities not too distance from work.”⁶ Family-friendly cities have seen the biggest net gains of professionals not only because they attract workers, but they retain them through their 30s and 40s.⁷ Families with children are also an important source of tax revenue and valuable consumer base.⁸ Put succinctly, “families provide the most reliable foundation for successful economies.”⁹

The provision of quality and affordable child care is an important economic driver in and of itself. If Travis County were to lose its center-based child care services, the direct financial impact would be just over \$1 billion—\$232.9 million from formal child care operations and \$773.2 million from reduced workforce availability. Access to affordable child care services affects the productivity and satisfaction of the local workforce; impacts the local economy; and provides a measurable return on

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investment.¹⁰ Subsidized support to allow low-income families to access high quality child care programs yields additional benefits. A RAND Corporation analysis estimates that every dollar spent on high-quality child care programs for low-income children ultimately will yield an economic return of \$1.26 to \$17. These returns are in the form of diminished needs for special education classes, higher high school and college graduation rates ,and, ultimately, reduced dependency on welfare. ¹¹

In addition to the economic impacts, retaining families with children offers cultural, social, and political benefits to cities. The personality, voice, and character of a city are defined not by buildings but by the people who live in them. Children “provide additional diversity and vibrancy to cities, which in turn makes them more attractive places for all people.” ¹²

Members of the American Planning Association overwhelmingly endorsed, in a 2008 survey, the views that families are important to the growth, sustainability, and diversity of a city—and communities which keep people for the whole life cycle are more vibrant. A recent study conducted by the CEOs for Cities—a national network of mayors, company executives, and civic leaders—echoed these views and found that the loss of families with children contributes to middle class flight, reduces the diversity and vibrancy of a city, and undermines advocacy for city services such as libraries, parks, and public safety.¹³ Parents tend to have more at stake in a city than other constituencies, are more stable and connected to the community, and are therefore more active in city government and have more power to shape city policy. ¹⁴ In contrast, cities with fewer children are more transient and less stable.

It is not only city services that suffer if a city fails to attract and retain families. Families with children, particularly middle class families with children, are also an essential constituency for the public schools. If Austin fails to recruit young professional families with children, the quality of the public schools will suffer. When children leave a school district, the district loses directly, through the loss of funding, and indirectly, through reductions in public commitment to the schools. In many U.S. cities, public schools are failing, which exacerbates the social inequities of those cities: The city becomes two cities, one comprised of childless professionals and wealthy families who send their children to private schools, and the other consisting of poor families (primarily renters) whose children are stuck in under-funded, under-resourced, and under-achieving public schools. The poor public schools then further discourage middle class families from locating within the city. Austin ISD has not yet reached this tipping point, as it boasts many high quality schools even in the urban core but, with its student body now composed of more than 60 percent low income children, it is a district at risk.

In summary, families with children are key to a city’s success. “Most urban leaders believe that cities devoid of children will be much less desirable places to live with much less secure futures.” As another expert noted, “Having fewer children really diminishes the quality of life in a city.” ¹⁵ Based on observations such as those described here, one expert has observed that “the obsession with luring singles to cities is misplaced. Instead, the emphasis should be on retaining young people as they grow up, marry, start families and continue to raise them.” ¹⁶

Nationally, city leaders are recognizing the importance of families with children to success of their cities. City of Portland Mayor Tom Potter has argued, “A city’s health should be judged by its youngest citizens.” ¹⁷ San Francisco’s Mayor Newsom has said, “A City without children is a city that has no future.” ¹⁸ As Austin looks to its future, our leaders likewise need to acknowledge the importance of children to the vitality of the city and develop a plan that works for our children.



II. SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

In March 2008, the Task Force conducted an online survey to gather information from Austin-area residents about Austin’s family-friendly features and what kinds of things could be done to make Austin a better place for families with children. The survey was completed by 1,059 persons. The Task Force also conducted three focus groups of parents to discuss in more detail the issues facing families and children in the City of Austin. The parents included lower-income, middle-income, and upper-income mothers; single parents and married households; working mothers and stay-at-home moms.

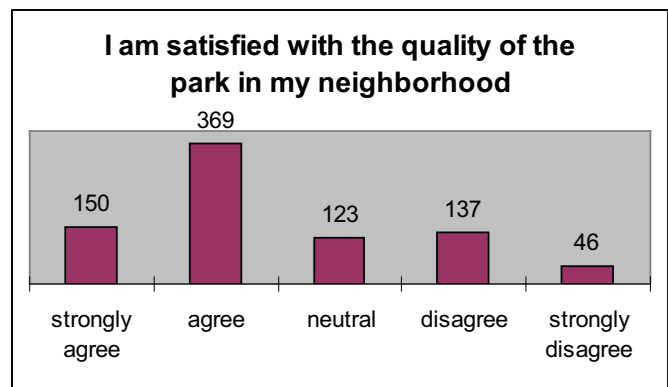
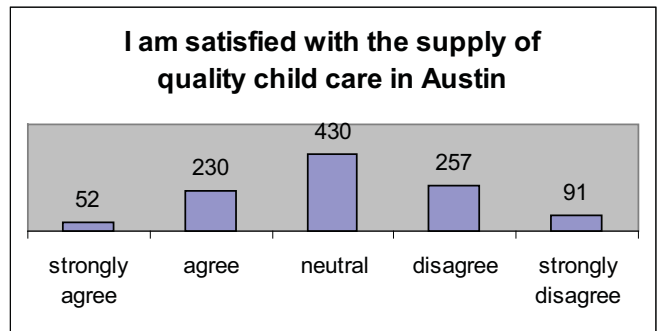
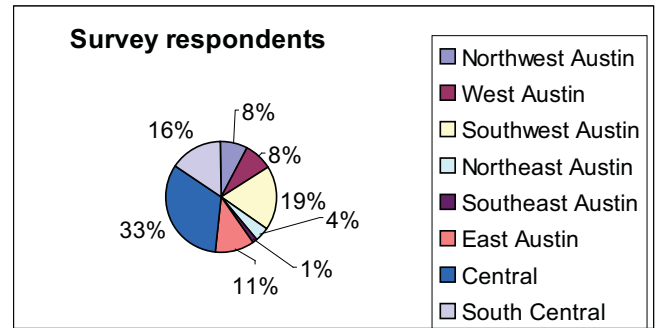
The online survey included five narrative questions asking survey participants to describe the best things about Austin as a whole and their individual neighborhoods for families with children, and also the worst things about Austin and their individual neighborhoods for families with children. Survey participants were also given the opportunity to offer their suggestions for making the city more family-friendly.

While, overall, survey participants believe Austin is a family-friendly city, the participants targeted many different areas of concern and ideas for improvement. Participants expressed fear that new development threatens to change the City’s family-friendly culture and the amenities Austin has to offer for families with children.

Austin families clearly value the many outdoor amenities for families—Zilker Park and the city’s other parks and green spaces made the top of the “best of” list in the survey. The city’s climate, free public pools, and numerous outdoor festivals and activities all contribute to the family-friendly nature of Austin. Austin families also reported satisfaction with an overall community culture that supports families with children, along with the many different cultural activities available for children and the city’s numerous child-friendly restaurants. Survey participants also noted the city’s decent public elementary schools, at least in certain parts of the city. In their neighborhoods, families value living in a place with a strong sense of community and being near other families with children. Families also enjoy being able to walk to a local green space for outdoor play and to local restaurants and stores that are family-friendly. Being near a good elementary school is also important for Austin families.

On the other hand, Austin families also have concerns about the City of Austin and its support of families and children. Top concerns are:

- lack of affordable quality child care;
- lack of affordable housing in the central core
- lack of child-friendly open space



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- low quality middle schools and high schools and disparate quality of elementary schools
- lack of sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes
- traffic and inadequate public transportation

Families expressed the most concern about the lack of affordable, quality child care and housing. Many families also expressed frustration with the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes in Austin's neighborhoods. Many families who want to be able to walk or bike to their neighborhood park, school, or local stores are unable to do so because of the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes as well as speeding cars, and so must rely on their car instead. In the same vein, families expressed frustrations with the city's outdated transportation network—long commutes in cars and on buses results in parents spending less time with their children.

Another top concern is the city's public schools. A family's ability to access a high performing school in Austin depends on their income and where they live. Survey respondents were especially troubled by the quality of AISD's middle schools and high schools, and large or overcrowded schools. Respondents expressed a general concern with the city's huge disparities in access to family-friendly resources based on where families live and their income.

Finally, while families generally regard the city's parks and pools as a strength, they also identified several weaknesses with these amenities and potential areas for improvement. One out of four survey respondents do not live within walking distance of a park. Families expressed concerns with the existing park infrastructure including the lack of playscapes, the lack of shade, and short hours at pools. Families also reported wanting to see more indoor activities for children available throughout the City and additional cultural amenities such as a science museum.

The focus group members echoed these concerns. In general, the participants think the City of Austin is doing a relatively good job at being family-friendly, but expressed concern that as the central city undergoes densification, Austin is becoming less friendly to families. The new condominiums and other new developments in the central city are not designed for families, and these developments are displacing important family amenities such as child care centers. Moreover, while the City of Austin has grown, its services have not caught up with the increases in the number of families.

SURVEY RESPONSES:

"In my mind, the day care issue is absolutely critical to address. It is impossible to be a contributing member to our society if your children are not safe. Daycare needs to be safe and affordable. \$700-1000 a month for an infant is NOT affordable."

"Austin has many great attributes for families and as it grows it is imperative that it maintains its family friendly environment especially downtown."

"We know we're lucky to live in a really nice neighborhood and community, but we're soon going to have to move out of it due to high rental rates, and there's no way we'd ever be able to afford a home in it."

"Austin is a great place to have kids. My neighborhood has a sense of community, but it would have more of one if able to get out and walk around without fear of being run over."

"We're very happy living in central Austin. I just wish there was more focus on families living in the city rather than just young professionals (condos, etc.). Maybe this survey is the start of that."

III. BEST PRACTICES

WHAT MAKES A FAMILY-FRIENDLY CITY

Family-friendly cities are about more than providing good social services for families; they are about creating environments that support children in every stage of development.¹⁹ Families want to live in safe, vibrant, walkable neighborhoods near pleasant, green open spaces and recreation areas that are accessible to children. They need access to quality child care and schools. And they need to be able to afford a safe home that has enough bedrooms and is designed with children in mind.²⁰

When families with children are deciding where to live, they are looking for not only family-friendly housing units but also family-friendly neighborhoods—they need and desire a community that supports the development of children. Market studies have established that some of the key priorities for families are:

- affordability
- safety
- privacy
- sufficient indoor space (three bedrooms and one to two full bathrooms)
- outdoor play space; and
- proximity to quality amenities such as child care, schools and parks.²¹



Many families with children are willing and interested in living in smaller spaces in urban areas—if the spaces are designed in a way that supports the raising of children. Lack of overall space can be compensated with smart design features such as including more but smaller bedrooms; storage for strollers, bikes, and toys; and the provision of common indoor and outdoor areas to play.

In terms of access to outdoor space, both softscape and hardscape areas are important. Children need access to private or nearby public pathways for biking and running around. Children also need access to complex play features beyond simple play units that have just one obvious use, such as jungle gyms or swings. Complex play areas provide for active, creative play, and manipulation, such as a table with digging equipment or a playhouse with supplies.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES ARE COMMUNITIES WHERE FAMILIES ENJOY:

HOUSING AT AFFORDABLE PRICES

CHILD CARE

PARKS

PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS

QUALITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

AND OTHER FEATURES THAT PROMOTE FAMILY WELL-BEING

Additional amenities that are important to creating family-friendly neighborhoods include nearby access to:

- Public transit
- Libraries
- Child care facilities
- Recreation centers
- Grocery stores



CITY VISION, GOALS, AND PLANNING PRACTICES

An important aspect of being a child-friendly city, especially in a climate of densification and change, is setting a city vision of being family-friendly and incorporating that vision into city planning practices. A 2008 American Planning Association study of urban planners found that U.S. cities branding themselves as “family-friendly” were more likely to:

- Include families in comprehensive plans
- Advance the interests of families in zoning regulations and site plan reviews
- Create better built environments, particularly housing
- Use a broad array of financial tools
- Involve families in planning processes.²²



Several cities have made it a priority to create a family-friendly city. In Denver, for example, under the mayor’s leadership the city launched the Youth-Friendly City Initiative, with the goal to make Denver the #1 Child-Friendly City in the United States.²³ The Mayor of Portland has also made children a priority in his administration.

Creating a family-friendly city requires a change in the way traditional city planning is conducted by requiring a city to examine city policies from the viewpoint of children and to assess how the policies impact the needs of children. Thus, for example, when public spaces are designed, they should be designed with consideration for how children would use the space. In planning a transit system, a family-friendly city would therefore:

- Examine every aspect of a transit system from the perspective of a child in a stroller
- Limit bus transfers on routes that children frequently use
- Ensure that every part of a transit system is safe, affordable, and welcoming to a child
- Explore pedestrian routes to ensure they are usable and safe for children
- Increase a child’s ability to safely walk and bike to school and activities.



In Nova Scotia, Canada, the province has adopted “Child & Youth Friendly Land-Use and Transportation Planning Guidelines,” which state that each municipality should designate a staff member who is responsible for bringing a child’s perspective to transportation and



land use planning issues. The needs of children and youth are to receive as much priority as other people and businesses. This change in perspective can result in changes as simple as changing the grades of sidewalks.²⁴

An additional component of making planning practices child-friendly is to seek the input and involvement of children. The United Nations Child-Friendly Cities Program states that one of the key components of a child-friendly city is that it involve young people in local decision-making. Denver is following the United Nations' principles by creating opportunities for children to have meaningful participation in the city's planning processes and by creating a city full of child-friendly spaces. The City of San Francisco similarly has a Youth Commission which involves youth in city planning. In Chicago, the Imagine Chicago program, a partnership of community builders, youth, and educators, provides youth with a role in planning for the city's future.

The CEOs for Cities recently commissioned a year-long study on what cities can do to attract families with children. The study lists many additional planning and related strategies that cities can take to support city families in their day-to-day lives.²⁵

DESIGNING HOMES AND NEIGHBORHOODS FOR FAMILIES

While many families with children will want to live in the suburbs no matter what type of amenities are offered in the urban core, there are also many families who are interested in living in the urban core if the right amenities are offered.²⁶ Yet, because new and denser urban development is not typically family-friendly, several cities have adopted design standards to create family-friendly housing and neighborhoods in the denser urban core. Here is a summary of some city efforts to design more family-friendly housing and neighborhoods in the urban core:

- The City of Vancouver is the poster-child of family-friendly downtowns. The city was the first to adopt requirements and guidelines for the construction of high-density housing specifically for families with children.²⁷ The guidelines cover everything from site selection and surrounding land uses to unit layout and storage. For example, the guidelines state that sites selected for family housing development should be close and have safe access to an elementary school, a playground, a day-care center, an afterschool care facility, a community center, grocery store, and public transit stop. There is also a suggested minimum of twenty family units in any single development project.
- The City of Portland recently established a set of design principles for child-friendly housing through the city's infill courtyard design competition. The city invited architects from around the world to submit designs for family-friendly housing oriented towards shared courtyards that would allow for denser housing in the urban core. A catalog of the winning entries is available at <http://www.courtyardhousing.org/>. The City of Portland plans to facilitate construction of the designs by providing funding to adapt the designs to building sites and encouraging developers to partner with the winning designers in a design-build competition.²⁸ Several additional initiatives are underway to make Portland's Pearl District in the urban core more family-friendly, including a review of the needs of families wanting to live downtown that will be part of the city's central city plan update, the development of affordable apartments which will include a child care facility on-site, and a new neighborhood park.²⁹
- In Seattle, a recent city-supported initiative is focusing on the urban core to create family-friendly urban neighborhoods. The project is in the process of suggesting policy recommendations in the areas of public and open spaces along with affordable family-sized housing for the central city. The project is involving children in the planning process. The city is also undergoing a review of its height and density bonus policy to consider using density bonuses and other incentives to achieve more housing suitable for families.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CHILD CARE OPPORTUNITIES

As discussed above, there is a direct link between child care access and the economic vitality of a region. As a result, cities nationwide have been linking the development of child care opportunities with economic development strategies.³⁰ Some strategies of note include:³¹

○ **INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

- Collective management strategies, such as Child Care Ventures in Santa Cruz, California, one of several efforts across the country where child care centers ally together to manage administrative costs as a group, which leads to economies of scale and the sharing of costs for staffing, purchasing, pools of substitute teachers, and the like.

○ **LABOR STRATEGIES**

- Workforce child care policies supporting on-site child care at businesses, employer contracts with child care centers, the availability of Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA), and employer-sponsored child care.³²
- Professionalization of the child care sector, supporting links between training and compensation, links to Quality Rating Systems, and business-college partnerships.³³
- Workforce development and child care subsidies from the public sector, including the use of federal dollars to provide child care subsidies for low-income working families.³⁴

○ **CAPITAL STRATEGIES**

- Facility finance strategies can encourage local banks, local real estate developers, and others with technical expertise in business, capital, and land acquisition issues to partner with the child care services community to develop strategies for funding and building child care centers. There have been several efforts of this kind at the state and local level, including in Connecticut, Ohio, and Minneapolis.
- Capital strategies to enhance quality, including loan forgiveness linked to quality rating improvements, increased child care subsidies based on center quality, or required subsidies provided by land developers in return for tax abatements.

EXPANDING CHILD CARE SERVICES THROUGH LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Several cities nationwide have made substantive efforts to improve child care services through extensive land use planning, transportation planning, and related policies. For example, building child care services into transportation planning can reduce congestion and commuter time. Child care centers can be located near transportation hubs with ISTEA and CDBG funds. Cities in Florida (Orlando) and California (Santa Clara, Oakland) have used this approach in funding child care sites. Other cities (Winston-Salem, San Francisco, Newark, and Colusa, California) have used flexible housing funding, CDBG grants, and Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) to place child care centers near housing hubs.³⁵

California appears to be a forefront of integrating land use planning with child care, in particular through the state's Local Investment in Child Care (LINCC) project, which encourages the development of land use policies that incorporate child care. Though these efforts range considerably from place to place, they include the use of impact fees from real estate developers to



fund child care services (San Francisco, Concord, Santa Cruz) and investment in planning to coordinate child care, transportation, and other infrastructure (Butte County).

Additional examples include:

- San Francisco has built into the City Code a requirement that development projects set aside child care space or contribute to a Child Care Capital Fund. San Diego has contributed land for twelve child care centers. Palo Alto provided land at a reduced rent to a child care center serving ninety-two children.
- Detroit, Minneapolis, and Seattle provide economies of scale for administrative services (eg., accounting) to child care facilities through comprehensive planning. Redwood City, California, has provided child care center space in community centers.
- Mountain View, California, uses recreation and park sites to locate child care centers. In Vancouver, child care services are incorporated into all city planning.
- The State of Vermont requires that all city planning incorporate child care services. Wisconsin has made efforts to build child care centers as part of industrial parks.
- California provides density bonuses for residential developments that include child care space. San Mateo County's Congestion Management Plan considers on-site child care as a traffic mitigation measure available to large development projects.
- North Carolina initiated Child Care WAGE\$ Project, which provides salary supplements for child care providers who work with children zero through five and TEACH Early Childhood Project, which provides scholarships to child care workers to complete education and increase income. This program has been very successful. Bakersfield, California, and Arvin, California, eliminated conditional use permit requirements for large family child care homes and eliminated child care permit fees.

CREATING SAFE STREETS

Street redesign is another important aspect of creating family-friendly communities. The transformation of streets into areas that are safe for bicycling and outdoor games can lead to a dramatic increase in play activity and physical activity of children.³⁶ Many cities close streets to vehicles on the weekends or other times during the week to create places for children to play and neighbors to socialize. In Bogota, Columbia, for example, the city closes 120 kilometers of roads to motor vehicles for seven hours each Sunday and opens them to people of all ages to ride bikes, jog, and gather. Likewise, in Paris, France, many neighborhood streets shut down on weekends and holidays and are transformed into children's play zones. In Curitiba, Brazil, six blocks of downtown are transformed each weekend into a pedestrian zone, including a children's painting zone.³⁷

In Holland, the Dutch design their streets (called Dutch Woonerfs, or mixer courts) with children in mind by creating shared spaces. Streets combine creative traffic calming devices including paving, plantings, and street furniture such as lampposts and benches, to enable slow-moving local traffic and children to use the same space. The shared space concept, according to the Congress for New Urbanism, is "the biggest recent innovation in European street design." The City of Seattle has recently started to adopt this concept in a transit redevelopment area next to downtown, through a set of new street design guidelines.³⁸



HOUSING TARGETS

Housing targets enable a city to plan specifically to meet the specialized housing needs of different housing types, including families with children. Arlington County, Virginia, for example, has set a goal of targeting its affordable housing units to a set of priority households. Sixty-five percent of all housing units funded by the county will be targeted to families with children, while 20 percent are targeted to seniors, and 15 percent to persons with disabilities.³⁹



PARKS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE

Providing parks within walking distance is an important amenity for a family-friendly city, especially in cities undergoing densification where homes lack yard space. If a park is more than half a mile away, “most people will either skip the trip or they will drive.”⁴⁰ Accessible parks have other benefits such as increasing physical fitness and allowing “neighbors to connect during morning playground sessions, lunchtime picnics, afternoon pickup games, after-dinner strolls, or weekend festivals.”⁴¹ In many ways then, residents’ distance from a park is a more important measure than absolute amount of parkland in a city.

Denver, Long Beach, California, Seattle, Minneapolis, and Chicago are touted as the best cities in the country when it comes to creating parks that are accessible within walking distance.⁴² Minneapolis is the most successful—99.4 percent of the city residents live within six blocks of a park. This standard dates back more than fifty years and is part of the city’s park board policies. Denver has had a goal that all residents should be within six walkable blocks and, in the city’s 2003 master parks plan, the city set a three-block goal for its newer, denser subdivisions. As of 2004, close to 90 percent of the city’s population lived within six blocks of a park. The city achieved this goal in part by repurposing land for parks and converting sites into learning landscapes, along with a sizable bond package. In Seattle, the half-mile standard is close to being met, and for denser



neighborhoods, the city has a goal of 1/8 mile so that every urban village in the city has a park or mini-park. In Chicago, which has more than 500 parks occupying 7,000 acres, more than 90 percent of the city's 2.9 million residents have a park or play lot within a half mile of their home. In the 1990s, the city created a "City Space" plan which identified gaps in parkland and led to the earmarking of impact fees to create new parks within walking distance of residences. The city now has a goal that residents should live within 1/10 of a mile from a pocket park.⁴³

In addition to public park areas, multi-family, mixed-use projects, and higher-density single family developments should be designed to accommodate children's and parents' need for outdoor space. One set of site design guidelines for medium-density housing includes for the following considerations: (1) Children need safe, uninhibited outdoor play for their physiological and mental health; (2) Parents need to be able to allow their children outside without constant, close supervision; (3) The environment around children's homes needs to be safe from traffic, pollution, and unnecessary physical and social hazards; (4) Children need easy, casual access to other children without a formal invitation to play; (5) Children need to create private spaces for themselves (for example, tree houses, forts, or clubhouses) on wild and unmaintained ground away from public view.⁴⁴

TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SPACES INTO AREAS WHERE CHILDREN CAN PLAY AND EXPLORE

Creating play spaces for children does not necessarily mean creating specialized one-acre playgrounds for children every six blocks, especially in places like downtown, as long as the city as a whole is made available to children to explore and play in. Thus, whenever public spaces are planned, a city should consider including child-friendly features. For example, the outdoor Pearl Street Mall in Boulder is filled with stone creatures for children to climb on and other areas for children for exploration and play. In Portland, when the city designed the Jamison Park in the dense Pearl District near downtown, the city included a

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water feature area for children. The Powell Barnett Park in downtown Seattle includes a tricycle maze and interactive spinning toys. The Sound Garden, located along the lakefront in Cadillac, Michigan, incorporates play wood and metal sculptures that also function as instruments.⁴⁵ With creativity, parks and outdoor play spaces can also be created in unlikely places such as converted parking lots and alleys.

EXPANDING OUTDOOR PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

Most traditional playgrounds focus on the development of a child’s gross motor skills. In response to research that children need exposure to a variety of challenging play opportunities, many cities have embarked on the creation of adventure playgrounds that offer creative play opportunities, in addition to more traditional running, jumping, and climbing activities. The Imagination Playground in New York City, for example, “combines sand, water, ‘loose parts’ and play associates to encourage a constantly changing environment where children can play, dream and build.”⁴⁶ Children have access to play props such as building blocks, buckets, brooms, and shovels, along with carts, wagons and wheelbarrows that allow kids to load, unload, and move stuff around.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

The City of Denver’s Learning Landscape Programs has transformed 46 neglected elementary school yards into attractive and safe multi-use resources, with \$10 million in bond funding. A collaborative process involving community members, school officials, teachers, and students, resulted in the design of new school yards open to the community for public use outside of school hours. The new yards include common gathering areas, shade, natural and cultivated gardens, outdoor art, improved hard surface games and educational elements, a range of developmentally appropriate play equipment, and creative play elements. “For the elementary school children, these revised playgrounds provide participatory landscapes for outdoor learning, improved outdoor recreation and play opportunities, improved appearance of the grounds and a reinvigorated sense of community. For Denver neighborhoods, this revitalization reclaims the school’s historical role as a focal point in the community.”⁴⁷

In Houston, parents who wanted to bolster support for a neighborhood elementary school created the Travis Elementary School “Dinosaur Park.” Working with volunteer architects, engineers, designers, writers, and others, the neighborhood group created a joint school playground and public park that features a jogging path, sandbox, tricycle path, and other play equipment.⁴⁸



Dinosaur Park received funding from the SPARK School Park Program, a nonprofit organization operating out of the Houston Mayor's office and focused on developing school grounds into neighborhood parks.

School districts, municipalities, urban planners, and environmentalists alike have recognized the value of creating school campuses that also house programs serving the broader community. Joint-use campuses, several of which now exist in Austin, allow public entities to maximize scarce resources while offering new or expanded services and promoting community support for neighborhood schools and the school system. Some private uses can even provide a significant up-front investment for construction or an ongoing revenue stream to offset facility maintenance and operations costs.

Many joint-use campuses seek to meet the health and social services needs of a community, providing space for community medical clinics or child care. Clinton Middle School in East Feliciana, Louisiana, for example, provides space for a full-service health clinic for students and the general public.⁴⁹ Others offer adult learning opportunities or share facilities—such as a theater or a fitness center—with the general public; one high school in West Virginia even includes a bank branch office within its building.⁵⁰ Strong models of joint-use facilities exist throughout the nation. Elizabeth Learning Center in California offers a health clinic, mental health services, integrated case management for families, adult education programs, and afterschool tutoring—in addition to serving students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade⁵¹. Edison School/Pacific Park Project, a collaboration between the City of Glendale, California, and the local school district, resulted in a multi-use project featuring an elementary school and community center, with the cafeteria, gymnasium, computer classrooms, library, park, outdoor theater, basketball courts, and parking functioning as shared facilities.⁵²

While planning and policy documents tend to focus on the construction of new school-community campuses, publications of groups such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Smart Growth America also highlight projects in which older school structures are renovated and redeveloped, often making possible new, non-academic uses. In Newport, Rhode Island, for example, the school district renovated a historic middle school, and the campus now functions both as an educational institution and community center.⁵³ A collaboration that included healthcare providers and the local school district resulted in the renovation and expansion of a neighborhood elementary school in St. Louis, Missouri, to include a community center, child care, and a teen center.⁵⁴

School districts can also partner with government and the private and nonprofit sectors to enhance and expand curricular offerings. In partnership with the business, art, government, and technology communities, the Minnesota Interdistrict Downtown School integrates its academic program with the surrounding urban fabric. All of the downtown serves as its campus; K–12 students attend classes at the school as well as in “external labs” offsite.⁵⁵ Classroom teachers involved in Project LEAP in Palm Beach County, Florida, collaborate with professional dancers in developing and team-teaching art-based methods for math, science, social studies, and language arts.

IV. ADDITIONAL CITY INITIATIVES

VANCOUVER: A MODEL APPROACH



While most downtowns have lost families with children, the number of children living in downtown Vancouver has doubled within just five years, between 1996 and 2001. By 2001, 5,680 children were living in Vancouver's 2.3 square mile downtown. In 2004, the city opened a new elementary school in an inner-city neighborhood for the first time in 30 years. The growth in families with children is the direct result of city planning efforts and the dedication of city officials that the city would not become a city of the childless rich. The key city policy to fulfilling this vision is a requirement that 20 percent of units in developments must be for low-income residents and 25 percent must be family-sized units. The family-size units are typically town homes surrounding residential towers. Parks and playscapes are integral to the developments.⁵⁶ Extensive development guidelines include other requirements to support the needs of families in dense developments. These requirements are discussed briefly above under Designing Homes and Neighborhoods for Families.

In developing the guidelines, the City of Vancouver first conducted research on families' housing choices and found that the number of bedrooms in a project is more important than the density. Moreover, density can be mitigated by factors such as location close to day-care, schools, shopping, and transit, as well as project design including open space and play areas. For example, the False Creek Community in Vancouver includes twelve-foot sidewalks, double rows of trees, an arts and recreation center, a children's center, and an elementary school that is at capacity.⁵⁷

City planning efforts in Vancouver have resulted in an array of public amenities that support children in the urban core, including child care and community centers, parks, playgrounds, and land for schools.

SEATTLE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH



In the 1980s, Charles Royer, the Mayor of Seattle, created a Kids Place initiative. The initiative is credited with "helping stem the exodus of families with children from the city."⁵⁸ Through the initiative, the Mayor fostered a city government culture that

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supported all children. Along with creating a policy plan for children and a children and youth commission, the Mayor required every city department to include an item in its budget that benefited children.⁵⁹ The city developed family support centers, and commercial businesses placed logos in their windows indicating that they were kid-friendly businesses. The initiative included marketing the city's neighborhoods to young families and making urban parks more family-friendly.

Norman Rice, who replaced Royer in 1990, expanded the initiative by creating the city's Comprehensive Child Development Program, which subsidizes child care for low-income working families. Under Rice's leadership, the City of Seattle proactively encouraged family-friendly workplaces and supported parents to complete job training programs and find jobs. The city created an elder services program and advocated for decent elder care to help offset the burdens that elder care can place on working families. Moreover, the city created a Families and Education levy, which generates \$8.5 million a year in funding for services—such as teen health centers and afterschool programs—to tax support families and help children succeed in school. Building and land use codes were modified to encourage housing development with families in mind.⁶⁰

The city's initiatives appear to be working. Despite the fact that the city has built few traditional houses since 2000, the city's percentage of families with children increased between 2000 and 2005, while declining in the rest of the county.⁶¹

SAN FRANCISCO: PLAYING CATCHUP



San Francisco has the lowest percentage of families with children of any U.S. city—only 19 percent of households in the city have children, compared to 33 percent of the nation. The city recently conducted a study to determine why families were leaving the city, and the biggest reason was the cost of housing.⁶² Mayor Gavin Newsom has initiated a series of initiatives to attract families with children back into the city. These include: coordination of services between the city and the school district, provision of health care to the city's uninsured residents, a working families tax credit, and the reallocation of housing resources to address the needs of families. The city has formed a Policy Council on Children, Youth & Their Families to oversee the development of new policies, including the implementation of a housing plan for families with children. The housing discussion draft plan contains the following six policies:⁶³

1. Create a plan to close the family housing gap with specific, measurable targets.
2. Adopt a definition of family-friendly housing for use by the private and public sector.
3. Protect and preserve housing for San Francisco's most vulnerable families.
4. Ensure that all neighborhood plans provide a minimum of 20 percent of family-friendly housing appropriate for families with children.
5. Appoint family constituents to key housing and land use decision-making bodies.
6. Create a permanent, dedicated local source of funding for creation of housing for families with children.

PORTLAND: SCHOOLS AS A CORNERSTONE OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Tom Potter, mayor of Portland, Oregon, has dedicated his term to trying to keep children in the city and to stem the tide of families leaving Portland schools. In 2007, the city embarked on an ambitious plan called the “Schools, Families, and Housing Initiative.”

The Schools, Families, and Housing Initiative was adopted in response to alarming trends in the city: The average sales prices of homes in Portland have doubled in ten years from \$158,000 to nearly \$332,000. During this time period, the Portland public schools suffered an enrollment drop of more than 11,000 students, or an average children per school each year. As a result, the school district had to close eight schools in the past four years alone.

The City of Portland sees families with children as the foundation of a vibrant city and so has embarked on several new programs as part of the Schools, Families, and Housing Initiative, with the aim of keeping families with children in the inner city and enrolled in public schools. The programs are centered on the principle that stronger links between schools, neighborhoods, and city services will result in stronger schools, stronger neighborhoods, and higher performing students.

First, the city has created a pilot temporary rental assistance program to families with children in schools with high student mobility.⁶⁴ Student mobility is a key contributor to student success—if a student moves out of a school in the middle of the school year, the student is much more likely to not succeed in the classroom. The main contributor to student mobility is a family’s inability to remain in their housing, usually as a result of a family who rents and is being evicted or cannot afford an increase in rent. Portland’s rental assistance program is training multi-lingual housing specialists who work in schools with high mobility rates. The specialists help families access resources to stay in their housing or relocate to housing in the same school zone. Temporary assistance of up to \$3,000 a family is available to help families pay their rent, along with moving costs, deposits, and utility hook-up fees.

Second, the city is administering a \$950,000 grants program to promote vibrant neighborhood schools. The grant is a matching competitive grant program for parents and neighbors who want to pursue a specific programmatic goal to improve a neighborhood school.

Third, the city is working to better integrate neighborhood and city planning with the planning, design, and operation of school facilities. The city wants to make it standard operating procedure to integrate the school’s and city’s planning and budgeting processes for schools and related support services. Ultimately, the city wants to transform schools into multi-functional community spaces by integrating school facilities with neighborhood uses such as child care, recreational spaces, libraries, and community gardens, based on the model of the Rosa Parks Elementary School, a community campus sharing space with many different local community partners. The key is to bring together the different city departments, schools, and neighborhoods as partners. The Bureau of Planning is taking the lead in neighborhoods to convene stakeholders and look closely at the needs of families with children in the neighborhood and to examine the needs of the schools in that neighborhood. The idea is to coordinate and prioritize public investment in family housing, parks and recreation, social services, safe routes to schools, and libraries.

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Fourth, the city is creating models and looking at ways to spur the development of denser ownership housing that accommodates the needs of families with children. The city recently completed a courtyard housing design competition to spur interest in the development of medium-density family-friendly infill housing in the urban core. The city is currently considering targeting some of its density bonus programs and public benefit requirements towards developments that include family amenities. The city is engaged in other programs as well, such as providing funding to implement a new website marketing Portland's schools and neighborhoods to new arrivals.

The Schools, Families, and Housing Initiative follows a series of other programs, including a special property tax levy for the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods Program, which provides for a broad range of children's and educational programs, including after-school programs at more than forty schools in the city. The city has also been proactively encouraging more subsidized housing for students with families near Portland State University and Oregon Health and Science University.

V. TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS



The following are the recommendations adopted by the Task Force:

A. CITY VISION AND PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

To be successful in attracting and retaining families with children, the City of Austin must adopt a mission of being a family-friendly city and must focus its planning efforts to create a community that welcomes families with children. This effort requires that the perspective of families with children be incorporated at multiple levels of planning and policy-making and that every city policy is analyzed for its effects, intended or unintended, on families with children. Current and future planning and policy-making should incorporate the best practices from cities that have been successful in attracting and retaining families. Because the greatest challenges for families with children are present in the urban core, special attention should be addressed to the needs of families in planning and policy efforts that affect these areas; however, planning efforts city-wide should incorporate the perspectives and requirements of families with children. The recommendations included in this section would focus planning and policy-making in service of a goal of making Austin the most family-friendly city in the country.

1. City of Austin Mission Statement: We recommend the City Council incorporate the following statement into the city's mission statement and into any future planning and policy initiatives: "Austin is committed to being the most family-friendly city in the country and will ensure that its policies and decisions support and enhance the quality of life for Austin's families with children."
2. Families with Children Commission: The City Council should create a Families with Children Commission to examine city policies on an ongoing basis in terms of their impact on families with children. The Commission should also review and evaluate the city budget and respond to how well it addresses the needs of families with children. The Commission should include representation from teenagers because children need to be engaged in the city issues that affect them.
3. Families with Children Ombudsperson: The City of Austin should hire a Families with Children Ombudsperson within the City Manager's office to review the city's proposed budget, policies, and decisions to ensure that the perspectives of families with children are taken into consideration in city decision-making at the City Council and staff levels. This individual will identify and work with key city staff and department officials to provide ongoing feedback on policies and best practices that could enhance the quality of life in Austin for families with children. The Ombudsperson should also oversee an annual report on the "State of the City of Austin and Our Families with Children."⁶⁵
4. Representation of Families with Children Advocates on City Commissions: The City Council should create an appointment for an advocate of families with children to serve on each of the following city citizen commissions: the Planning Commission, Downtown Commission, Parks and Recreation Board, the Waller Creek Citizen Advisory committee, the Design Commission, Library Commission, and other commissions and relevant task forces developing policies that have an impact of families with children.
5. Comprehensive Plan: In the Austin Tomorrow Comprehensive Plan, which is currently being developed, the City Council should: (1) place a priority on enacting land use and other planning policies that enhance the quality of life for families with children and promote family-friendly neighborhoods and services; and (2) incorporate national best practices to make Austin the most family-friendly city in the country. The planning process should incorporate input from children and young people, parents,

city government, school district, businesses, the community, and other stakeholders.⁶⁶

6. **Downtown Plan:** The City Council should direct city planning staff and the planning consultants for both the Downtown Plan and downtown affordable housing plan to include a plan for the incorporation of family-friendly developments and amenities into downtown. The plans should include strategies for attracting and retaining families with children to both play and live downtown. Some of the newly designated residential districts in downtown should be targeted for families through planning, design guidelines, land use requirements, and the dedication of incentives and funding. All parks and public spaces in downtown should be designed to be accessible and attractive to families with children.

7. **Future Planning Efforts:** The City Council should take appropriate action to ensure that all future planning initiatives at the City of Austin incorporate the perspectives of families with children.

8. **Mapping Project:** The City Council should direct staff to overlay the existing city map of public parks and open spaces with information about private parks, recreation areas, sidewalks, child care services, public and private schools, and other family-friendly amenities. The map, which should also indicate gaps where these amenities are lacking in particular neighborhoods, should guide future planning efforts and city expenditures.

9. **Neighborhood Planning Process:** The City Council should direct the Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department to incorporate into the neighborhood planning process a more concentrated focus on issues related to families with children. NPZD should also provide neighborhood planning areas with a broad menu of options to attract and retain families with children. The issues that should be addressed in neighborhood plans—some of which already receive attention during the planning process—include, but are not limited to, housing type; design guidelines; child care services; schools; green space; sidewalks to schools and parks; and other amenities for families with children. City of Austin and Austin Independent School District staff should work together to provide neighborhood planning teams with information about schools in their planning areas as well as research that helps teams assess how particular land use decisions might affect schools. (See related discussion in “Recommendations Related to Public Schools.”)

10. **Family-Friendly Design Standards:** The City of Austin should hire a consultant and work with community stakeholders and developers to create family-friendly design standards for housing, using a rating system similar to the Austin Energy Green Building standards. The City of Austin currently has few models of dense family-friendly housing in the urban core. As Austin’s urban core continues to densify, the city needs standards that will guide and incentivize private interests to create more family-friendly development. We recommend the guidelines be modeled in part on Vancouver’s and Portland’s design guidelines and address features such as shared streets, unit design (interior and exterior), shared play and public areas, child accessibility, privacy, safety and security, and traffic calming. We recommend that these features then be required in developments over a certain size and in certain geographic locations, as well as in all Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) and Transit-Oriented Development District (see below). In Vancouver, for example, all downtown developments must include the city’s family-friendly design features, and 25 percent of all units must be designed for families with children.

11. **Transit-Oriented Development:** We recommend the City of Austin incorporate family-friendly design standards, such as recreational areas, green space, child care, and appropriately-designed housing, into each of the city’s transit-oriented development districts.

B. CHILD CARE SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

Child care services are essential for not only families with children but the economy of our region. Difficulty in accessing child care that is close to work or home will be a significant deterrent to families who are considering locating in the city. Child care is a fragile resource because child care operators often operate on tight margins, so are highly vulnerable to increasing rents and other operational costs. Austin already has seen the loss of a number of central city child care centers. If Austin is to be successful in recruiting and retaining families, the City of Austin must work to ensure an adequate supply of high-quality

affordable child care, including not only care for preschool children, but also afterschool care for school-aged children and appropriate care for children of all ages with special needs.

1. Child Care Services as an Economic Development Issue: The City Council should endorse a policy stating that access to quality and affordable child care services is both an economic development issue as well as a social service issue. Traditionally, child care has been seen as an individual family issue—one with little impact on the quality of life of a city or on the local economy. Long viewed from the social services perspective, it has merited little interest from city planners or economists. Research indicates, however, that child care services are a \$1 billion driver in our economy and thus play a critical role in a city's infrastructure and local economy, just as do other pieces of the local infrastructure, like roads and transportation.⁶⁷ Adoption of a policy brief by the City Council would be a critical first step in integrating child care services into all aspects of city planning, zoning, transportation and social services.

2. Strategic Planning: The City Council should hire a consultant to research and develop a comprehensive needs assessment and strategic plan for child care services as an economic development strategy for the City of Austin.⁶⁸ The Task Force believes that much more comprehensive data collection, research, and analysis are needed before any specific policy recommendations can be made around child care services. Data must be collected and analyzed with future needs forecasted to identify the most critical gaps and to develop a strategic plan and vision for child care services in the City of Austin.

a. The strategic plan should be developed in collaboration with local stakeholders including United Way Capital Area's Success By 6, the Child Care Council, Family Connections, the city demographer, WorkSource Child Care Solutions, and the Texas Workforce Commission, many of whom have already compiled relevant data that could support such an assessment and planning process.

b. The strategic plan should emphasize the importance of the quality of child care; the need for families, especially low-income families and families with children with disabilities, to have access to quality child care; the need for adequate funding of child care; the need to preserve existing child care facilities; and the need for child care to be part of neighborhoods and to be included in new developments.

c. The strategic plan should fill specific information gaps such as: (1) what is the need for part-time and off-hours (evening) programs, (2) to what extent will the capacity of existing programs serve future needs; (3) how many and what percentage of children are being served by unlicensed providers; (4) what are the geographic parts of the City of Austin that will most need additional child care services in five, ten, and fifteen years; (5) what is the local impact of child care on worker productivity; (6) is there a difference between the quality and accessibility of care for subsidized children versus non-subsidized; (6) is there a difference between the quality and accessibility of care for children with disabilities versus children without; (7) is there a gap between capacity for subsidized vs. non-subsidized care; (8) what are the legislative and code barriers for developing child care facilities in Austin; (9) what are the most effective ways to integrate child care services into city planning efforts; and (10) an analysis of which models adopted by other cities have been effective in expanding access to quality, affordable child care services. Funding for this study may be available from foundations with interests in this area (e.g., Kellogg, Packard) as well as from federal agencies including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We recommend inviting the input of Mildred E. Warner, Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell University, and engaging all Austin agencies that are involved in child care services issues.

d. The consultants conducting the strategic plan should give serious consideration to the recommendations of the Child Care Council to the Task Force on Families and Children and to any other historical recommendations. These recommendations were made to the Child Care Services Subcommittee by the Child Care Council at its request:

i. Encourage the use of Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) that include early education and child care options in new development projects;

ii. Require environmental reviews to determine whether development projects impact existing early education and child care providers;

- iii. Exempt early education and child programs that meet quality standards from city and county property taxes;
- iv. Encourage inclusion of licensed child care facilities in Transit Oriented Developments (TODs);
- v. Provide land and building space for early education and child care facilities as part of city and county real estate transactions;
- vi. Increase funding for improving quality early education and child care services for low-income families by investing in a variety of research-based, proven strategies.

3. **Child Care Council:** The City Council should continue to regard the Child Care Council (CCC) as a key resource for policy recommendations in regard to child care issues in Austin. In the approximately twenty years since its founding, the CCC has played a key role in the establishment of Family Connections, the Fund for Child Care Excellence, and the introduction of United Way's "Success By 6" to the Austin community. The CCC has long been known for its vital, committed, and hard-working membership. The Council is committed to speaking as one voice and is eager to offer leadership in addressing Austin's complex child care issues. The CCC has conducted extensive national research over time that establishes and confirms the recommendations related to child care in this report.

4. **Dedicated Funding for Child Care Services.** The City Council should dedicate 50 percent of the non-housing in-lieu-of fees from the new downtown density bonus and other future density bonus programs to subsidize the creation or retention of child care facilities within a mile of the development or within the City of Austin's new transit-oriented development districts. The City Council should also identify funds within the City of Austin budget to provide additional tuition subsidies for low-income families to participate in quality child care programs, including day-care for younger children and afterschool and summer programs for school-aged children.

C. HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Housing is the key requirement for bringing new families into the city and keeping those who already are in Austin—unless families can find housing they can afford and that meets their needs, they will not move to Austin. Families seeking to locate in downtown or elsewhere in the urban core face the greatest challenges in finding housing; home prices in these areas have soared, and rents also are increasing most rapidly in the central city. In downtown areas, options are limited even for families with financial resources, as much of the new housing and surrounding amenities are designed to accommodate singles or childless couples. The difficulty of finding affordable family-sized housing is not restricted to the central city, however, nor is it primarily a problem for lower-income families; as home prices increase throughout the City of Austin, middle-income families increasingly are choosing to locate outside the city limits so that they can obtain homes that meet their needs. The recommendations provided here are an effort to increase the availability of affordable and market-rate family-sized housing in the City of Austin through existing programs, new programs, and collaborations with other interested parties.

1. **Pilot Family-Friendly Development:** We recommend that the City of Austin create and assist with the funding of a model family-friendly development in one of the transit-oriented development districts (TODs). According to a development expert who met with the Task Force, current urban developments are being designed for singles and childless couples, in part because lenders tend to be conservative about investing in new types of development. By creating a pilot project and educating the development community about successes in other cities, the City of Austin would lay the groundwork for the private market's involvement in building more family-friendly developments. In conjunction with a pilot project, we recommend the following:

- a. The City of Austin dedicate a parcel of government-owned land for the project (options could include the Austin Energy tract in the North Lamar/Justin Lane TOD or the city-owned East 5th Street property in the Saltillo TOD);
- b. The City of Austin conduct community charrettes to obtain broad input on family-friendly features for the development;

- c. The City of Austin issue a Request For Proposals for the development of the tract. The RFP should require that the development incorporate ideas from the community charrettes, model family-friendly design features, and include affordable housing, on-site child care, indoor and outdoor recreational spaces for children, and other best practices for family-friendly housing;⁶⁹
 - d. The City of Austin stay actively involved as a partner in the project and maintain ownership of the land; and
 - e. The location and design of the development be informed by the mapping of services in the area.
2. Target Government Housing Dollars: The City of Austin's annual and five-year consolidated housing plans should include specific targets for the creation of affordable housing for low-income families with children, including creation of affordable opportunities for families with children in the urban core.⁷⁰ The plans should designate a percentage as well as numerical targets for new government-funded and incentivized affordable housing units (both rental and homeownership) that will be occupied by families with children, especially larger low-income families (five or more persons), who have the highest housing needs of any housing group in the City of Austin. The plans should be based on a comprehensive assessment of the housing gap and needs for families with children at different income levels.
 3. Develop Affordable Housing Vision and Expand Housing Planning Efforts: The City of Austin should develop a twenty-year vision statement for closing the affordable housing gap in Austin (including specifically for families with children). Through the five-year Consolidated Plans, the City of Austin should develop specific, measurable targets for attaining that vision. The Consolidated Plan should be enhanced to include consideration of land use policies and planning, coordination with the city demographer on growth projections for low-income families with children, and geographic dispersion of affordable housing opportunities for families with children throughout the urban core and across the city. The Consolidated Plan should take into account school attendance zones with declining enrollments and seek to target programs to create more family-sized housing in those zones as appropriate.
 4. Prioritize City of Austin-built Homes for Families: The City of Austin should continue to give priority to low-income families with children for city-built homes as low-income families with children have some of the largest housing unmet housing needs in Austin. Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) guidelines do allow for the prioritization of home sales to families with children and persons with disabilities, and staff for AHFC indicates that these groups do receive priority. However, of the approximately twenty homes developed by AHFC since fiscal year 2005, only five have been sold to families with children, despite aggressive marketing and outreach on the part of AHFC. This issue requires further examination. The Community Development Commission should evaluate with AHFC the reasons why fewer families with children are purchasing the AHFC-built homes and develop recommendations of policies to increase the sale of homes to families with children. These policies could include: (1) additional collaborations with CHDO such as sharing waiting lists; or (2) AHFC adopting joint venture agreements with the CHDOs for the development of the larger homes.
 5. Housing Investments: To help align the City of Austin's housing investments with the needs of families with children in Austin, we recommend the following:
 - a. The Council should require city-funded affordable housing programs and private housing development projects that enter into development or redevelopment agreements with the City of Austin to give priorities for two-plus bedroom homes to families with children and to persons with disabilities with an in-home caretaker. This recommendation does not require that the units be sold to families with children or that units be held open until a family purchases or rents the unit, but instead requires that families with children simply receive priority;
 - b. The Community Development Commission and NHCD should explore additional ways to increase the sale and rental of city-subsidized family-sized housing to families with children.

- c. For city-subsidized affordable housing units with three or more bedrooms, the City Council should adopt a requirement that only families with children are eligible. (This policy would be similar to that utilized by the Austin Housing Authority; the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination against families with children but allows cities to promote housing opportunities for families with children, and federal regulations specifically allow for sellers and landlords to set reasonable occupancy requirements based on the number and size of bedrooms).
 - d. The City Council should direct the staff of Neighborhood Housing and Community Department to start collecting and reporting family-related data for all homeownership units that receive housing subsidies from the City of Austin or through city-administered federal housing programs. The data should include the numbers of bedrooms, the family composition, and the household size of the original purchaser from the City of Austin. This data is not currently collected and would be important to allow the newly-created Families with Children Commission, the Community Development Commission, and other planning bodies to track the City of Austin's progress towards serving the housing needs of families with children.
6. Density Bonus Programs: The City of Austin has an assortment of different density bonus/ affordable housing policies that have been adopted or are undergoing development (e.g., UNO, Downtown, Rainey Street, Vertical Mixed Use, Transit-Oriented Development, and Planned Unit Development). Some of the density bonuses tie the amount of required affordable housing to the square footage in the density space, and others tie the affordable housing to the number of density bonus units. Tying the bonus to the square footage encourages the creation of more family-sized units, while tying the bonus to the number of units encourages the creation of efficiency units that cannot accommodate families with children. To ensure that some of the density units are available for families with children, we recommend the following:
- a. Modify existing density bonus programs (VMU and UNO) and tailor future density bonus programs so that the number of affordable units required is based on the square footage of the development (or density space) instead of the number of units in the development (or density units);
 - b. Modify existing density bonus programs (VMU and UNO) and tailor future density bonus programs to require that the bedroom composition of the affordable units reflect the bedroom composition of the entire development; and
 - c. Require that developments with density bonuses give priority for affordable units with two or more bedrooms to families with children and persons with disabilities with live-in caretakers.
7. Homes and Schools Temporary Rental Assistance Program: The City of Austin should adopt a pilot "Homes and Schools temporary rental assistance program."⁷¹ This program should be modeled on the City of Portland's new program, which funnels housing counseling resources and emergency rental housing assistance funding to low-income families with children in targeted neighborhoods with high rates of student mobility in public schools. There is a direct connection between student mobility rates and success in school. The more children are shuffled from apartment to apartment, and thus from school to school, the more likely they are to fail in school. Under the pilot program, low-income families with children in public school who are at risk of losing their current housing would be eligible for housing counseling in their school and targeted housing assistance to help the children stay in their current neighborhood school. The ultimate goal would be to limit student mobility and therefore increase student performance in school.
8. Housing Resource Website and Marketing: It is very difficult for a family (or anyone for that matter) trying to find affordable housing in Austin to find out about existing resources. Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department lists the names and phone numbers of nonprofits providing homeownership opportunities, but no updated database exists that provides a list of available affordable rental and for-sale housing opportunities. With more and more affordable housing opportunities and new programs coming online, such as the VMU and TOD affordable housing programs, low-income households in Austin must have an easy way to find out about these resources. In conjunction with this need, we recommend the following:
- a. The City of Austin should work with nonprofit and for-profit developers to develop or enhance a centralized, easy-to-access "one-stop" website portal listing currently available affordable housing units and units coming online. For models, see the City of Calgary's website: <http://www.lowcostrent.org/housing.htm>; and Denver's downtown website, which

b. The City of Austin should develop a marketing campaign and work with local realtors to promote the website to Austinites and provide an easily accessible link to the site.

9. Colleges and Universities: We recommend the City of Austin partner with The University of Texas, Austin Community College District, and other local colleges and universities to encourage the development of affordable family-friendly housing for students. Housing that is affordable to students with children is very hard to come by in Austin, and The University of Texas is undergoing a planning process that could result in the loss of an additional 500 units. We recommend the City Council pass a resolution and work with The University of Texas to adopt policies for the Brackenridge Tract that will ensure the on-site replacement of, at a minimum, the greater of 500 units of affordable family housing or 25 percent of the new units developed on the Brackenridge Tract. We also recommend the City of Austin engage all local universities in planning to provide for more family-sized units in the urban core, for not only students but also staff and faculty.

D. PARKS, RECREATIONAL SPACES, AND CULTURAL AMENITIES RECOMMENDATIONS

Parks and cultural amenities are key components of a family-friendly city; indeed, they may be the components that initially attract a family to the neighborhood or community, and they create a climate that is inviting to families. In addition to attracting families to a city, close-to-home access to parks and recreational spaces is critical to a child's well-being. If a park or other outdoor space is not within walking distance, a child is much less likely to utilize that space. Unstructured free play in city parks and other green spaces provides a host of benefits, including health benefits (such as a reduction in childhood obesity), cognitive benefits (studies show that access to open space and parks results in higher school achievement), and socialization benefits. Parks also provide many benefits to the broader community-at-large: economic benefits, environmental benefits, and an overall strengthening of the community. Parks are "often the glue that holds the community together and the means to maintaining and improving future positive social interactions."⁷²

Cultural institutions (such as libraries and museums) and cultural events (such as family-friendly festivals and child-oriented concerts and theatrical events) also provide significant benefits to families with children and the community at large. They are opportunities for learning, creativity, physical activity and social interaction, and they contribute to community cohesion. For example, libraries often offer story times for young children and their parents, which not only encourage literacy in children, but also give children and their parents an opportunity to socialize with neighbors and thus foster a sense of community.

Because parks and cultural amenities contribute significantly to a child's well-being and to the family-oriented character of a community, Austin should offer families of all incomes, ages, and ability levels access to safe, attractive, and well-maintained parks or public green space; to innovative and diverse play spaces and public gathering spots; and to educational, fun, and age- and ability-appropriate cultural programming.

In our parks recommendations, we request that the City of Austin take steps to dramatically increase and enhance children's access to parks and recreational spaces because many families with children in Austin currently do not live within walking distance of a park.⁷³ However, recognizing the enormous expense of creating full-sized parks within walking distance of every neighborhood in Austin, we also endorse continued revisions and changes in design standards for parks, to allow for small pocket parks and urban playspaces that could be developed on small, difficult-to-develop parcels of land or corners of large urban projects. We also suggest that the City of Austin explore new creative partnerships with other governmental or nonprofit entities (e.g., the area school districts) and with private developers to develop, enhance, and maintain parks and recreational facilities throughout the city.

1. Set New Goals for Green Space Access: The City Council should set a goal of providing, by 2018, a park or public green space access within a quarter-mile radius of all existing and planned housing located in the urban core, and a half-mile radius for all other parts of the City. The City of Austin should set a goal of meeting its current one-mile goal throughout the City

within the next two-and-a-half years, or by 2011. Finally, the City Council should then provide the resources and planning tools to enable PARD to meet these goals. The City of Austin's park planning goal set in the 1983 parks master plan was to provide a park within a mile of every neighborhood resident; even after 25 years, the city does not meet this goal. More than twenty areas in the city are not within a mile of a park.⁷⁴ Moreover, the city's one-mile goal falls far short of the national benchmark of locating a park within a quarter- to half-mile walking distance of each city resident. A child is much more unlikely to use a park that is located more than a half-mile walking distance.⁷⁵

To facilitate meeting the quarter-mile goal:

- a. The City of Austin should inventory and then implement a plan to convert appropriate city-owned land to neighborhood pocket parks and urban play spaces in partnership with neighborhood associations, the Austin Parks Foundation, and other appropriate civic groups.
 - b. PARD should continue to explore new and innovative tools and potential changes in current parks design requirements to enable the creation of outdoor play spaces in a denser urban environment, such as through the creation of small "tot lots" (small inner city lots converted into play spaces for children five and under), and the inclusion of outdoor playscapes on city facilities such as libraries. Most of the City's pocket parks are one-plus acres and are designed to fit into a more traditional suburban development setting. The Parks Department should continue to explore modifications to the current design guidelines for pocket parks to support the creation of more parks in a denser urban setting. For example, the current requirements for setbacks required for a neighborhood pocket park may not make sense in a denser urban setting and thus may need to be modified. The development of smaller urban parks could ultimately cost less for the City of Austin, especially if located on city-owned land and through parkland dedication property. The current pocket parks standard typically requires an allocation of \$1 million to acquire and develop a park, whereas a smaller tot lot, for example, could cost as little as \$250,000, depending on the location in the City of Austin.
 - c. Increases to the City's parks budget, after many years of cuts, must become a City higher priority. In addition, in the next general obligation bond allocation, the City of Austin should make the creation of new urban parks and open spaces one of the top priorities for funding.
 - d. The City of Austin should encourage and help incubate partnerships to transform small undevelopable parcels and concrete cover in downtown Austin and elsewhere throughout the urban core into micro-play spaces for children and families.
 - e. Replicating the example of the Triangle development and Mueller Airport redevelopment, the City of Austin should continue to encourage partnerships between the city and the private sector to provide funding for the long-term maintenance of parkland donated to the city.
 - f. The City of Austin should create Public Improvement Districts in the areas around the city's downtown parks and squares and in other appropriate development areas to help pay for parks improvements, operations, and maintenance within the district.⁷⁶ Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code authorizes cities to create PIDs to establish and improve parks, after submitting a petition to the area residents for approval of the district.
2. Enhance Parks Planning Process for Children: All City of Austin planning efforts pertaining to parks and open spaces should take into consideration the special needs of children of all ages and include family-friendly amenities. The Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan, Town Lake Corridor Improvement Plan, Waller Creek Plan, the Republic Square planning efforts, and other planning efforts involving parks and city open spaces should make the inclusion of child-friendly features and play spaces a priority. As part of the updates to the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Long Range Plan, PARD should engage in a comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the play environment for children in the city, including evaluating each existing park site and recreational facility, the gaps in existing features, the gaps in the location of facilities, and the diversification of play area types.

3. Dedicate Parkland in Large Developments: For large residential developments (including all large residential developments in a Transit Oriented-Development District and in a city density corridor), PARD should require parkland to be dedicated instead of allowing for an in-lieu-of fee. However, in some situations it may be appropriate to allow up to 50 percent of the parkland dedication requirement be met by a payment of an in-lieu-of fees. If the land available for dedication falls within a floodplain or is otherwise regarded as undevelopable as traditional parkland, PARD should consider other innovative recreational amenities that will appeal to families with children.
4. Incorporate Play Features in Public Spaces: The City of Austin should include innovative, child-friendly features and play spaces in all large public spaces (both outdoor and indoor spaces), including at the Seaholm redevelopment project, the Green redevelopment site, the new downtown library site, and the City of Austin's downtown squares. The City of Austin should provide for a playscape or other outdoor child-friendly features at all city libraries.
5. Incorporate Play Features in Downtown Spaces: The City of Austin should create parks and open spaces with family-friendly features throughout downtown, including at any newly redeveloped park sites and the redeveloped public squares. The number of safe, child-friendly outdoor spaces in downtown is very limited. For example, there is no outdoor public playground equipment for children in all of downtown, with the exception of a small playscape next to the Town Lake trail near the Rainey Street redevelopment area.
6. Transform School Yards: The City of Austin should partner with AISD and other school districts to transform public school yards into enhanced, multi-use outdoor resources for children and the community.⁷⁷ Denver's Learning Landscape Programs, described earlier in this report, and other similar collaborative initiatives can serve as models. This kind of program helps connect schools with neighborhoods and transforms land into a valuable community asset.
7. Support Development of Destination Parks: The City Council should provide funding to develop the destination parks purchased by PARD through the 1998 general obligation bond allocation. Although the City has purchased the land for four destination parks, City Council has only allocated funding to develop one of these.
8. Provide Bike and Pedestrian Paths: The City of Austin should implement the vision from the Austin Tomorrow Plan of providing connectivity of green space for bike and pedestrian paths across the city.
9. Expand Afterschool and Summer Programs: The City of Austin and AISD should enter into additional collaborations and shared-use agreements with each other, with nonprofits, and with civic groups to create additional summer and afterschool indoor recreational activities at underutilized campuses for children of all ages and all abilities.⁷⁸
10. Enhance Existing Park Features: The City of Austin should enhance existing park features to provide all children with safe and diverse opportunities to play. Specifically, PARD should:
 - a. Incorporate a broader range of materials in playscapes and play elements; diversify the types of play spaces; and include more innovative, interactive options in existing and new parks.⁷⁹
 - b. Expand recreational offerings for toddlers and for older children, both at parks as well as city-owned recreational centers.⁸⁰
 - c. Expand services to children with cognitive as well as physical disabilities.
 - d. Partner with Austin Treefolks, private nurseries, and other relevant organizations or businesses to expand tree planting and shade in city parks, especially near playscapes.
11. Extend City of Austin Pool Hours: The City of Austin should provide funding to allow PARD to extend pool hours to be open longer during the day and for an extended period of the year. Presently, most neighborhood pools do not open until June and

then close in August, and during that period are open only for limited hours. For example, many neighborhood pools do not open until after noon during the month of June. The limited operational hours of the City of Austin's neighborhood pools was frequently listed as a shortcoming in the Task Force's online survey this past April.

12. Provide Adequate Funding for Maintenance: The City of Austin should provide adequate funding for PARD to be able to properly operate and maintain its existing and new facilities.

13. Enliven Public Spaces: The City Council should create additional public gathering spaces in downtown and throughout the city and incorporate child-friendly and family-friendly features into existing public spaces.⁸¹ The Council should review and implement ideas expressed in Austin Alive: Mapping Place through Art and Culture (Downtown Arts Development Study); these include but are not limited to suggestions for revitalizing downtown parks and public spaces by incorporating art, creating self-led history walks and trails; developing outdoor art galleries, and introducing interactive cultural elements at strategic locations throughout the downtown.⁸²

14. Use Cultural Arts to Lure Families Downtown: The City of Austin, in partnership with other public and private entities, should seek opportunities to use the cultural arts to attract families with children and others to downtown spaces. Ideas could range from expanding support for individual activities such as outdoor theatrical and dance performances to initiating major programs, using for inspiration Rhode Island's "Waterfire" summer-long family festival or Paris's "Paris Plage," an annual month-long event that transforms a street along the Seine River into a mile-long pedestrian walkway and beach with activities ranging from dance lessons to volleyball games.

15. Expand Support for Library System: The City of Austin should continue to expand its budgetary support of the central library and the branch libraries. City Council should support the new central library in designing spaces for children and offering expanded literacy and cultural programming. City Council should also explore expanding the Austin History Center into a museum with programming for children, adults, and families.

16. Support Neighborhood-Based Cultural Activities: In collaboration with local businesses, cultural organizations and institutions, AISD, and other partners, the City of Austin should support neighborhood-based cultural activities and the development of cultural and heritage community/neighborhood districts.⁸³ Neighborhood-based events promote a sense of community among Austinites and can serve an important economic development function. In addition, school-based community events can help attract students to neighborhood schools and can promote awareness of area public schools more generally. In collaboration with AISD and other school districts, the relevant City of Austin departments could provide guidance, expertise, resources, and other tangible support for community events, especially those that take place in collaboration with neighborhood schools. Other specific actions the City of Austin could take might include assisting groups in obtaining health permits; negotiating street closures; and providing security.

17. Create Life-Long Engagement in Cultural Arts. The City's libraries and relevant departments should collaborate with AISD, local businesses, and cultural organizations in developing programs that would enrich life-long active engagement in the cultural arts.⁸⁴ Such programs should offer opportunities for adults, families, and children and should encourage not just appreciation but rather active participation in the arts.

18. Create Pedestrian Zones. The City Council should close certain streets in the downtown on weekends to promote car-free family areas.

19. Introduce Downtown Family Nights: In partnership with local businesses, the City should initiate a once-monthly "family night" in downtown, perhaps during a trial period during the summer: selectively close streets to promote safe walking and create areas for play; encourage restaurants to offer children's menu options and restaurants and museums and clubs to provide child-oriented entertainment; and link with other family-friendly happenings, such as "Movies in Republic Square."

20. The City Council should play a proactive role in supporting efforts of the Children's Museum to secure a downtown site. The

City Council should explore opportunities to create a science and technology museum and identify opportunities to encourage other new child-friendly cultural institutions and museums.⁸⁵

21. Make Resources Accessible: In partnership with external organizations and publications, the City of Austin should create a web portal with information on kid-friendly activities, schools, child care services, housing, and other issues relevant to families with children. The City should also explore opportunities for supporting additional family resource centers and making resources for families (such as toy libraries) available at branch libraries and community recreation centers.

E. SCHOOLS RECOMMENDATIONS

The quality of the public schools that their children will attend is a significant consideration for most families with children who are assessing the merits of a home in Austin. Aside from their educational mission, schools can serve as valuable resources for neighborhoods by, for example, providing playground and other recreational facilities. Schools also can play an important role in stabilizing and enhancing a community. In developing the following recommendations, the Task Force relied on these assumptions: (1) Families with children in the City of Austin can be best supported through neighborhood schools. (2) The relationships between families with children in the City of Austin and Austin schools can best be supported through collaborative processes and broad community involvement. (3) School districts should consider collaborative use of district and other public use facilities as a cornerstone principle in school district facility planning and use. (4) There is a need to improve the collaborative planning processes, both long and short term, between the City of Austin and school districts. (5) There is an opportunity to improve the impact of capital expenditure projects of both the City of Austin and school districts through better coordination of capital improvements. (6) There is an opportunity to improve community awareness and involvement with school districts and the City of Austin. Several ideas offered in this section overlap with those developed by the Austin Independent School District Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools.⁸⁶

NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

1. School districts in the City of Austin should adopt policies and practices that support neighborhood-based schools. Local school districts should modify, or create if necessary, board policy that defines school attendance zones as neighborhood-based. Texas Education Code allows school districts to charge “a reasonable fee” to transport students within a two-mile radius of any given school.⁸⁷ This code in effect establishes a free walk zone around a school for school districts. This two-mile radius should be used as a fundamental basis for the establishment of school attendance zones.
2. To preserve neighborhood relationships and improve student academic achievement, the alignment, or vertical teaming, of schools and tracking of students to those schools should be such that the graduating cohort of students not be split to attend different schools. If a district cannot accomplish this goal for facility-, financial-, or accountability-related reasons, districts should minimize the splitting of a graduating cohort of students and should place a reasonable time limit on how long the practice of splitting the graduating cohort may be used.
3. To minimize school overcrowding and maximize the efficiency of facility use, area districts should review and adjust attendance boundaries on an annual basis. Districts should make every attempt to authorize and publicize such changes so that parents and students have time to prepare for the changes. Districts should develop appropriate procedure and policies for screening hardship cases and approving exceptions to the attendance boundaries.
4. Area school districts should increase the diversity, quantity, and quality of choice programs such that magnet schools, dual language, special education, and programs for children with disabilities are provided to a greater ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of children. Quality of instruction and academic rigor should be consistent throughout districts.
5. AISD should identify programs that are successful in attracting families to Austin; attracting families from other parts of the district; and retaining families from the attendance zone. AISD should sustain and support these programs, and, if

appropriate, should replicate these programs at other campuses.

6. Area school districts should offer guidance, expertise, and tangible support to help schools market their programs to families in their respective attendance zones.

7. School fairs and other community and neighborhood events promote a sense of community, provide information, and serve as recruitment tools for neighborhood schools. In collaboration with AISD and other area school districts, relevant City of Austin departments could provide guidance, expertise, resources, and other tangible support for community events that take place in conjunction with neighborhood schools. Other specific actions the City of Austin could take might include assisting groups in obtaining health permits, negotiating street closures, and providing security. This recommendation also supports recommendations in the City of Austin's "Create Austin" plan.

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

1. Like many large urban cities, school districts in the City of Austin face declining enrollments in several central city schools. A lack of affordable housing for families with children contributes to this decline. As declining central city school enrollments could have a wide-reaching negative impact, the City of Austin and Austin Independent School District should collaborate to develop a joint plan by the end of 2009 to reverse this trend.

2. Area districts should explore any potential school openings, closings, or facility repurposing within an open, transparent process where data and goals are clearly defined and made available to the public and in which the community and the City of Austin are active participants in the eventual decision.

3. Using the Florida or Oregon codes as models, the City of Austin should adopt a policy that requires more formal, coordinated planning between area school districts and local government entities.⁸⁸ The only formal codified planning relationship between the City of Austin and any of the eight school districts within its boundaries is found in the City Charter, which identifies the board president of the Austin Independent School District as an ex officio member of the City of Austin Planning Commission. City of Austin staff and the staff of area school districts communicate about planning efforts, but the City Council and City Manager, with input from community stakeholders, must create more formal, regular, and transparent coordination and communication. The new Families with Children Ombudsperson should help facilitate these relationships and should have input into collaborative decisions. The planning process should also include representation from all eight school districts within the city limits of the City of Austin. While Austin Independent School District (AISD) is recognized within the city charter as a planning partner, the remaining seven districts do not appear to have any formal representation in the city's planning process—although several are growing more rapidly than AISD.

4. The City of Austin, AISD, and Travis County should articulate several areas of focus for the City of Austin/Austin Independent School District Joint Subcommittee, a body designed to promote intergovernmental coordination and communication. These areas of focus should include public safety, planning, affordable housing, and capital improvements. Presentations to the Joint Subcommittee should be related to these areas of focus and should include recommendations for action, where appropriate, and allow sufficient time for discussion by the members.⁸⁹

5. The City of Austin should require an Educational Impact Assessment for development projects of relevant size. When making decisions regarding development or redevelopment projects, the relevant city boards and the City Council are not required to consider the projects' potential impact on school enrollment, school transportation, or the projected academic performance of a school. Background material identifies school districts, and in some cases schools, but the process does not require boards to give consideration to the impact these projects could have on schools. An Educational Impact Assessment would, at a minimum, provide information about schools in the area as well as data about the development's intended unit mix, bedroom count, anticipated sales or rental price, and amenities, as well as to what extent any current residents are families with children who would be dislocated from the project.⁹⁰

6. As a registered “neighborhood organization,” AISD receives the notifications and opportunities for involvement in the neighborhood planning process. AISD or the appropriate other school district should assign staff to participate on an active and regular basis in neighborhood planning processes. District staff should collaborate with Neighborhood Planning and Zoning Department staff to provide neighborhood planning teams with information about schools in their planning areas as well as research that helps teams assess how particular land use decisions might affect schools. (See related discussion in “City Vision and Planning.”)

7. The City of Austin and area school districts should coordinate and develop partnerships among schools, neighborhoods, health care providers, institutions of higher learning, and city social services to make strategic investments in targeted areas and to connect the processes for school design and city services operation.

FINANCIAL COLLABORATIONS

1. Financial constraints represent perhaps the largest single obstacle to both school districts and the City of Austin. To better serve the interests of the Austin community, all local government entities should coordinate capital improvement projects.

2. The City Council should explore adopting impact fees for developments or redevelopments over a certain size to fund school-related improvements, as has been done elsewhere nationally. These fees could take a range of forms, such as the donation of land for schools to impact fees collected for sidewalks and traffic control devices to create safe routes from a development to an existing neighborhood school.

3. Many small improvements to the school and neighborhood environment, such as the Texas Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School program, can be accessed by the community without voter approval. School districts and the City of Austin should initiate a process to better coordinate proposals for programs such as these.

COLLABORATIVE FACILITY USE

1. Austin has several examples of joint-use school district facilities that provide space for other local government uses. Both Austin and local school districts would be better served if all school district projects were developed as either joint-use public projects or joint-use projects between school districts and the City of Austin or Travis County to achieve appropriate public use goals. Creating joint-use facilities has become a nationally recognized best practice.⁹¹ When designed in collaboration with other governmental entities and community stakeholders, school campuses can include space for child care and meet an array of other community needs. Not only would this approach leverage scarce resources, it would complement other city practices of encouraging multi-use and mixed-use land use practices. The City Council and local district leadership should develop a process for determining where and how either school district or local government facilities can be shared for mutual benefit and efficiency.

2. The City of Austin should collaborate with school districts and with public and private entities to explore transforming under-enrolled or otherwise challenged school facilities into multi-use campuses. The non-academic use could provide services to the student population—for example, a dance troupe-in-residence could offer free lessons to students—or the use could serve the broader school community but not offer direct services to students, as is the case with on-site infant child care programs. Local school districts should develop policies and recruit personnel to facilitate such arrangements and should explore facility design and security strategies that would enable such arrangements to be safe and successful.

3. The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department should explore entering into additional joint-use agreements with local school districts to share public amenities such as parks, landscaping, pools, and athletic courts.

F. TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Transportation is the scaffolding for a family-friendly city. If families with children find it difficult to move around their neighborhood and the city, they cannot take advantage of the community's amenities. More time spent in a car or bus commuting to child care facilities, schools, and jobs, also reduces the time parents have to spend with their children. Transportation and public safety intersect in the areas of safe pedestrian and bicycle routes and traffic calming, areas of major concern to Austin families. Indeed, frustration with the poor sidewalks, inadequate bike lanes, unsafe pedestrian crossings, and fears about speeding traffic were among top problems listed in the Task Force survey and discussed in focus group meetings. Inadequacies of the public transportation system and traffic congestion also were raised as factors adversely affecting families with children and restricting their interactions with the community.

To be truly family-friendly, the City of Austin must increase the efficiency and safety of its transportation network, including pedestrian and bicycle routes, so that families with children can access the amenities of the community and maximize the time they spend with their children. A full set of recommendations regarding improvements to the transportation system is far beyond the scope of this report, so we have focused on those that most specifically affect families and children, such as safe pedestrian and bicycle routes.

1. The City Council should provide increases in funding and target the next general obligation bond package to create:

More sidewalks and biking in neighborhoods for safe routes to schools, parks, and transit stops;

More protected bike lanes;

More traffic calming in residential neighborhoods and family-friendly enhancements to existing calming devices. Traffic circles, for example, prove difficult to navigate for a parent with a stroller; adding sidewalks to the circles could provide some additional safety for pedestrians.

2. The City should make it easier for families with children to utilize existing sidewalks by adding curb cuts to major streets (for families with stroller and individuals with disabilities), and lengthen "walk" signal times on popular, busy streets such as Barton Springs and South Congress.

3. The City should make streets and sidewalks safer for families with children. A safe streets and sidewalks initiative should include the following programs:

a. A public service campaign to educate Austinites about the need to stop at crosswalks and to yield the right-of-way to pedestrians.⁹²

b. Provision of "Caution: Children" signs in both English and Spanish to neighborhoods.

c. Expansion of enforcement efforts for drivers who violate crosswalk signs, and the targeting of fines to the City's sidewalks program.

d. Making information about processes for obtaining stop signs, street lights, and crosswalks more readily available to public.

e. The City should consider requiring wider sidewalks as a standard practice and explore ways to make sidewalks safer through the creation of a separation between streets and sidewalks using plantings and other means.

4. The City and Capital Metro should improve the access of families with children to the public bus system, such as by providing bus stops with benches; providing trees or other types of shade at all stops; posting schedules at the bus stops; and expanding

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weekend routes to pools, parks, and other places that attract families. The City and Capital Metro should also expand parking and transit options for large public festivals and events.

5. In conjunction with the City of Austin's goal of creating a more walkable Austin, the City should initiate an aggressive program to make streets around schools, parks, and public spaces more pedestrian- and bicyclist-friendly. In addition to seeking additional money for the Safe Routes to Schools program, we recommend that the City work with AISD to keep central city schools open (and, if appropriate, to reconvert central city AISD buildings back into schools) to minimize students' need to cross major intersections on foot or bike. The City should consider identifying car-free walking corridors near schools to promote

ENDNOTES

1. A recent report by CEOs for Cities explored family interest in living in the urban core and found that families fall into one of four categories: Urban Pioneers, Tentative Urbanites, Discontent Suburbanites, and Suburban Loyalists. Suburban Loyalists are satisfied with living in the suburbs and do not express an interest in living in the urban core of a city. Urban Pioneers, on the other hand, are die-hard city lovers who will do anything to live in the urban core. The report recommends cities focus on Tentative Urbanites and Discontent Suburbanites, who are willing to live in the urban core if the right amenities are offered. The report is available at: www.ceosforcities.org/internal/files/CEOs_KidsInCities.pdf
2. Ryan Robinson, "Families with Children in Austin," PowerPoint presentation to the Families and Children Task Force on 26 September 2007.
3. Janny Scott, "Cities shed middle class, and are richer and poorer for it," New York Times, 23 July 2006.
4. Joel Kotkin, "The Rise of Family-Friendly Cities," Wall Street Journal, 27 November 2007, citing Brookings Institute demographer Bill Free.
5. Kotkin.
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. CEO for Cities, "City Kids," 7.
9. Kotkin.
10. United Way Capital Area, "The Economic Impact of Formal Childcare in Travis County," (2008): 15. According to a study by Texas A&M University, "every \$1.00 invested in high quality pre-k programs [in the state of Texas] returns at least \$3.50 to local Texas communities." From "A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universally-Accessible Pre-Kindergarten Education in Texas," 74. The United Way Capital Area's Success by 6 Program recently issued a finding "every \$1.00 invested in quality preschool programs can save society as much as \$17.00 in remedial education, welfare costs, and court and prison expenses." Success By 6, "The 2007 Report Card on Child Well-Being for Austin/Travis County," 3.
11. http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/261982_lcenter07.html
12. "City Kids," 6.
13. "City Kids."
14. *ibid.*, 7.
15. Phillip Longman, Senior Fellow of the New America Fund, quoted in Timothy Egan, "Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children," New York Times, 24 March 2005).
16. Kotkin..
17. Quote paraphrased by Timothy Egan in "Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children."
18. John Pomfret, "Where Did All the Children Go. In San Francisco and Other Big Cities, Costs Drive Out Middle-Class Families," Washington Post, 19 March 2006.
19. Richard Weissbourd, *The Vulnerable Child: What Really Hurts America's Children and What We Can Do About It.* (Da

Capo Press, 1997), 232. According to the United Nations, a Child Friendly City is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every young citizen to: influence decisions about their city; receive basic services such as health care and education; walk safely in the streets they own; meet friends and play; have green spaces for plants and animals; live in an unpolluted environment; participate in cultural and social events; and other items. See <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/>

20. The top two reasons families with children move to the suburbs is the lack of affordable housing and the need for more space. Timothy Egan, "Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children," referring to a study conducted by Portland State University on the reasons why parents left the City of Portland.

21. See, for example the City of Portland, Farrarini and Associates. "Market Assessment for Family-Oriented Condominiums" Portland, OR: PDC, 2006 and the Canadian Mortgage & Housing Corporation Study, "Housing the New Family: Reinventing Housing for Families."

22. Israel, Evelyn & Warner, Mildred, "Planning Family Friendly Communities: Survey Results," a PowerPoint presentation presented at the 2008 APA National Planning Conference (29 April 2008).

23. Beverly Kingston, et al., "Creating Child-Friendly Cities: The Case of Denver," Municipal Engineer (June 2007).

24. See also the Canadian Institute of Planners, "Kid's Guide to Building Great Communities; A Manual for Planners & Educators."

25. CEO for Cities, "City Kids."

26. See Isabelle Groc, "Parents with young children say 'yes' to living downtown," Planning (June 2007), citing a Portland Development Commission study.

27. "High-density housing for families with children guidelines." City of Vancouver, 23 March 1992.

28. <http://www.courtyardhousing.org>

29. See Groc, citing a Portland Development Commission study.

30. Cornell University's Linking Economic Development and Child Care Research Project has conducted extensive research and provided support to cities working to develop stronger links between economic development and the availability of child care services. For more information, see the project's website at: <http://government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/reports/childcare/>

31. Mildred Warner, Shira Adriance, et. al. "Economic Development Strategies to Promote Quality Child Care," Linking Economic Development and Child Care Research Project, Department of City and Regional Planning, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University, 2004, 24ff. The Child Care Subcommittee of the Task Force drew heavily from the text and examples used in this article for this discussion of strategies.

32. In Austin these policies are generally left up to the individual business to decide. Lack of subsidies and the high cost of providing the child care tends to limit the availability of workforce child care to only the middle- and upper-income employees.

33. In Texas, there are informal programs that link training to compensation but this practice is not mandated. Texas uses the Rising Star system as a Quality Rating System and provides increased subsidies from WorkSource for child care centers as they accumulate more "Rising Stars." The City has partnerships with ACCD for child development scholarships—there is currently a waiting list, however, for teachers wishing to access these services.

34. While these are in place in Texas, reimbursement from WorkSource, however, does not cover full tuition costs at many child care centers, which can be a burden to struggling child care centers. United Way Capital Area's Success By 6 does offer

grants to child care centers make up the difference between the WorkSource reimbursement and the full cost of the tuition.

35. CDBG funds have been used to build child care centers in low-income areas in Austin (but not near transportation or housing hubs). Child care services are mentioned as needing to be considered in Austin's TOD plans but are not a requirement.

36. City of Portland, "Principles of Child Friendly Housing," Bureau of Planning, July 2007, 20: citing a study in Germany that found street redesign in Germany led to a 20 percent increase in play activity.

37. Arthur Lubow, "The Road to Curitiba," New York Times Magazine, 20 May 2007.

38. Linda Baker, "Streetless in Seattle": An innovative shared-space design is taking shape in the city's developing South Lake Union neighborhood," Metropolitan Magazine (17 April 2006), www.metropolismag.com/cda/story.php?artid=1911.

39. City of Arlington website: <http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/CPHD/housing/targets/CPHDHousingTargets>

40. Peter Harnik and Jeff Simms, "Parks: How Fair is Too Far," Planning (December 2004).

41. *ibid.*

42. *ibid.*

43. *ibid.*

44. Clare Marcus Cooper and Wendy Sarkissian, *Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for Medium-Density Family Housing*. University of California Press, 1988.

45. See descriptions of the "Sound Garden" at Cadillac Area Visitors Bureau website: <http://www.cadillacmichigan.com/pages.php?tabid=4&pageid=21&title=Sound+Garden> and on the Project for Public Spaces: http://www.pps.org/great_public_spaces/one?public_place_id=676&type_id=0

46. <http://imaginationplayground.org/more/index.html>. The Project for Public Spaces has information on several innovative playgrounds from across the country. See PPS's website: http://www.pps.org/topics/play/Play_Places.

47. http://thunder1.cudenver.edu/cye/lla/lla_ucd.html

48. For more history about the development of this project, see Travis Park Elementary's website <http://www.traviselementary.org/sparkpark.htm>.

49. See The Rural School and Community Trust, "School-Community Partnerships Benefit Both" http://www.ruraledu.org/site/c.beJMIZOC1rH/b.1563225/k.E71D/SchoolCommunity_Partnerships.htm

50. Robbin Rittner-Heir, "Schools and Economic Development," *School Planning & Management*. 24 June 2006. Available online at <http://www.peterli.com/archive/spm/437.shtm>.

51. Elizabeth Learning Center (<http://www.eslc.k12.ca.us>) was designated as an Urban Learning Center site by the New American School's Development Corporation (NASDC). New American School's Development Corporation or the New American School, as the private nonprofit organization came to be called, set out to effect broad-based educational reform in part through school design. For more information, see Thomas K. Glennan Jr., *New American Schools After Six Years*. Rand Corporation: 1998.

52. See City of Glendale Parks and Recreation Department brochure, available online http://www.ci.glendale.ca.us/parks/pdf/PCC_Brochure.pdf and "Edison School/Pacific Park Project," Case Studies: Joint Use section of *New Schools Better*

53. Barbara McCann and Constance Beaumont, "Build 'Smart,'" American School Board Journal (October 2003). Available online at <http://smartgrowthamerica.org/SGA%20School%20Sprawl.pdf>
54. "Historic Schools Success Stories: Adams School and Community Center," National Trust for Historic Preservation. <http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/case-studies/historic-neighborhood-schools/historic-schools-adams-school.html>
55. See the school's website: <http://www.wmep.k12.mn.us/idds>
56. "Family Housing, Downtown," Planning Commissioners Journal, No. 61 (Winter 2006).
57. Linda Baker, "Spurring Urban Growth in Vancouver, One Family at a Time," New York Times, 25 December 2005.
58. Weissbourd, 231.
59. *ibid.*
60. *ibid.*, 232.
61. Aubrey Cohen, "Parents want more family-friendly downtown living," Seattle Post-Intelligencer 16 October 2006.
62. Lisel Blash et al, "Getting Behind the Headlines: Families Leaving San Francisco," San Francisco State University, Public Research Institute, September 2005.
63. San Francisco Mayor Newsom's Policy Council on Children, Youth and Families, "Housing for Families with Children in San Francisco," Discussion Brief, 23 January 2006.
64. For another model of a rental assistance program that is designed to promote school stability, see the Flint, Michigan, program discussed in Erik Eckholm, "To Avoid Student Turnover, Parents Get Rent Help," The New York Times 24 June 2008.
65. The focus of the State of the City report would be to provide an update on particular city policies that have been adopted related to improving the quality of life for families with children, along with any shift in demographic trends related to families with children. The ombudsperson may work in collaboration with nonprofit organizations and other relevant city departments to compile this report. Several community agencies, such as the United Way Capital Area, already provide reports on particular issues related to families and children. The State of the City report should therefore be a supplement to any existing reports and not attempt to duplicate the information covered in these other reports.
66. See planning processes in Seattle, Washington; Charleston, South Carolina; Des Moines, Iowa; and Minneapolis, Minnesota for some examples.
67. For additional information on the economic impact of child care in the Austin region, see the introduction section on the reasons for creating a family-friendly city.
68. Several promising efforts are underway to improve child care services in Austin, like Success by 6's efforts to increase the number of child care facilities meeting quality standards above minimal licensing regulations. In spring 2006, fewer than 15 percent of local child care facilities met any quality standards; today, nearly 30 percent meet these standards. The city's comprehensive plan should be developed in collaboration with these other efforts.
69. For several examples, see the City of Vancouver's TOD developments and downtown family-friendly design guidelines and the City of Portland courtyard design competition guidelines.

70. See Arlington, Virginia's plan, for example.
71. The City of Austin's Neighborhood Housing and Community Development Department currently offers a tenant-based rental assistance program, but the scope is focused on chronically homeless families and is thus more limited than what is proposed in this recommendation.
72. Richard J. Dolesh, et al, "Top 10 Reasons Parks are Important," National Recreation and Park Association website, www.nrpa.org. For a list and links to scholarship and other publications examining the many different benefits of parks and open spaces, visit the Natural Learning Initiative's website, at <http://www.naturalearning.org/publications/publications.htm>.
73. One-quarter of the task force's survey participants reported they do not live within walking distance of a park.
74. The mile standard is not "as the crow flies," but instead takes into consideration a person's ability to walk to a park without crossing any major physical barriers such as a railroad track, major creek, or major road. The map "City of Austin Parks 2007," which appears in the Appendix, illustrates the location of existing parks.
75. For a broader discussion on the benchmarks set by other several other cities around the country regarding the siting of parks, see the Best Practices section of this report.
76. A Public Improvement District was created in 1993 and currently exists in Downtown Austin to provide funding for certain downtown improvement initiatives.
77. See the Best Practices section of the report for information on the City of Denver's program to transform schoolyards into multi-use spaces for children and the surrounding neighborhood.
78. The City of Austin's "CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan" and AISD's Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools final report offer related suggestions. See, for example, "CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan," built environment recommendations," esp. recommendation 2, page 28.
79. Austin might, for example, create an adventure playground similar to the one in downtown Houston and the Imagine Playground in New York City, or incorporate other creative ideas highlighted by groups such as the Project for Public Spaces.
80. One past program that might bear reconsideration is PARD's "Roving Leaders" program that connected AISD students with nearby parks and facilities. The program was eliminated after a series of budget cuts.
81. See Jaimeson Park in Portland, Oregon.
82. While the Downtown Arts Development Study focuses rather heavily on the visual arts, most recommendations could accommodate a broader definition of the cultural arts and could thus offer even more appeal to families with children.
83. See "CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan" for expanded discussion of this point.
84. See "CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan" for expanded discussion of recommendations related to this point, especially pages 42–44.
85. See Houston and Dallas as examples of cities with such cultural offerings.
86. Please see the Community Committee on Neighborhood School's "Final Report to the Board of Trustees," presented to the AISD Board of Trustees on April 28, 2008.
87. Texas Education Code, Chapter 11.158 Section (a)(14).

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88. City policy similar to Florida Code 1013.33 or Oregon Statue 195.110 is recommended.
89. This recommendation borrows heavily from the language in the CCNS "Final Report to the Board of Trustees."
90. This recommendation borrows heavily from the language in the CCNS "Final Report to the Board of Trustees."
91. For a series of case studies, see the New Schools Better Neighborhoods website at <http://www.nsbm.org>
92. The Public Safety Task Force has also made similar recommendations.

