

Opening Central Texas for Business Task Force

Initial recommendations

May 5, 2020



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The Honorable Sarah Eckhardt
County Judge, Travis County

The Honorable Steve Adler
Mayor, City of Austin

Judge Eckhardt and Mayor Adler,

Thank you for giving the Chamber the opportunity to create a working task force to recommend next steps as we look toward reopening the Central Texas economy. Your leadership in acknowledging that this adaptive landscape requires public and private sectors working together will make all the difference in keeping Central Texans safe and healthy.

Since your initial request, we have established a task force that has more than 125 members representing a wide range of interests, including small and large businesses in multiple industry sectors, business membership organizations, and community groups that support the needs of business such as transportation, public health, and safety. The priorities of this task force are to 1) provide feedback on how we open our economy and to initialize future policy, 2) monitor and evaluate the reopening, and 3) inform the program design for city and county economic recovery funds.

This is a complex situation, and policies must adapt to account for the evolving landscape in this unprecedented time. As conditions change, the task force is committed to providing you with real-time industry-specific input, as well as general recommendations and feedback, that will help inform and guide your policymaking.

It is our goal to be transparent in our efforts and to lead with collaboration, innovation, and heart. With that in mind, the following document is the first work product of the task force and represents our best efforts to strike a balance between public health and reopening the economy.

On behalf of the entire task force, thank you for the opportunity to contribute these recommendations.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laura Huffman'.

Laura Huffman
President & CEO
Austin Chamber of Commerce

Opening Central Texas for Business Task Force

Purpose

The task force is charged with creating a set of policy recommendations, that will rely on appropriate health metrics to reopen Central Texas in a safe, healthy and productive way. This is a highly iterative effort focusing on the following interrelated purposes

1. Providing feedback to on how we open our economy and to initialize future policy
2. Monitoring and evaluating how the work is going
3. Inform the program design for city and county economic recovery funds

Formation

- Austin Mayor Steve Adler and Travis County Judge Sarah Eckhardt requested the Austin Chamber of Commerce to convene a business task force consistent with the stated purpose above.
- The Austin Chamber invited business membership organizations (chambers of commerce, trade associations) throughout Central Texas as well as business owners and operators.
- Additionally, the task force includes representatives from community organizations focusing on the needs and concerns of individuals such as social equity, workforce development, labor, childcare, education, and mental/behavioral health, among others.
- Task force members participated in advisory or working groups to evaluate current challenges and provide recommendations for action by public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- The threat of the COVID-19 pandemic will not end soon, nor shall the work of the task force. New task force members will be welcomed to provide needed perspective on the opportunities and challenges related to the gradual reopening and stabilization of the Central Texas economy.

Guiding principles

- It is critical to recognize that COVID-19 has created a complex situation that touches every aspect of our region. No one person or organization can succeed alone. Our efforts will be successful because they are authentically collaborative.
- Transparency and clear communication are important. The health criteria that are used as the underpinnings of reopening the region must be clearly communicated to the public.
- Phasing our community back into business will be contingent upon meeting health criteria first and foremost. We must design our recommendations with evidence-based data.
- Designing policies during a pandemic is new for us all. We will adapt as we learn.
- We will capture the incredible innovation happening in our community and share best practices in a thoughtful and consistent way.
- We will recognize the various weaknesses and inequities exposed by the pandemic and begin to imagine how to make our economy and community stronger and more resilient.

Advisory groups

- Infrastructure
- Public health
- Small business
- Workforce & education (social needs and organized labor)

Industry working groups

- Construction
- Food & beverage
- Healthcare
- Manufacturing
- Office & professional services
- Tourism & special events

Task force meetings (all via Zoom conference call)

- **April 24**
Remarks from Senator Watson, County Judge Eckhardt, Mayor Adler, Adriana Cruz
- **April 28**
Review of updated orders by Gov. Abbott; breakout discussion by working group
- **May 4**
Review of draft recommendations and summary for each working group

Recommendations

Community partnerships

Effectively reopening the Central Texas economy will require the continued partnership that formed this task force. In partnership, our individual contributions are a collective strength.

- **Childcare availability:** With schools closed for the remainder of the academic year and more businesses allowed to reopen, increasing childcare options is vital.
- **Reduce the digital divide:** A lack of equity in access to broadband and connected devices presents obstacles to remote work and learning. Enabling creative solutions and future technologies, including the latest wireless broadband, will be important to this discussion. School districts can build upon recent innovations to expand access through use of emergency spending powers and private sector partnerships.
- **Public outreach and input:** Near-term outbound communications should focus on Phases I and II reopening of businesses. An inbound feedback process to hear about successes and concerns from the public and to inform effective policy should be implemented. Feedback should be received from multiple stakeholder levels including public health, workforce, community organizations, and businesses.

Government: City and County orders

- **Optional framework for contact tracing:** Local officials should work with the State and public health experts to implement clear contact tracing procedures that will reduce the spread of COVID-19. The procedures should protect privacy, apply consistently/fairly, and minimize business interruption.
- **Testing:** Improved and increased testing will be required to provide the data that will be key to monitoring the impact of reopening and on COVID-19 infection rates.
- **Industry guidance:** Businesses need clear guidelines to follow for workplace safety standards to protect frontline workers and other at-risk workers from infectious diseases. Local guidance can be modeled after the construction industry and be consistent with the governor's order.

Government: State of Texas orders

- **Public health criteria:** Per GA-18, Gov. Abbott retains the authority to cease reopening in specific counties due to increased COVID-19 threats. Clear and measurable targets related to cases, hospitalizations, and fatalities are needed to determine status for each county.
- **Reduce the digital divide:** Encourage the Governor's Broadband Development Council to begin drawing down federal funds for broadband infrastructure. High-speed internet availability for households by county is as follows:
 - Travis: 99.02%; Williamson: 95.24%; Hays: 93.85%; Bastrop: 70.40%; Caldwell: 69.47%

Government: Federal

- **Ensure equity for federal assistance:** Due to oversubscription in the first round, many small businesses missed initial PPP funding. The second round of PPP funding may also be

exhausted before all eligible firms receive funds. Additionally, there are segments of the business community that were unable to participate in the PPP/EIDL programs. Local assistance funds should seek to address these gaps.

- **Fund infrastructure:** Future congressional action should include capital funding for infrastructure projects (transit, aviation, highways, broadband) and reauthorize the FAST Act.

Private sector: Business best practices

- **Remote work:** Per CISA guidelines, workers should work remotely when possible. Federal Reserve Bank-Dallas estimates 48% of regional jobs are eligible for remote work.
- **Share best practices:** The task force is committed to building a repository of best practices to support businesses as they seek guidance for reopening. Businesses are encouraged to share openly in order to be a resource to others and to contribute to shared knowledge.
- **Liability and authority:** Businesses must follow the provisions within state and local orders and all applicable laws. However, businesses that are able should consider adopting higher standards for their own operations (mandatory use of face coverings, hygiene/sanitization protocols) to protect the health and safety of employees, customers, and visitors.

Compiled working group summaries

To view draft summaries of input from advisory and working groups [please visit this link](#). These summaries are working draft documents. They will be routinely updated and should not be considered final drafts nor official recommendations of the task force.

Task force members

This task force comprises more than 100 community and business leaders that represent a wide range of interests, including small and large businesses in multiple industry sectors, business membership organizations, and community groups that support the needs of business such as transportation, public health, and safety.

Name	Organization
Neeraj Aggarwal	Michael & Susan Dell Foundation
Joan Altobelli	Austin YMCA
Tamara Atkinson	Workforce Solutions Capital Area
Mason Ayer	Kerbey Lane Cafe/United Way Board Chair
Josh Baer	Capital Factory
Ed Bailey	Austin City Limits Live & 3Ten
Cheyenne Baker	Freeman
Jason Ball	Round Rock Chamber of Commerce
Dianne Bangle	Real Estate Council of Austin
Marina Bhargava	Greater Austin Asian Chamber of Commerce
A.J. Bingham	The Bingham Group, LLC (Representing the Greater Austin Restaurant Association)
Scott Blalock	JW Marriott Austin
Joe Bolash	Austin Hotel & Lodging Association Chair
Bill Brice	Downtown Austin Alliance
Veronica Briseño	City of Austin
Charles Brotherton	Travis County
Joseph Cajas, III	The Cajas Digital Agency/Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber Board Chair
Tina Cannon	Austin LGBT Chamber
Gus Cardenas	Austin Healthcare Council
Sue Carpenter	United Way for Greater Austin
David Case	Schertz Bank & Trust
Allison Castle	Castle Communications
Chris Cervini	Austin Community College District
Peter Cesaro	GDHM/Real Estate Council of Austin Board Chair
Elisbeth Challener	ZACH Theater
Emily Chenevert	Austin Board of Realtors
Derrick Chubbs	Capital Area Food Bank
Carrie Ciliberto	Home Builders Association of Greater Austin
Randy Clarke	Capital Metro
Krystle Cline	VORTEX Repertory Company
Beth Corbett	Central Texas Food Bank
Spencer Cronk	City of Austin

Dr. Paul Cruz	Austin ISD
Scott Davidson	Code 4 Event Management/Emergency Services
Andy Davis	Ascension Seton
Cara DiMattina Ryan	Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area
Emily Dreyer	Dell Technologies
Denise Eisman	Austin Hotel & Lodging Association
Craig Enoch	Enoch Keever/Austin Chamber of Commerce Board Chair
Christine D. Escobar	Univision Communications Inc.
Dr. Mark Escott	Interim Health Authority
David Evans	Integral Care
Gary Farmer	Heritage Title Company/Opportunity Austin Board Chair
Tamara Fields	Accenture
Joe Fowler	Home Builders Association of Greater Austin
Jay Fox	Baylor Scott & White
Frank Fuentes	U.S. Hispanic Contractors Association
Ryan Garrett	Stubb's Austin
Kate Garza	Ascension Seton
Mike Geeslin	Central Health
Jason Giulietti	Greater San Marcos Partnership
Michele Glaze	Samsung Austin Semiconductor
David Glenn	Home Builders Association of Greater Austin
J.J. Gottsch	Ryan Sanders Sports & Entertainment
Larry Graham	Texas Gas Service
Nikki Graham	Bank of America
Amber Gunst	Austin Technology Council
Sandy Hentges Guzman	Austin Area Research Organization
Kareem Hajjar	Hajjar/Peters LLP
Debbie Halpert	IBM
Tam Hawkins	Greater Austin Black Chamber of Commerce
Patricia V. Hayes	PVH Consulting Group/Greater Austin Black Chamber Board
Jeremy B. Hendricks	Southwest Laborers District Council/Laborers' International Union of North America
Kenny Hill	Goodwill Industries of Central Texas
Cathy Hoover	Westlake Chamber of Commerce
The Honorable Donna Howard	Texas House of Representatives
John Howard	Dell Technologies
Laura Huffman	Austin Chamber of Commerce
David Huffstutler	St. David's HealthCare
Brett A. Hurt	data.world, a Certified B Corporation
David Jabour	Twin Liquors
Charlie Jones	Four Leaf Productions

Michelle Jones	Freeman
Josh Jones-Dilworth	Jones-Dilworth, Inc.
Scott Joslove	Texas Hotel & Lodging Association
Maninder Kahlon	Dell Medical School, University of Texas at Austin
Jason Kelley	IBM
Natalie Kennedy	Kennedy Creative Events
Juliana Kerker	St. David's HealthCare
Kyle Kerrigan	Upbring Innovation Labs/Austin Young Chamber Board Chair
Chase Kincannon	Austin LGBT Chamber
Ed Latson	Austin Regional Manufacturers Association
Rick Levy	Texas AFL-CIO
Glen Lietzke	Austin Junior Volleyball
Cindy Y. Lo	Red Velvet Events, Inc.
Andy Loughnane	Austin FC
Amy Madison	Pflugerville Community Development Corporation
Dr. Molly Beth Malcolm	Austin Community College District
Oksana Malysheva	Sputnik ATX
Chief Brian Manley	Austin Police Department
Mark McClain	SailPoint/Austin Technology Council Board Chair
Tracye McDaniel	TIP Strategies/Past Chair, International Economic Development Council
Laura Mitchell	Lake Travis Chamber of Commerce
Jason Mock	San Marcos Chamber of Commerce
Chas Moore	Austin Justice Coalition
Nick Moulinet	DPR Construction
Jack Murray	Austin Marathon & High Five Events
Tom Noonan	Visit Austin
Juan M. Ortiz	City of Austin
Eli Pablon	Amazon
Alyssia Palacios-Woods	Austin Young Chamber
Carmen Palo	HID Global
Anna Panossian	Circuit of The Americas
Dixie Patrick	Austin Independent Business Alliance
Abby Payne	SailPoint
De Peart	Downtown Austin Alliance
Wes Peoples	Wes Peoples Homes, LLC
Dr. Colette Pierce Burnette	Huston Tillotson University
Ann-Marie Price	Baylor Scott & White
Diana Ramirez	Travis County
Rebecca Reynolds	Music Venues Alliance-Austin
Dr. Richard Rhodes	Austin Community College District

John Riedie	Austin Creative Alliance
Rosa Rios Valdez	BCL of Texas
Nelia Robbi	McGinnis Lochridge/SAFE Alliance Board Chair
Geronimo Rodriguez	Austin ISD Board President
Luis Rodriguez	Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Jose Roig	City of Austin
Nathan Ryan	Blue Sky Partners
Jackie Sargent	Austin Energy
Samantha Schoen	HID Global
Amos Schwartzfarb	Techstars Austin
Elliott Smith	Kitchen Sync Strategies
David C. Smith	United Way for Greater Austin
Jennifer Stevens	JHL
David Stewart	HID Global
Kelsey Streufert	Texas Restaurant Association
Simone Talma Flowers	Interfaith Action of Central Texas
Trisha Tatro	Austin Convention Center Department
Kathy Terry	P Terry's/inLieu
Scott Turner	Riverside Homes
Michele Van Hyfte	Downtown Austin Alliance
David Waddell	Texas Restaurant Association
Jason Winborn	AT&T
Ellen Wood	vcfo, Inc.
John Woodley	Advocates for Disability Access
Jacqueline Yaft	Austin-Bergstrom International Airport
Yuen Yung	Casoro Group