



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Jon Fortune, Deputy City Manager *JF*
Susana Carbajal, Chief of Staff *SC*

FROM: Bill Wilson, Interim Director, Homeland Security & Emergency Management *Bill Wilson*
Zach Baumer, Chief Sustainability Officer *Zach Baumer*

DATE: October 4, 2024

SUBJECT: Update on the Austin Resilience Network

Background

On April 8, 2021, Austin City Council passed [Resolution 20210408-028](#), directing the City Manager to engage with the Office of Sustainability and other relevant City departments, school districts, and external partners on Resilience Hubs to 1) create a plan, budget recommendations, funding strategies, and a timeline for designing and equipping an initial six pilot hubs for disasters, including the necessary power and water redundancies, and 2) budget recommendations, funding strategies, and a timeline for creating a community-wide resilience hub plan sufficient to serve all Austinites during emergencies.

More frequent and severe weather and other disaster events have highlighted the need for a Resilience Network that can provide accessible community spaces, supply distribution centers, backup power and water, safe temporary shelter, and better engagement and information sharing around emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. During non-emergencies, a Resilience Network can equitably enhance community resilience by offering resources and community-building activities year-round.

Resilience Hub Pilot Program & Lessons Learned

Although disasters and severe weather can affect everyone, low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted. High-priority neighborhoods and potential pilot sites were identified through a collaborative process involving Travis County, Austin Independent School District, community stakeholders, a Community Advisory Committee, and data collected by The University of Texas at Austin researchers. Focusing on these neighborhoods, City facilities were assessed for their potential to serve as information centers, warming and cooling centers, food and water distribution centers, or “shelter-capable” locations. With \$3 Million in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Office of Resilience worked closely with the Parks and Recreation Department, Building Services, Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM), and others to evaluate and upgrade six City recreation centers with redundant power systems and other infrastructure hardening.

The pilot successfully fostered community collaboration and enhanced preparedness. However, implementation of the Resilience Hub concept also presented some notable challenges. Defining and scoping the term “Resilience Hub” proved complex and use of existing City facilities is limited by space and scheduling constraints. Additionally, the community expressed a desire for 24-hour services, which the locations are not equipped or staffed to offer. The sole focus on the Hub Center approach limits our ability to meet the larger community demand to only those services that can be provided at each hub. Staff recommends the development of an enhanced resilience approach that improves scalability and flexibility to ensure a broader range of community needs can be met.

Next Steps

To best facilitate relationship building and incorporate capabilities from all stakeholders, we recommend evolving the approach for City resilience beyond Resilience Hubs to a broadly integrated Resilience Network. A network approach addresses the challenges identified in the pilot phase by creating a strong, flexible network of capabilities and services that connect community members in need with existing resources. Going beyond the physical locations will extend the reach and impact of resilience efforts. Community collaboration and partnerships are central to this transition, with local organizations playing a pivotal role. During the pilot, relationships were strengthened with partners like Go Austin / Vamos Austin, Community Resilience Trust, and The University of Texas at Austin. City departments also contributed to critical facility upgrades, including solar and backup power installations.

For the Austin Resilience Network, HSEM will lead programming and resource development through the lens of emergency management. HSEM’s near-term focus is on engagement and capacity building with mass care organizations and the public; broader outreach and engagement with community-based organizations; development of mass care plans, training and exercises; and identifying opportunities for formal agreements (i.e. Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with organizations and Interlocal Agreements).

Within the next two months, there will be further collaboration with community stakeholders, a presentation to the Community Advisory Committee, and a rebrand of the program. Leading into the Winter Weather Season, HSEM will have completed the Community Capacity Project and identified organizations to prioritize building out formal MOUs for support during disasters. In 2025, Council can anticipate further progress with more targeted capacity building, training and exercise engagement, and a comprehensive approach to achieve a representative sampling of MOUs with organizations across all mass care sectors.

Questions or requests for additional information can be directed to Bill Wilson, Interim Director, Homeland Security and Emergency Management, at Bill.Wilson@austintexas.gov, or Zach Baumer, Chief Sustainability Officer, at Zach.Baumer@austintexas.gov.

cc: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
CMO Executive Team