

# Safety

## Strategic Outcome:

Being safe in our home, at work, and in our community

## Council Indicators:

- Emergency Response
- Community Compliance with Laws and Regulations (actual and perceived)
- Community Prevention and Preparedness
- Administration of Justice
- Quality and Reliability of Safety-related Infrastructure and Utility Services

## Challenges (DRAFT):

1. How do we engage and inform the community to ensure that public safety services are delivered to a diverse community and vulnerable populations in a safe, timely, and proactive manner given the challenges of significant growth, racial inequities, and traffic congestion?
2. How do we build meaningful community relationships that transform our organizations, foster trust and legitimacy, and increase compliance with laws and regulations?
3. How do we prevent, prepare for, respond, and become more resilient to natural and human-caused threats and hazards including digital security breaches through strengthening local and regional partnerships?
4. How do we ensure that City enforcement and justice processes are accountable, fair, equitable, impartial, and transparent?
5. How do we proactively identify, assess, and manage risks related to the quality, reliability, and access to critical infrastructure and utilities services, given the challenges of an aging infrastructure, greater climate impacts, and population growth?

## **SAFETY CHALLENGE #1 – Success of Emergency Response**

How do we engage and inform the community to ensure that public safety services are delivered to a diverse community and vulnerable populations in a safe, timely, and proactive manner given the challenges of significant growth, racial inequities, and traffic congestion?

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### **Nature of the Challenge**

Traffic is a big problem for first responders when someone is not breathing. Every second counts. Traffic congestion continues to create problems for Austinites including the City of Austin's first responders. As Austin grows and traffic increases, how do we reach every Austinite in the right time with the right response?

Response times are critical to saving life and property. But they are only a part of the story. Getting the right emergency response at the right time involves understanding what Austinites need and designing services to meet those needs.

Austinites speak many different languages and come in all ages, colors, and backgrounds. Every Austinite has a particular health, relationship, and financial status.

Over the next five years, the City of Austin has the opportunity to engage even more closely with our diverse community so that together, we can design and deliver the appropriate response in every emergency situation.



### **Evidence**

- Continued low-density suburban development can strain the public safety budget, as more development on the city's fringes require additional related infrastructure to ensure adequate response times. For example, in 2017, 90 percent of Priority 2 Emergency Medical Services calls originating in the area around Station No. 31 (Southwest Austin) were responded to within 12:33 minutes; while 90 percent of Priority 2 calls originating around the area of Station No. 6 (downtown) were responded to within 9:22 minutes.
- For Austin Police, call quantity has steadily increased over the last five years. From Fiscal Year (FY) 2014-15 to FY 2015-16 the number of emergency and urgent calls responded to increased by 4 percent. (City of Austin FY 2015-16 Performance Report)
- The demographic composition of City public safety departments does not reflect the general population. For example, in 2016 the Austin Fire Department was 78 percent Caucasian; 4.1 percent African American; 16 percent Hispanic; 1.5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander; and 0.4 percent American Indian. When compared to 2010 census data, it shows non-white populations are underrepresented within the department (2016 Council Budget Question 169; 2010 Census).

## SAFETY CHALLENGE #2 – Community Compliance with Laws & Regulations (actual and perceived)

How do we build meaningful community relationships that transform our organizations, foster trust and legitimacy, and increase compliance with laws and regulations?

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### Nature of the Challenge

Everyone who lives, works in or visits Austin expects to feel safe. According to a 2016 anonymous community policing survey, residents and non-residents agree that they feel safe in Austin and the [Austin Police] department provides a high level of service. (Matrix Consulting Group, 2016)

Collaboration on safety is critical in a complex urban environment. “Now that a growing number of essential systems are interconnected, city experts stress the need to build stronger relationships in all parts of a community before threats strike.” (The Safe Cities Index 2015, Economist Intelligence Unit)

Austin is known internationally for large festivals such as South by Southwest (SXSW) and Austin City Limits. These events require extraordinary public safety support from several City departments such as Transportation, Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services. Staffing these events is a topic of continual conversation as Austinites question whether public safety service delivery is negatively impacted by the dedication of staff to these events.

### Evidence

- “The increase in older and younger Austinites will require additional services oriented to these age groups. The changing ethnic and racial composition of the city will also shift demand for certain services, including an increased need for multilingual communications.” (Imagine Austin)
- Current staffing models limit opportunities for officers in the field to be more proactive. Proactivity levels are at an overall level of approximately 22 percent, well below the 35-45 percent range typically considered to represent effective level of patrol services. (Final Report on Community Policing, Matrix Consulting Group, 2016)



Photo Credit: City of Austin

*The Austin Police Department and community members from the Rundberg area come together to beautify their neighborhood.*

## SAFETY CHALLENGE #3 – Prevention & Preparedness for Emergencies

How do we prevent, prepare for, respond, and become more resilient to natural and human-caused threats and hazards including digital security breaches through strengthening local and regional partnerships?

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### Nature of the Challenge

Does every Austinite know how to best prepare for and respond to different types of disasters? Having information in different languages and culturally relevant contexts increases access and understanding. Through greater collaboration with community groups, Austin can provide appropriate public outreach that raises hazard awareness and communicates actions to be taken (Flood Mitigation Task Force, Final Report, May 2016).

As we saw during Hurricane Harvey, mobile devices and social media were used extensively to assist people in need who evacuated to Austin. Some evacuees relied solely on their mobile phones for the most current evacuation information, navigation, and resources that they could use.

Adding to natural hazards, Austin needs to be prepared for digital security breaches that could disrupt city services or even steal Austinites' identities. In April 2017, the City of Dallas woke up to sirens blaring when a hacker breached their systems. On a global scale, in May through June of 2017, hackers accessed Equifax systems, stealing people's names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, and addresses and, in some instances, driver's license numbers.

### Evidence

- “Recent extreme events are likely to be the new normal. Vulnerable populations are likely to be disproportionately impacted due to limited ability to adapt.” (Toward a Climate Resilient Austin, Executive Summary, 2014)
- It is critical for emergency management organizations to establish themselves on social media outlets before a disaster strikes. During non-disaster periods, emergency management professionals should explore how they can use social media to deliver information. (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2017)
- “If you have a credit report, there's a good chance that you're one of the 143 million American consumers whose sensitive personal information was exposed.” (Federal Trade Commission, September 2017)



Photo Credit: Austin Teresa  
*An evacuee and her daughter before evacuating to Austin from Houston during Hurricane Harvey (2017).*

## SAFETY CHALLENGE #4 – Administration of Justice

How do we ensure that City enforcement and justice processes are accountable, fair, equitable, impartial, and transparent?

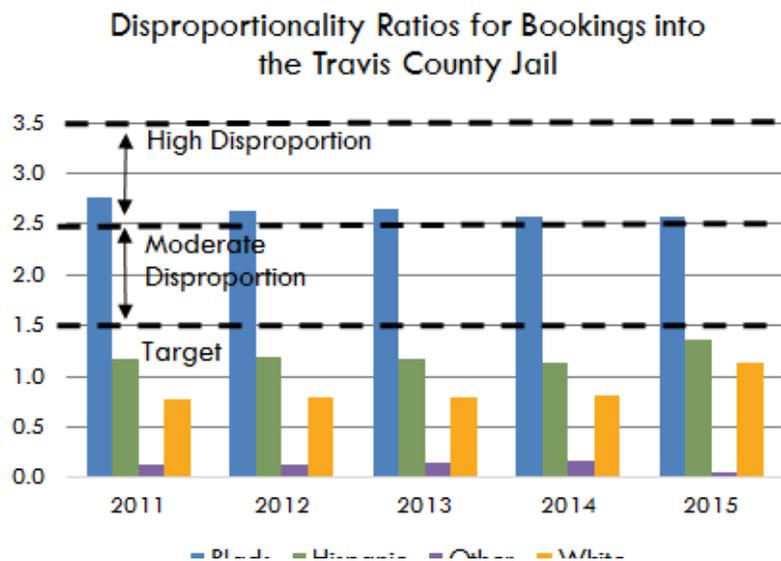
### Nature of the Challenge

Austin faces many of the same challenges as the nation today. Researcher Phillip Atiba Goff wrote in October 2016 for the Research Center for Policing Equity and John Jay College of Criminal Justice that “Public trust in law enforcement is alarmingly low in many communities nationwide.” Goff presents research showing “positive police community relationships are crucial for safer communities.”

Austin will need to take important steps toward recognizing and addressing racism at the personal, institutional, structural, and systemic levels. Over the next five years, the community has the opportunity to focus on and enhance current efforts to make enforcement and justice processes fair and equitable for all Austinites.

### Evidence

- The Community Advancement Network (CAN) 2017 Dashboard reports the disproportionality ratio of jail bookings for Blacks in 2011 was 2.8 and 2.6 in 2015.
- The City Auditor’s Special Request Report on Alternatives to Incarceration at Municipal Court (July 2016) indicates that Austin and other Texas cities are working to expand alternatives to incarceration for indigent defendants guilty of fine-only offenses.



Data Source: Community Advancement Network

*The disproportionality ratio of jail bookings for Blacks has exceeded the “high disproportion” threshold for five years.*

## **SAFETY CHALLENGE #5 – Quality and Reliability of Infrastructure and Utility Services**

How do we proactively identify, assess, and manage risks related to the quality, reliability, and access to critical infrastructure and utilities services, given the challenges of an aging infrastructure, greater climate impacts, and population growth?

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### **Nature of the Challenge**

All Austinites expect to have safe water to drink, electricity to power their homes and businesses, and safe, drivable roads. Austin’s growing, sprawling population combined with climate change can have significant impact on the City’s ability to deliver these basic, core public services.

Extreme weather tested Texas’ critical infrastructure beyond the breaking point in several cases in 2017: Corpus Christi, Victoria, Houston, and surrounding areas experienced either extended power outages, boil water notices, or severely damaged roadways during the fall 2017 hurricane season.

To prevent these undesirable events in Austin, the City will need to strengthen coordinated, proactive risk management efforts with City, regional, state, and federal partners. In Austin’s 2014 report on Climate Resiliency, the Office of Sustainability identified potential impacts to critical infrastructure and recommended that the City “Develop vulnerability assessments, and integrate current departmental planning efforts such as: Enterprise Risk Management, Business Continuity Plans, Long Term Plans, and Capital Plans.”

### **Evidence**

- Hazard mitigation activities are an investment in a community’s safety and sustainability. It is widely accepted that the most effective hazard mitigation measures are implemented at the local government level, where decisions on the regulation and control of development are ultimately made. (City of Austin Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, 2016)
- Resident satisfaction with flood control efforts has decreased from 65 percent in 2012 to 48 percent in 2016 (City of Austin Community Survey, 2016).
- There are more than 700 buildings in the 25-year floodplain, according to recent data analyzed by the Watershed Protection Department.



*The Austin Memorial Day floods of 2015 tested many bridges and roads.*