

Anti-Displacement Community Resource Centers Proposal

August 3, 2021

Submitted by the Following Organizations Who Are Part of a Community Coalition Focused on Proactively Addressing Issues Relating to Displacement:

Austin Area Urban League	Accessible Housing Austin!
Austin Justice Coalition	Austin Revitalization Authority
Blackland Community Development Corp.	Community Advancement Network
Community Powered Workshop	East Austin Conservancy
Equidad ATX	GO Austin/VAMOS Austin
Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corp.	Planning Our Communities

Addressing Basic Needs in Times of Crisis

When a crisis hits, the needs are great and varied. A household struggling to pay rent may be forced into greater food insecurity. A household with unforeseen medical bills may have also suffered a job loss due to the medical event. While crises are multifaceted and complex, available resources are often targeted for a single issue, such as emergency rental assistance or food pantries. Even more complicated are the portals one must find to access these resources and the overlapping requirements of eligibility for each.

Therefore, we recommend the City and County design a more accessible and integrated system of community resource centers for households to access the panoply of services and assistance available. This will entail uniformity of documentation as well as cross referencing ability to avoid duplication of benefits. This system of community resource centers should be simple to use and should be accessible across the digital divide. For residents, to equitably access the resources that are available, all levels of government must reconsider how to engage the community.

As we have seen during the pandemic and during Winter Storm Uri, it was difficult for community members to access basic needs such as food, housing and utility assistance as well as emergency home repair services during these states of emergency. A system of better providing these essential services and resources to the community is needed to avoid unnecessary hardship and harm to human life during these crisis situations.

The geographic breakdown of calls to 2-1-1, since the pandemic began, should inform the areas of high need. The attached map highlighting calls to 2-1-1 for food assistance during the pandemic, clearly shows areas where community members have had the greatest degree of difficulty in accessing one of the most basic of all human needs, food.

Mapping of calls to 2-1-1 is provided by Children's Optimal Health and is available at the following website:

<https://coh-tx.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8d9051e9503d4338b6469c7a343881a1>

Acknowledging that there are certain neighborhoods in Austin that are under-resourced due to high concentrations of poverty, unemployment and other factors, the City should consider establishing a system for providing essential services and resources in these areas on an on-going basis.

Addressing Basic Needs for Families At-Risk of Displacement

In areas that are gentrifying, the household budgets of long-time residents who have low to moderate incomes are stretched because of rising property values dramatically increasing property taxes and rent for

people who are often on fixed incomes. For homeowners, property taxes increase rapidly. For renters, the amount of rent that households must pay increases because the property taxes for the apartment owners go up. Household budgets are stretched so thin that monthly expenditures may involve picking and choosing between which bills to pay. An unexpected expenditure such as a trip to the emergency room, unplanned home/car repair or an unusually high utility bill place residents in a bind they may find difficult to remedy if they have a limited or fixed income.

For low-income individuals in areas that are under-resourced and/or vulnerable to displacement, crises such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, the impacts of a storm, like Winter Storm Uri, a localized flood, etc. will create an untenable situation where their demand for basic needs will become severely elevated but their ability to compete for those resources will be hampered by the fact that, during a emergency, many other community members require the same type of assistance. Creating a more effective system of support for individuals living in areas that are under-resourced and/or vulnerable to displacement will help these residents meet their basic needs regardless of whether the crises they face are specific to them, their neighborhood or the entire City/County.

Priorities for Selecting Community Resource Center Locations

The suggested community resource centers should be structured in a way that they serve the needs of households in neighborhoods vulnerable to gentrification. Along with data on areas hit hardest during the pandemic (when we look at concentrations of COVID cases and calls for basic needs assistance to 2-1-1), we recommend that the following issues be considered in selecting the specific locations of these community resource centers:

- 1) Areas identified as “Most/More Vulnerable to Displacement/Gentrification and that are considered Susceptible, Early Type 1 or Non-Gentrifying” based on the methodology used in the Uprooted Study.
- 2) Areas adjacent to prioritized census tracts experiencing the impacts of displacement from gentrification, defined 4 as neighborhoods experiencing:
 - Direct displacement (residents can no longer afford to remain in their homes due to increased housing pressure and are forced out, e.g. evictions);
 - Indirect or exclusionary displacement (the neighborhood changes as low-income residents can no longer afford to remain in the neighborhood or are excluded as a result of discriminatory policies); and
 - Cultural displacement (the character of the neighborhood is transformed to focus on new residents, leaving remaining residents with a sense of dislocation).
- 3) Beyond the investment requested in this proposal, the City of Austin should also consider setting-aside funding to mitigate displacement in areas where intense development is about to occur, specifically areas near the new soccer stadium, surrounding the proposed Colony Park development, Project Connect station areas, identified equitable TOD planning areas, and the new Tesla manufacturing facility.

Anti-Displacement Services and Resources to Incorporate into Operation of Community Resource Centers (“Right to Remain/Right to Return” Resources & Strategies)

This proposal for Community Resource Centers builds on the following recommendations in the Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF) report:

(ADTF Recommendation #4 unless otherwise noted): The City should partner with a non-profit organization to develop a one-stop-shop (e.g., Office of Housing Stability) to provide the assistance they may need to exercise their “Right to Remain.”

(i) integrate all assistance programs, simplify processes and develop a targeted outreach program to ensure that seniors, low-income residents, long-time residents and disabled residents in neighborhoods experiencing displacement:

- Are taking full advantage of all (i) home repair programs, (ii) exemptions/rebates relating to taxes & utilities and (iii) options relating to property tax deferrals;
- Receive assistance regarding (i) property sales/transfers to protect equity/assets of homeowners, (ii) probate/estate planning, and (iii) access to property deed in order to qualify for FEMA and home rehabilitation programs that are deed-dependent.
- Are informed of rights and the resources available to renters/tenants, including help and resources for (i) navigating the evictions process, (ii) accessing emergency rental assistance; (iii) accessing relocation assistance, etc. (*ADTF Recommendations #74, #75, #76,)*)
- Obtain guidance and assistance in identifying and accessing affordable housing rental or purchase opportunities that are city-funded, city-endorsed or city-incentivized (*ADTF Recommendation #69*)
- Receive support from Housing and Planning Department's financial empowerment program;
- Can connect with centralized waitlists for City-financed, incentivized, and endorsed housing. (*ADTF Recommendation #3*) *This opportunity should also be available to previously displaced residents, honoring their "right to return."*

(ii) connect homeowners and renters with displacement assistance and resources.

(iii) conduct outreach and education to the public on housing and development issues.

(iv) connect with non-profits and academic institutions involved in displacement work.

Administration & Oversight: While there are a variety of City departments where the CRCs could "live" for budgetary, oversight and accountability purposes, we urge the resource centers to be under the purview of the Equity Office. If the Equity Office is not the responsible department, we urge they be given a formal role with regard to decision making, oversight and evaluation. Adequate resources should be provided to the Equity Office so that they can effectively serve in this role.

Small Business Support: We also support continuation of the City's Legacy Business Relief Grant program (or an on-going version of it) and feel that the CRCs would be a great avenue by which to identify qualifying businesses and to link them up with the City's program.

Relationship of this Proposal to Resilience Hubs

This City is in the midst of conducting an assessment of the establishing Resilience Hubs which are described as:

"neighborhood centers that are designed to coordinate culturally sensitive, multilingual services to better meet the needs of diverse groups of community members and to provide a safe place for temporary shelter and relief during days of extreme heat or disaster events such as floods, and during non-emergency times they can provide space and programming for community-building"

efforts that increase resilience when emergencies occur; serve as a community resource during times of emergency.”

We suggest that the “resilience hubs” that operate during non-emergency situations be equipped with the capacity to provide the support and resources described in this proposal and be prioritized for areas vulnerable to displacement.

There may be areas vulnerable to gentrification that are not selected for a Resilience Hub. In these areas, we should look to existing facilities (neighborhood centers, recreation centers, libraries, school-based family resource centers, etc.) to serve the role outlined in this CRC proposal.

Additional Considerations

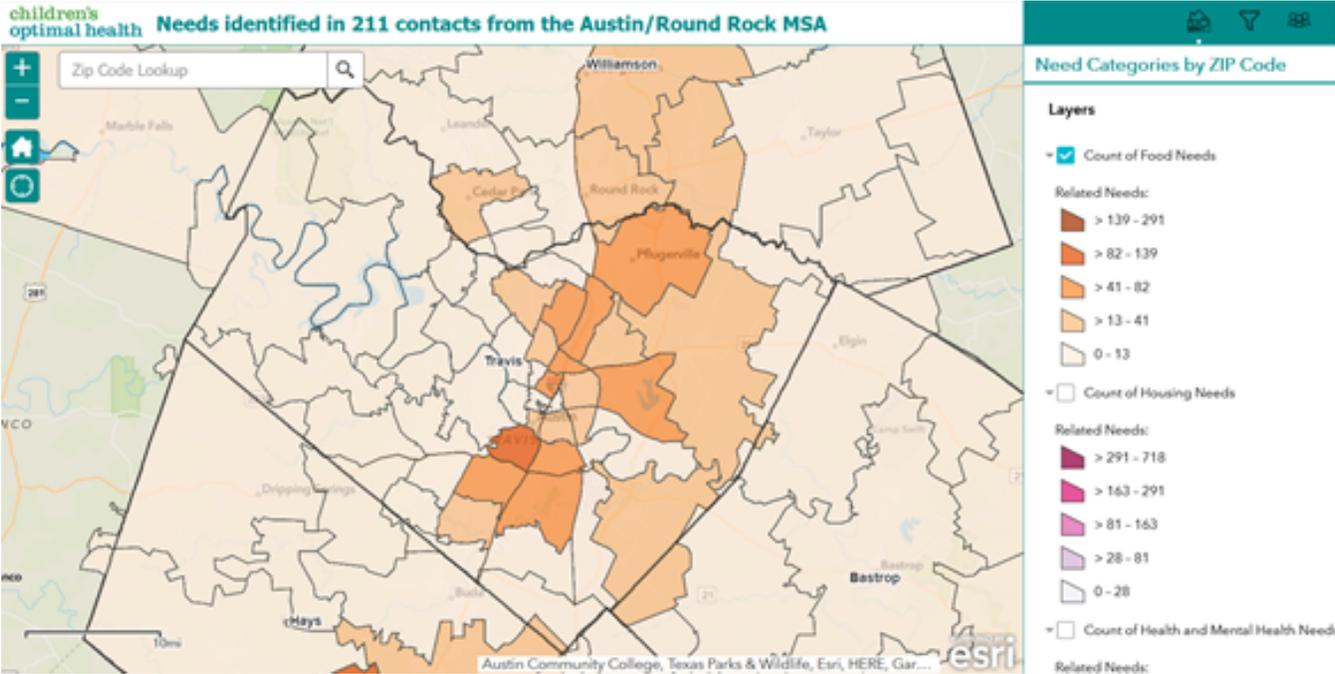
Community engagement is critical to the effective management and operations of CRCs. To echo some of the sentiments in the [Equity Reinvestment Work Group](#) (of the Reimagining Public Safety Task Force), we feel strongly that each CRC should have a Neighborhood Advisory Council that will help: with the establishment of the CRC in each neighborhood; assist in selecting partners to assist with program administration and service delivery; and in selecting priorities that their particular CRC would work to address.

As we have already outlined, there is a potential anti-displacement connection to the Resilience Hubs conversation (in the previous section) as well to the Reimagining Public Safety process (in the previous paragraph). Improving crisis/emergency response is another overlay to which we alluded in the opening section of this proposal. Funding to improve and enhance resilience, the delivery of public safety services and emergency response should meaningfully align with efforts to help neighborhoods at-risk of displacement since data demonstrates that such neighborhoods often are highlighted as priority areas when viewed through those other lenses.

In this age of rapidly increasing housing costs coupled with natural disasters and electric grid instability, it is critical that Council allocate funds towards this CRC proposal to help provide assistance to renters and homeowners struggling to remain in their homes. Displacement would be greatly diminished through an effort to improve direct support to residents and/or ensure meaningful community voices in the development, planning, and operation of the CRCs.

Finally, we would also like to note that this proposal is a work in progress, and the Central Texas Collective for Racial Equity has been including the concept of establishing Community Resource Centers as part of its fundraising efforts as a strategy aimed at addressing housing and other needs in areas at risk of displacement.

Map of Calls to 2-1-1 for Food Assistance Since the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic



Source:
<https://coh-tx.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8d9051e9503d4338b6469c7a343881a1>