

Mayor Pro Tem, Colleagues on the Council, City Manager, City staff, my neighbors and fellow Austinites:

It is true that the current state of our city is anxious, troubled, and hurting. But it is not the complete truth of this moment. We are also so much more than that. In an almost curious way, the state of our city is anxious and hopeful. Even as we manage a set of inescapable challenges so stark as to stretch the imagination, we look to a future, precisely because it is uncertain, that provides us a once-in-a-century opportunity to no longer be bound by who we were a year ago. Some greater power has reinvented us all. This much change, all around, in almost everything, gives us an almost infinite sense of freedom to do what it takes to actually become all that we aspire to be.

So here we are now, confronting challenges unlike anything we've ever seen before. Where do we begin? In times of such great uncertainty, what should be our guiding light? I think we begin with -- and look to -- "justice."

This could have been a speech only about COVID-19. In every discussion of things that matter – our families, our health, our jobs, businesses and our schools, our best laid plans – the virus is the elephant in the room. In the dark film this year has been, the coronavirus was the supporting actor that stole every scene.

Everyone knows the arc of the virus.

The hard choices came fast as we cancelled SXSW, then moved to avert a public health disaster with stay at home orders to slow the spread of a virus we were still learning about. We didn't know if the community would join in such an extreme measure or if incredible disruption would work. Both did. We saved thousands of lives in our city alone.

We all want the local economy--and our lives--back as we knew them. But the governor's decision to reopen before we had sufficient testing and tracing in place and before our numbers were low enough compounded our challenge. We went on to more permissive phases without knowing the impact of the preceding one. We tried to open businesses as they had operated pre-virus... as if the virus was gone. Leaders at the national and state levels gave destructive or ambiguous messages about what we needed to do to prevent a surge. And so the virus came roaring back. Truth is, the virus was never gone. It just hides... waiting for us to invite it back into our lives.

And that's when we showed what Austin can do. We rallied again, focused on masking, distancing, and avoiding groups. Again, we stopped the trajectory and we saved more lives, this time becoming a state-wide model for what is possible. We learned we have the ability to control the virus by our behaviors and we glimpsed a future where more was possible.

Today, it appears we're in a plateau. That's better than a surge – but still dangerous. The virus is real and the infectivity in our community is still too high.

You want to open businesses and schools? Drive down the infection rate further than we are now. Infectivity in our community is now about 10%-15%. We need to get to under 5%.

By the way, any crowd at all, gathering for UT football, won't help us get there. I read the University of Texas is considering gathering 25,000 people for football games. I hope they don't really try to do this. I'm not sure anywhere in the world are such groups gathering. Even in places with virus infection levels lower than ours.

Our choices have consequences. People die from this virus. Many people who live through it are carrying injuries that may be with them the rest of their lives. Risks we take with masks, distancing, or large groups puts at risk sustaining the opening of schools and businesses?

This virus is more than just an attack on our physical health, it's also a devastating blow to our economic health. Unemployment is at unimaginable levels.

Businesses have shuttered -- some temporarily and some lost forever. Many of our neighbors don't know how they're going to feed their families or whether they'll be evicted from their homes. Tenants struggle with rent; homeowners and landlords struggle with mortgage payments.

Our hospitality and creative workers and industries, so great a part of our economy, are reeling. For many, it's already too late.

The City is putting more than \$200M into programs and direct aid to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis. But it's not enough. We need more federal help. Congress needs to pass CARES II and it needs to provide support to cities so we can help ourselves.

But COVID-19 is also a moral challenge. In many ways, it makes this moment even bigger than all of that.

COVID-19 isn't just killing people, its impacts are disproportionately felt by communities of color. Black and LatinX Austinites are getting infected and dying at higher rates than their white neighbors. How many of us sat at home, to shelter in place from the storm, and watched essential workers, construction workers, health care workers in nursing homes forced to take risks the rest of us could avoid? That we had susceptible and at-risk neighbors was no longer theoretical. It became too real. Yes, we worried about whether there'd be toilet paper on the shelves, and we also began to notice, perhaps for the first time, the people working to restock those shelves.

COVID-19 highlighted that we lack the transportation infrastructure to get people to the jobs that make the city run. It showed us the generational vulnerability of neighbors of color who have been systematically denied access to healthcare resources. We saw that during a pandemic, the health of immigrants, poor people and those without homes is interconnected with our own. We saw that homelessness is not just about people without homes, it's also about 40% of

those experiencing homelessness being African Americans. Homelessness is a racial issue: a particularly cruel result of displacement, disinvestment, and despair. Our stay-at-home mandate revealed the housing insecurity of hundreds of thousands among us. COVID-19 made it clear how many “essential” workers lack access to the essentials.

As if there was any way to avoid seeing the racial contours of the COVID-19 crisis, another challenge, forever intertwined with the virus, was heartbreakingly clear... and infuriatingly common. When we watched George Floyd plead for his life, then call out for his mother before dying beneath the knee of a police officer, overwhelming numbers finally began to disabuse themselves of the fantasy that people of color are equally valued, protected and safe... even by those sworn to protect us all.

In Austin, Mr. Floyd’s death came mere weeks after the shooting of Mike Ramos, a tragedy we have yet to explain and an incalculable loss to those who loved him and to his mother, most of all. We were not bystanders to the tragedy in Minnesota... like cities around the country, we too have been living this perverse cycle of police violence, community outrage and precious few answers.

This view of the virus and of our city through the lens of justice and race is one we should not and cannot close our eyes to. We can see it everywhere around us and in everything we do. Like the mirror that doesn’t lie, this crisis is laying bare injustices that have long been too easy to ignore. We just haven’t dealt with it.

It's been a challenge too large, too intractable, too difficult. In fact, it's the kind of challenge that society can only pick up and resolve when confronted with a moment of such upheaval that fundamental change is not a choice, but the only option available.

History tells us that sometimes it takes a monumental tragedy to put us on a fundamentally different, and even historically right and just path we would not otherwise have found. Sometimes, the great sea changes in direction and inertia necessary for us to fundamentally and transformationally change a society's future happen only because of great disruption. Only when our current dreams seem shattered are we forced to dream anew. To see our world and ourselves differently. When we can no longer do what we've always done, we can realize the dawning of a new day and focus on new dreams.

Let me give you two historical examples of what I'm talking about. The first is the story of Austin's dam (as related by former UT President Fenves). Seems in the late 1800s, Austin was dreaming about its future and what it could grow up to be. The leaders looked enviously at the growing number of mill towns in the Northeast and how their economies were boosted by building dams and harnessing the power of water for energy to drive what they hoped would be new manufacturing. Austin as the manufacturing center of the Southwest! It didn't work that way. A storm came and washed out both the dam and the dream. The land surrounding the dam would never develop into manufacturing but instead

would take its place as part of the University of Texas. From the debris of one future came the eventual realization of Austin as a city of ideas

Another example is the New Deal rising from the Great Depression. Up until most recent times, this was the depth of economic chaos. Over 20 million people lost their jobs. We all know those stories. Out of that crisis, however, we saw the initiation of new ideas and tools that have been enshrined to this very day: public works projects, social security, and other New Deal programs that, for the first time at such a scale, dealt with relief for the unemployed and poor, recovery of the economy, and reform of the financial system.

From these examples, we should draw courage and hope. Our history as a city and a country is one of responding to crisis with innovation, generational investments and finding the will to correct our mistakes. And the bigger the crisis we face collectively as a community, the greater the opportunity for big Ideas that represent fundamental change.

We get to decide if COVID-19 is ultimately remembered as an historical backdrop on our city's march to address justice, race, and inequities as we have never done before, or whether the meanness and destruction of the virus becomes the dominant memory.

Let's act boldly now, to become the city we want to be. Fair, prosperous and resilient. Not despite the challenges of the moment, but because of them.

Because of the freedom to change direction that only comes from great change forced upon us.

### **Homelessness**

Austin has the opportunity, the need, obligation and responsibility, to move decisively to end homelessness in our community. Austinites living on the streets and in the woods have dramatically shorter lifespans and increased vulnerability to violence and sexual assault. For all of the discussion around this topic, no one wants this for our neighbors – absolutely no one. For too long, though, we were content to not think too hard about it because we didn't see it. We didn't see the suffering, we didn't see the injustice. We didn't see it, because we didn't want to. It made us uncomfortable. We adopted policies that were intended to move it along and hide it.

I am proud that this community has embraced the discomfort that comes with big challenges, and that we are working together on real solutions to homelessness – to end it, not just address it. I'm thankful that this community rejected calls to return to a time when we asked the police to harass the least fortunate so that we could avert our attention from their needs, while doing little to resolve their plight.

To the people that signed on to the petition because they were desperate for a solution for people experiencing homelessness, I want to say that I share your

impatience. Having chosen this more just path, though, and having rejected the false promise of cosmetic fixes, our work is incomplete unless we follow through with the commitment to house the homeless. This will require us to do a better job of inclusively managing shared public spaces.

COVID-19 made that commitment even more urgent. Our response to this pandemic brought the city and its non-profit service providers to work together as never before. We've been able to dramatically increase the number of hotel beds to transition people off of the streets. We've focused on how our crisis response system functions and come up with a clearer map than we've ever had for how to move forward.

We need to invest in affordable housing and prevention efforts that make homelessness rare; and in diversion and rapid re-housing programs that make homelessness brief; and we need to significantly invest in permanent supportive housing that ensures that homelessness is non-recurring for all those that successfully rise above that experience.

The scale of resources to end homelessness is great, but the solutions are real and achievable.

Austin has shown we know how to solve this problem— as we did by reaching net effective zero for veterans. It's something we have shown we can make great progress on – as we have with youth homelessness. It's also something that this

community has been eager to invest in - as we did with the historic \$250m affordable housing bond in 2018 and will again with a vote for funding to address displacement this coming November.

Now is the time -- our moment of opportunity -- to build on that work and to act boldly to make our city more just. We know that 38% of our homeless population is Black – over 4 times greater than the demographics of the County as a whole. When we work to end homelessness, we are also doing the important work of addressing the symptoms of racial injustice.

### **Project Connect**

With much of the city complying with stay-at-home orders and guidelines to protect themselves and help fight the spread of COVID-19, our roads and highways seemed eerily empty, and ridership on public transit plummeted. That relief from traffic was short-lived, however, as more and more of economy re-opened or adjusted operations. Congestion has returned to IH35 and MoPac as has Austin's eternal frustration.

Although many fewer people were not riding our buses and commuter rail, Capital Metro was still carrying tens of thousands of riders a day. These essential workers both did not have the option to work from home nor the option to drive to get to the jobs all of us needed done.

In our community, far too many of the people most in need of affordable, reliable, rapid transportation to meet their daily needs and improve their lives don't have it. As a result, many are forced to spend a disproportionate part of their income on dangerous ways to get around, or they are losing time and --in too many cases -- risking their lives -- to make use of inadequate transportation options.

Project Connect is a bold transit plan for the just and accessible city we aspire to be. It certainly addresses traffic, but it will do so much more. With light rail, a downtown transit tunnel to speed up travel, no matter what vehicular mode you choose, new MetroRapid lines and vehicles, and a transition to a zero-emissions fleet, Project Connect will connect our entire city, creating new opportunity for Austinites, reducing our dependence on expensive personal vehicles, and save lives

The expense and burden of owning a car – **which is estimated to be in excess of \$10,000 per year on average in Austin** - should not be the price of admission to participate in our economy. Project Connect is not just a transformative mobility program for our region. It represents a generational investment in more just and equitable access to opportunity for whole swaths of our community who live in transportation deserts

Project Connect, once **FULLY BUILT**, will bring more frequent and rapid transportation to jobs, education, and health care for tens of thousands of black and brown households – the essential nurses, medical technicians, grocery clerks and countless others more of us have recently come to appreciate. The potential impact is enormous. Consider:

- Over 200,000 people of color live near new MetroRapid stations.
- Nearly 55% of those who live near proposed Orange and Blue Line rail stations, and nearly 80% of those near Green Line stations are people of color.
- Tens of thousands households living below the poverty do not have access to cars. Over 57,000 people in poverty and nearly 26,000 households without cars are located near new MetroRapid stations.

- The Blue Line will serve over 26,000 people in poverty and nearly 10,000 zero car households.
- The Orange Line will serve nearly 29,000 people in poverty and 11,000 zero car households
- We'll be able to expand and improve service to our community's highest need areas in the Eastern Crescent, with new commuter rail and rapid bus lines.
- New rapid service on MLK and Pleasant Valley could cut transit users' commute by 30 minutes or more, giving people time back to spend with their families.

We must acknowledge that major transportation investments in our past have done more to deepen inequality, to segregate rather than connect, to displace rather than benefit.

We must learn from that painful past and ensure we do not repeat those injustices. We must ensure that the very communities we intend to serve with improved transit are actually able to keep living in those areas once the

improvements are in place. Along with the historic investment in transit will come a historic investment in preserving the affordability of communities near our transit investments:

- Banking land for affordable housing before gentrification takes hold
- Building thousands of new, permanently affordable homes
- Preserving existing affordable homes
- New programs, developed collaboratively with residents of the neighborhoods impacted, to keep people in their homes

No other city has embarked on a project of this magnitude in a way that learns from the mistakes of the past and makes, real meaningful investments to ensure equitable outcomes

In November, I hope and believe our council will give voters the chance to right many transportation wrongs in an historically grand way.

**Policing/Budget.**

Let's think big. What if we really wanted to make our city safer? Are we willing to engage in the re-imagining of policing if it could make us safer?

And what does it mean to "re-imagine policing?" And while we're at it, what do people really want to "defund" the police? I'm anxious for us to put the politics and hyperbole aside and actually think through the choices surrounding the desire to make us all more safe, their implications, and the pathways for whatever we want to do.

For example, why is it that we expect our police officers to be our first option in responding to mental health disruptions? It seems that too many of these police calls don't go well. Why don't we expand the availability of mental health professionals so that the police role is one of backup in case these professionals need help? If we could farm much of this activity to others, we might not need as many police officers? We should find out.

So many people ask me if they should call 911 or 311 for their issue. I'm not always sure the answer. But maybe the better question is why do we have two different numbers? What if there was only one number, one set of operators, each trained to immediately forward every call to where it's supposed to go? Maybe the police department, and the taxpayers, could save some money, even while the public is better getting in touch with the right person, if we no longer made the police department pay for 911? We should find out.

For the last several years, our local law enforcement leadership, working with criminal justice attorneys, has been examining whether to put civilian scientists and doctors in charge of an independent forensic lab. Maybe that would help with the perception of impartiality? Maybe the courts should be paying for this work rather than it coming out of the police budget? We should find out.

Some have suggested that we should explore whether Internal Affairs would better be able to do its work if its investigating officers were not part of the same police force they're expected to investigate? And should the police department have to pay for that? We should find out.

What about the Academy where prospective police officers receive their initial training? About half of the curriculum is set by the state, but about five hundred hours of instruction are directed by us locally. Do you think we should consider re-directing our half of the training to much more intensive training on mental health intervention? Would the training be more responsive to the community generally if the Academy administration were civilians and police officers served only as adjunct professors? And if so, would it really need to be the police department that paid for this? We should find out.

One of the areas where we have too much violent crime is associated with family violence. These must be horrible calls for police responding to a situation where a family member has injured another. In this city we have places where people can

go, with their children, to be safe and protected before that violence occurs. But right now, if they call, many are put on a waiting list because we don't have enough available spaces. If we wanted to do more to fight family violence, is it better to invest in people who respond to the violence once it's occurred, or in providing more shelter spaces to avoid the violence? We should find out.

It seems like many if not most calls answered by the police, and the fire department for that matter, are health related calls. This is what EMS does. Maybe they're more trained for this type of call? Maybe increasing the number of EMS personnel would mean there'd be less we'd be asking the police department to do. Maybe such a change in who responds to medical calls might save the taxpayers money. We should find out.

These are the kinds of things that are involved in re-imagining police.

I'm really looking forward to the continued conversation with my colleagues and the City Manager and staff on these items. But here's what I'm thinking might be the way to go next week:

- I support engaging in the re-imagining of the police department in many different ways.
- I support the process the City Manager and Deputy City Manager have put into play to evaluate, together with the community, ideas such as

those above including whether and how any idea makes sense and would be achieved.

- I do not see how we actually make any of these things happen right away. If we want real, transformative change, we have to be prepared to do the work necessary. This will take all of us working together, digging deep, resolving conflicts, removing barriers, being our most creative, innovative and adaptive. For some things, the path seems more clear. Ultimately there will be no lasting re-imagination realized and sustained without putting in the time, resources and deliberation required. These are important decisions.
- This re-imagining process has to happen fast and some of the ideas have to be moved on now.
- To demonstrate the seriousness of this inquiry and to provide greatest transparency, I support removing elements, such as those above, from the police budget and putting them into a transition budget category, which looks like it will contain well over \$100M in elements currently in the police budget.
- To make sure that we actually do the work to evaluate, recommend and to be ready to execute where appropriate, I support only authorizing expenditures out of the police budget and the transition budget for six months. This would mean that in six months, none of these budgets would be funded without Council affirmative action, creating in essence, as second budget process in six months on these matters.

- There would also be no need to wait six months for budget amendments if they are ready, or if a council member wanted to bring one more quickly.
- I believe the Academy curriculum lacks sufficient confidence in the community that it will move police personnel to the kind of culture and approach most desire. Therefore, I do not see how the November Academy class can go forward as planned. This is difficult for me because I believe that the Academy is the best way we to place culture change-agents among our officers and these cadet classes provide us with our best opportunity to diversify our force.
- We need to examine appropriate force levels today and as part of any re-imagining that gets executed where functions inside the police department are undertaken elsewhere or are handled in ways that are intended to provide increased public safety.
- We need to better understand in the next few days, the overtime reserves to see if there are monies there that could be moved to next week into any mental health intervention that still needs funding and into increasing the capacity of EMS.
- From at least a purely public safety perspective, we need to commit to funding and operating more transition and permanent supportive housing for those without homes and those that need a safe place to go.

I want the demonstrators, marchers and advocates to know how much I respect, admire and appreciate their efforts to impact the debate we're having at city hall.

It has made a significant difference in the nature and substance of the conversation we are having. I hope that this commitment portends well for an incredibly high turnout at the polls in November... something to which we should all commit.

I want our law enforcement officers to know that your mission and your safety is also paramount with me and this Council. I know that discussions that center around considering new and different ways to achieve safety can be heard by some as an indictment of performance. I can't help what others say. I do know that the conversation among the dais is focused only on our joint mission, you and us, to find the best ways to keep our community safe. The discussion I hope we have over the coming few months is one in which I hope you participate because there is much for me to learn.

Finally, on this subject, I want to address police department leadership. The discussion we're having in Austin about trying to find the best ways to provide for public safety is the same as is happening all over the country. We need partners and advisors in this search that are open to exploring and building on new ideas. We need the full data to be presented so it can be objectively considered. We need not only an openness to consider change but a keen desire to move past the status quo and to look at public safety more broadly than even mainly focusing on ensuring we're best equipped to deal with unsafe moments when they occur. We need more than just a willingness to accept change if it happens, we need a champion for change at its best.

In year's past, this State of the City would have ended about here. After having laid out the Big Things that we need to do. These Big Things are all transformational: ending homelessness, delivering Project Connect citywide rapid transit, and reimagining policing and public safety. They rise to the moment. But let's start talking about doing more.

The success of Austin and Texas began at the expense of its slaves. The first census in 1825 showed Austin with 450 slaves, 35% of the total count. By 1860, the number of slaves were increasing faster than the population as a whole. The colonization laws gave settlers up to 4,605 acres of land and additional 80 acres for each slave they had. Blacks were kept from voting in 1902 with a poll tax, were segregated on public transportation in 1906, and preventing from voting in primaries in 1923. In 1928, Austin adopted a land plan that forced African Americans to leave their homes and move to the east side of town. In 1932, ordinances were passed that moved nearly all those that hadn't already been moved.

A century and more of deliberate segregation, compounded by a lack of investment over generations and our own local version of the institutional racism have had disastrous -- and completely predictable — results: extreme wealth and wage disparities; poverty rates for Travis County black and Hispanic residents are about 2.5 times greater than the poverty rates for Whites; in Travis County, 28% of all people under the age of 65 who are low-income have no health insurance,

with Hispanic residents most likely to be uninsured; while Black residents account for 8% of the total adult population in Travis County, 23% of all people booked into the Travis County jail are Black; a recent report by the Urban Institute and the Center for Policing Equity finds that Black motorists are four-times more likely to be arrested after being stopped by the Austin Police Department as White motorists.

These statistics reflect -- not a deficit of ability, ambition or effort -- but rather, a shameful combination of racist policy, compounded by decades of inattention and disinvestment by Austin's privileged, mostly white leadership over the ensuing generations.

We've done a lot to address some of the vestiges of institutional racism and system inequities. But not enough. Our pre-pandemic economic success and stratospheric growth hid and thus delayed the magnitude of the reckoning with Austin's legacy of racism and systemic inequity that's really required. We have been taking concrete steps but moving too slowly... and people are suffering as a result.

We have to acknowledge the roadblocks to prosperity for people of color in Austin were set intentionally and their impacts will be felt for generations unless we act. We must harness the energy of disruption to remake Austin as a city of *real* opportunity for all. It will require a commitment by each of us to address our affordability and displacement crises and to expand healthcare options and

transportation infrastructure to every corner of the city, to ensure that our institutions are just and equitable.

I'm adding my voice to those of Mayors across the country who are calling on Congress to develop and execute a national program of restitution for descendants of slaves in this country, to address the yawning chasm of a wealth gap between Black Americans that began with slavery and has widened over generations through reconstruction, through the shameful scourge of Jim Crow and remains an insidious force to this very day.

We must also do the work here. We would not be alone in this work. Cities around the country (Ashville, Providence, Durham, Tulsa and others) are owning up to the physical, emotional and economic violence visited upon people of color by the communities they call home.

Tonight, I'm asking Council and the Community to begin planning a pathway to atonement and restitution. There is already movement in this direction and we should support those who are trying to find the way forward. It will require us to be intentional about addressing our history and righting the wrongs. It is the work of saying "Black lives matter."

I believe COVID-19 will eventually be overshadowed by the Big Ideas it is helping to put into place. But even more important will be why and how we do the Big Things. Importantly, each promotes justice when analyzed through an equity

lens. History will remember 2020 as the moment that pointed us in the direction of justice. Because this was the year that forced us to see injustice unlike any time before. Like someone grabbing and holding our face between their hands and not letting us turn away -- forcing us to look at the unfairness around us and our part in perpetuating it.

Last year, at last year's State of the City, I stood at a podium in City Hall chambers and said: "Race issues remain our most significant equity challenge." This was a year ago. Do you think those words resonated then the way they do today? "There is no justification," I said then, "for having a ten-year differential in life expectancy depending on whether you live on the east or west side of town." And that was BEFORE the coronavirus. The truth is, that last year, we had yet to really grasp the enormity of the opportunity gulf that separates our neighbors of color from many of their white counterparts.

2020 has been a troubled year. I believe it will turn out to have been the kind of necessary trouble that Congressman John Lewis exhorted us to make in the name of progress.

Never has the resolve been so great to live in a more fair and more just society than it is today. That hope and dream, the sense that things are somehow different – and more different than they have ever been, is wrapped in a feeling of hope and optimism that is equally unique. The time is now, the drumbeat grows. The time is now to ensure we exit this time as a more just city than we

were when we entered. We can do this. If we're not scared to think big. This is the moment to define who we are. We should dedicate ourselves to doing justice – and not in little ways. We must rise to the moment and change history. motivated violence by agents of local government and law enforcement will not re-occur.

Perhaps only at times such as these, where our routines and inertia are so utterly disrupted, can we be freed and forced to dream and act big. We can get swallowed by the challenges, or we can see them as freeing us to think in grand ways and differently and truly deliver a different kind of tomorrow.

So let's do big things. Let's end homelessness. Let's bring real mobility to Austin. Let's reimagine how we keep one another safe. Let's address race and do something about correcting centuries of injustice because it is the fundamental injustice that fuels so many others.

Doing these three big things will require a major disruption of the status quo. All of these challenges -- and others -- require a reckoning with the racial disparities that exist in every corner of life in this city. We have to recover, but shame on us if we rebuild systems as inequitable as before. Let us embrace the remarkable gift it is to have so much undecided and up in the air. Let's celebrate the opportunity born of the necessity to rebuild. Let's commit to be guided by a search to deliver justice. Let's join in a DISRUPTIVE RECOVERY, seizing the moment rebuild in a just and equitable way.

EMBARGOED