http://www.mayoradler.com/planning-for-the-future/

**SOCA 2018: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

Mayor Pro Tem and my colleagues on the Council, Manager Cronk, distinguished guests, and fellow Austinites:

Before I begin, I want to thank Consul General Carlos Gonzalez Gutierrez of Mexico for introducing me this evening.

People don’t realize that how closely we are working together these days. It hasn’t always been so. Used to be we saw each other only at happy occasions, like at Casa Mexico during SXSW.

Times have changed, and so has our relationship. I want to tell you something that not many people know. When the immigration raids began earlier last year and Austin was made a particular target, we had no reliable access to information except what we got from my friend, the Consul General. At that moment, we found ourselves in common cause in service of this city — and all of its people.

That bond was strengthened when Hurricane Harvey looked like it was headed right at us. His government immediately offered shelter to any Texan who might need it.

You and your wife were in our local shelters tending to all our guests. Again and again, my friend, you demonstrate that you care about people – all people – yours, mine, and ours.

Consul General Gonzalez Gutierrez, you are my partner in some of the biggest challenges facing our two countries. Tonight, I pledge to you not only continued brotherhood and friendship, but continued vigilance in our efforts on immigration.  
We want our neighbors in Austin to be safe regardless of who they are or where they came from. We know preserving trust makes us the safest big city in the state. We will not use fear to divide our community. Consul General, you can count on Austin.

So let’s begin… Now, more than ever, I value opportunities for us to take stock of a year’s progress and to measure ourselves against the needs of the future.

In these turbulent times, we must deliberately and seriously speak and act in a way true to who we are. Our city continues to face formidable challenges. We cannot pretend we don’t see them. We need to act and to plan for what the future will bring.

The question you should be asking is whether your Council has the will to seize the moment and to act on the scale of our challenges. The answer to that question, when you look back a year and look ahead a year, is “yes.”

Ten years from now… twenty years from now… a new generation of Austinites will ask us what we did, at this time of great risk, to preserve and protect the magic of Austin. This is our moment.

We must act with our eyes focused clearly on the future.

Last year, when we gathered together for this purpose, I said that if the world completely lost its mind, we’d still be Austin, Texas.

…I did not mean that as a challenge, but the world certainly held up its end of the bargain.

It seems our country is losing its way in the world. Here in Austin, though, we know who we are. And if we remain true to ourselves, we will always find the solid ground on which to build our future.

Tonight, we know the state of our city is stronger than ever. And this past year, we repeatedly re-affirmed who we are… In fact, we shouted to the whole world, that we are Austin, Texas…

The Austin metropolitan area added 30,000 jobs last year.

We’ve got the lowest unemployment rate in two decades. In fact, we have the second-lowest unemployment rate in the whole country.

We’re still the safest big city in Texas.

We lead the state in startups, venture capital, and patents.

We’re the best place to start a small business in the country.

And the best place to live in America.

But in Austin, we should never measure our progress by how well we are doing compared to other cities.

We can only say the state of our city is strong if we are affirmatively building a future in which we preserve the spirit and soul of Austin.

In this last year, your City Council and City Staff laid an important foundation for that future in many ways, chief among them on traffic, affordability, racial and economic inequality, homelessness, and climate change.  
This coming year we are poised to build further on that foundation in even bigger and more transformative ways.

Let me start with one of the top challenges facing Austin, traffic.

Thanks to this Council, our staff, and the 2016 Mobility Bond that you passed, we’re doing more actual work than ever before.

We made our four (4) top-crash intersections safer, reducing crashes by as much as 67%, and started work on the next two. Even though there’s much more to do, city-wide traffic deaths are at a three-year low.  
By the end of 2020, we’re scheduled to build 30 new miles of sidewalks to make your neighborhoods safer and for your children to more safely get to their schools.

The city is joining with the State on Loop 360, 2222 & 620, Parmer Lane and, with Council Member Flannigan’s leadership, Anderson Mill. We’re putting in more than $110 million from the bond, and TxDOT is more than matching us with an additional almost $230 million. Within a few years you’ll be able to drive down Loop 360 and never hit a single stoplight.  
We’re executing the 2016 Mobility Bond on our most trafficked corridors (North and South Lamar, Burnet, MLK, William Cannon, Slaughter, Airport, Guadalupe and Riverside.)

It’s proposed that all the corridors get major work. We’re talking 50 new turn lanes at 30 intersections, 120 smart signals that time themselves automatically, and 30 miles of repaved streets…

…We’re talking about safety improvements that include upgrades at 13 of our next-most crash prone intersections and 40 new mid-block pedestrian crosswalk signals. And we’re talking about 75 miles of connected sidewalks and paths and 40 miles of bike lanes along the corridors and 100 miles of bicycle route connections.

You know what this means?

The engineers tell us that all this work will reduce traffic delays by 25% and collisions by 15%. This is the work you are expecting us to do, and these are the results you are expecting us to get.

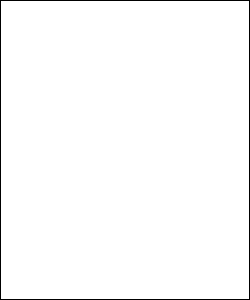
Even with executing the bond on time and on budget, our work is just beginning. We must continue planning for the future.  
This Spring, our city staff will propose our city’s first, comprehensive, locally focused Strategic Mobility Plan. This is the plan that will set out a long-term mobility vision and one that coordinates our city’s long-term planning with that of Capital Metro, the Regional Mobility Authority, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (or CAMPO).  
We will see three data-driven mobility scenarios that show a new way of thinking about mobility: one focused on travel time, reliability, and access to opportunity; another on affordability; and another on forecasted growth. With a rigorous, public engagement process beginning this year, Austin will adopt a north star for future mobility investments.  
Capital Metro will bring forward this year a mass transit vision for the entire region. The losing urban rail proposition of 2014 focused on one segment of what needed to be an entire system. This year, we’ll see, with different modes, what an entire system might look like.

There might be nothing more important to the future of this city than these new visions for a better transportation future for our city and our region. We look to CM Kitchen and our Council Mobility committee to begin the process to secure that future. We count on the leadership of CMs Garza, Renteria and Kitchen, who sit on the CapMetro board, and on CMs Alter, Flannigan and Kitchen, who serve with me on CAMPO, where I was just elected Vice Chair.

While our work on affordability is nowhere near finished, and will continue as long as our economy continues to grow, we’ve taken real steps to help ensure that people who work in our city can afford to live here, too.  
The first thing we think of when we think about affordability is housing prices, and that’s where we’re making important progress.

For the majority of us that don’t own homes, rents are finally leveling off. Supply has increased and is now finding greater balance with demand. Rents were flat last year, and anticipated to be flat this year, too. While not the only factor, housing supply’s impact on housing cost is real.  
The Council is also increasing the supply of subsidized affordable housing. Since this City Council took office in 2015, we have increased spending from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund by 530%.

From the time we took office until now, this City has incentivized or co-invested in the construction of more than 2,000 completed income-restricted affordable units – and more than 6,300 are in progress. Important leadership has come from Council Members Casar and Renteria and others of our colleagues on the Council.

 For homeowners, we are making progress on permitting reform to make it cheaper and easier to add on a bathroom to your house. The expedited permitting program this Council approved last year is producing big results this year, with a tenfold increase in expedited permits. Nearly all the projects completed through Expedited Permitting got their permits within one day after a review meeting.  
We’re refunding those inexplicable jumps in water bills, and with Council Member Troxclair’s leadership are making sure that does not happen again. For seniors and the disabled, we increased your property tax break for the third year in a row. And we lowered Austin Energy electric rates. But we’re not done yet.

We need to give seniors and the disabled another property tax break for a fourth straight year, and this year we should cut water bills for everybody.

The affordability crisis is hitting our musicians and artists particularly hard. This is not new, but what is new is how the Council is moving forward to help, working with artists and the Music and Arts Commissions to implement the Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus Resolutions. We’re moving forward with professional development and on revenue opportunities with a busking pilot, a Facebook Live series, and a Live Music Venue Best Practice Guide.

Last week, we passed CM Kitchen’s ordinance focusing on preserving and creating spaces for our creative communities. The new Chapter 380 incentive program now being developed city-wide will propose a focus on encouraging new creative spaces.  
I want to call out the leadership of Gary Keller who is helping to take care of musicians and music venues…

…Gary is but one example of how our city benefits from the extraordinary yet quiet work of many of our citizens.  
There is one music/creative arts initiative that deserves special mention. We’re seeing promising results with the successful trial of later, live music hours on Red River! After twenty years of… let’s be honest… of warfare, music venues and nearby residents are working together to ensure both the vitality of the live music scene and the peacefulness of our neighborhoods. That’s not an isolated example…

Within the next two months, artists, venues and residential property owners will bring to Council an “Agent of Change” proposal with consensus rules governing new sound in old neighborhoods and new neighbors near established venues.  
This is an example, perhaps one of the best examples, of how Austin needs to move past the old paradigms of “who’s fighting who” in our city, and into a future where we value collaboration, listening to and respecting each other. We need to find the truths in each other’s reality. That is the only way we preserve the best of our city.

To help the working poor get out of poverty, we have to help train people for better jobs. That’s why I hope this year our Council will adopt the Master Community Workforce Plan. I’m proud to have joined with Travis County Judge Sarah Eckhardt to ask our workforce development community to bring us this first ever regional workforce development plan.  
Working together, our Chambers of Commerce, businesses, workforce agencies, local colleges and our community college have presented us with a plan to lift 10,000 economically disadvantaged local residents into middle-skill jobs by 2021.  
We have as many good jobs here as we have good people. But they don’t match up. We need to help people who live here now to get the training to fill those jobs. And we’re going to get this done.

This year your Council will reform how Austin does economic incentives. This is part of creating a more affordable future for Austin. We’re going to focus this tool to more specifically achieve the benefits our community most values and needs.

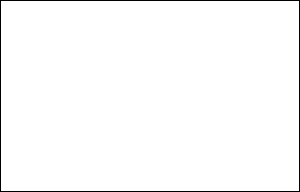
We thank CM Casar for his leadership in passing the recent ordinance on earned sick leave, because even if it was primarily about keeping our community safe and healthy, it is an important piece of helping to make sure that people that work in Austin can afford to live here.

I join many if not nearly all of my colleagues in recognizing that this initiative must include the city adopting for itself the same earned sick leave requirements passed by Council for Austin businesses.

But any truly honest conversation about affordability must also address the rapid rise of property taxes.

We all know, property taxes are going up. And going up too much, too fast. In fact, for the median priced home in most of Austin, all property taxes combined have gone up $1,408 in just the last five years. That’s a lot.

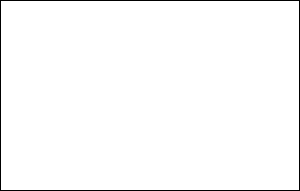
But did you know that $1,023 of that increase does not come from increases in city taxes, or county taxes, or hospital district taxes, or taxes to fund AISD schools, or all of those taxes added together?

 This brings me to something that, for my money, I’ve always thought were missing in our State of the City Addresses: charts!

…Actually, it’s a bar graph. It answers the question: Which governmental entity is the out-of-control taxing entity here in Austin?

The answer: It’s the State. Look at that increase over the last five years. (That’s is the part of the school district tax that the state takes and isn’t used to educate children in Austin.)

$1,023 of the $1,408 property tax increase you are feeling over the last five years comes solely from the increase in the State Property Tax?

 Let me show you another bar graph. Here, again, you can see that the total property tax bill has gone up from $4,653 to $6,061 in the last five years.

You can also see that the city property tax has gone up from $1,041 to $1,250 or a total of $209 over the last five years.  
The county property tax, the hospital district, all other property taxes, except schools, added together have gone up about $242 over the same period of time.

The property taxes to fund AISD schools in Austin has actually gone down from $2,032 to $1,965 over the last five years.  
But, look at the State Property Tax (again, the money the State takes from the AISD property tax and spends somewhere else). Five years ago, it was at $355. This year, it’s at $1,378. That is an increase of 288% over the last five years.  
Did you realize that this year, the State of Texas will keep more of your local property taxes than the City of Austin? ($1,378 vs. $1,250)

When people in most of Austin, inside the AISD, say that property taxes are going up too much too fast, we are not talking about the City or the County or the Hospital District or even AISD’s cost to educate Austin children.

When people say that property taxes are going up too much, we’re talking about the State Property Tax.

It is hard to believe that the Governor is even talking about trying to limit city, county and school district tax increases to 2.5% per year (without a vote), when the State Property Tax has increased by 288% in just five years.  
It is high time the State legislature finally does something about increases in property taxes. And, if they’re going to really do something, then our State leaders cannot try to divert us away from the real problem. It’s the State Property Tax. To fix its runaway tax, the State must fix and appropriately fund the school finance system. Nothing else will actually give us property tax relief in Austin.

One of the most important aspects of this Council’s work on affordability is redirecting resources and effort to where they can do the most good. This focus requires us to address racial and economic inequities. The long economic boom we’re enjoying here is not colorblind. Even after years of robust job growth, unemployment in Black and Hispanic households is way too high.

Did you know that in Austin, life expectancy is ten years greater in the West than in the East. Ten additional years to love your family and be loved. Ten more years to achieve so you can leave something behind.  
That inequity is something we inherited, but we don’t have to pass it down to future generations. We need to expand opportunity in Austin to include everyone in every neighborhood.

The Spirit of East Austin framework, initiated three years ago by CMs Houston, Pool, Renteria, Troxclair and me, is about to bring to Council the fruits of the most extensive public engagement process I’ve ever seen. This has been a long time in coming.

Under the umbrella of that framework, we initiated the Mayor’s Institutional Racism Task Force. This task force has provided racial equity training for 210 corporate, non-profit, government, education, and grass roots leaders with another 160 to be trained later this week (70 of which will attend training entirely in Spanish). I hope thousands of Austinites get the opportunity to engage in such training.

It is a testament to her commitment to this work that CM Alter opened up her office budget to help other council staffs attend the training.

That task force’s work is also seeing tangible results. Out of 247 unique recommendations from the institutional racism task force, 60 have already been implemented, and an additional 96 recommended actions are either already underway or are planned.

Our city is finally taking actual steps to implement the Colony Park Master Plan II. It is important that this great master planned community is being planned in partnership with the community and is going to serve the holistic needs of the long-time residents. With CM Houston’s continued leadership, that neighborhood should soon have its pool… and more.

A special thanks to the Colony Park Neighborhood Association for their persistent, passionate, and knowledgeable engagement; you have taught us the true meaning of community engagement.

This Council created our Equity Office and it has already begun realizing the vision. It has just completed an analysis of the racism Task Force recommendations; it has begun making racial equity an integral part of each department’s practices and policies, as well as ensuring that equity is embedded in the priority strategic outcomes the Council is adopting to guide its work. Racial equity will be forever something we include from the get-go and not just as a box that’s checked at the end of a process.

After years of studies and resolutions, the Council is poised to do something real about displacement in the eastern crescent. The City Auditor gathered all those reports and ideas, and turned them over to a newly created, Council-appointed Anti-Displacement Task Force.

Our city is eager for this task force to do its work so that those ideas, together with new ones now arising from the community, have a place for them all to go together – to be assessed, compared, analyzed and discussed, so that the best of all the ideas can rise to the top and be reported back for Council consideration and implementation.  
The Task Force will review and inform their recommendations with a parallel study conducted by UT Austin, initiated by CM Pool, that maps the vulnerability of displacement for all Austinites, and also offers specific tools that correlate to susceptibility of displacement.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past any more than we can afford the cost that the status quo is imposing on our community. Our job is to prevent an unacceptable future.

After years of unimplemented ideas, we need to do something to address displacement. We need the Anti-Displacement Task Force and the UT study to reflect the urgent certainty that their ideas will be taken up by the Council following their deliberative process.

This Council has shown a special willingness to try new things and to put new resources behind the mission of housing the homeless.

I thank Mayor Pro Tem Tovo for all the work she has done over many years to address this challenge. We are all excited about the new innovations you have championed like the inter-disciplinary HOST teams that this Council acted to expand this year, and the “Pay For Success” model around which this Council has begun to rally support.

This city had a successful federal pilot program in helping homeless youth. And we’ve got an in-house innovation team working on a $1.5-million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to develop smarter ways to help our most vulnerable neighbors. Alan Graham and many in our community are launching the expansion of the very successful Community First model.  
This Council, city staff, public safety officers, and community stakeholders has acted to address the downtown drug crisis, and with Council Member Troxclair’s leadership is creating a pilot temporary work program for those experiencing homelessness. We are on track to meet our goal of 400 new Permanent Supportive Housing Units by the end of this year.

But for all we’ve done, there is no doubt that we need to do more to help those experiencing homelessness. We need to set a specific goal, and then we need to fund it.

Let’s make the “ECHO Plan goal” the City’s goal. We should commit to housing the homeless. Not more homeless. Not most of the homeless. Our goal should be finding Homes for all the Homeless, as we find them.

We know how to do it. We are among the cities that have achieved effective zero in homeless veterans. Soon, our City staff will be coming to Council, armed with our Audit Reports and the ECHO Plan, so that the Council can focus holistic policy direction.

Bottom line, we all know we’re going to need to find even more money if we’re serious about addressing the homelessness challenge. We are going to have to find all the new revenue streams possible. That’s why the concept of the Downtown Puzzle is so attractive to me.

Your Council has asked the University of Texas to study the possible expansion of the convention center and report back in the Fall. There are questions to be answered. And if, that study comes back with favorable answers, then we should move forward to capture the associated $10 million per year in tourist dollars that may well be available to invest in re-scoping the ARCH downtown and helping Austin to meet its homelessness challenge at scale city-wide.

And because we know that we and our children and grandchildren won’t have much of a future if we don’t halt man-made global warming, each of us – as residents of a city, a state, a nation, and the world — must do all we can to save our planet.

As your mayor, I’m proud to have joined almost 400 other US mayors to adopt, honor and uphold the Paris Climate Agreement. I reiterated our commitment last October at the Paris Climate Conference and again in December when I signed the Chicago Climate Charter at the North American Climate Summit.

Last year this Council, thanks to the leadership of CM Pool, upped our renewable energy goals from 55% by 2025 — to 65% by 2027 (and asked for a plan to get us up to 75%). This is one of the most ambitious clean energy goals in the country. And we’re well on our way toward meeting that goal. We’re beginning the process to close our only coal plant and increase our use of renewable clean power at Austin Energy.

Last year we bought more solar and wind to push us over 50% renewables by 2020. The economics of such energy have gotten so competitive, that the last renewable energy contract signed by Austin Energy will serve to reduce the rate-payer cost.

Tonight, we talked about lots of big ideas. Here is one you might not have heard about, but it might be the biggest one of them all. This year, we will work on one of the most important projects in our city’s history and a big part of our future– a [100-year water plan](http://austintexas.gov/waterforward) for Austin. This long-range water plan will ensure that as Austin continues to grow we have a diverse, reliable water supply for the coming century.

This plan should have strong recommendations to strengthen our water conservation programs and to expand our reclaimed water system. And, I expect the plan to advance relatively new, but reliable technologies, such as Aquifer Storage and Recovery, as a way of storing large amounts of water underground to avoid excessive evaporation.

The time to fix the roof is when the sun is shining, and the time to prepare for the drought is when the lakes are full.

As concerns the land development code, the status quo is our worst enemy. Anyone who loves this city knows we cannot afford the cost of not getting the code revision done right. Everyone in this room knows that CodeNEXT is not what is causing today’s demolitions of existing homes, gentrification, and increasing traffic and unaffordability. It provides the opportunity to find part of the answer.

I am encouraged that the most recent staff recommendation for the mapping is closer to the Austin Bargain of preserving and respecting neighborhood identity and quality of life, focusing our housing supply growth on our major corridors, and establishing the transitions to make it all work. I still want to see more such alignment and more in the way of achieving affordability in housing.

I encourage our volunteer boards and commissions to work diligently to get code revision in good enough shape so when it reaches us, we can give Austin a new land development code that works.

Folks, we’re going to take as much time as we need to get this right. But we have to get it right. Managing growth to preserve the spirit and soul of our city will be difficult, if not impossible, if we don’t get CodeNEXT done right. We can get it done this year. Let’s show the world how to work productively through our differences for the greater good and a better future.

CMs Kitchen and Alter and I have posted over 50 specific goals for Code Next that we think might well identify many of the common goals shared by most of those involved in CodeNext discussions. At our last work session, CM Pool said she was signing on, too. If enough of these goals reflect common ground, then we are well on our way toward achieving a CodeNext consensus. We can do this, together.

Get ready; looks like we’re going to have another bond election in November. Soon, the Council will get the recommendations from the citizens panel, and I’m excited to hear that it’s likely to include a call for significant investments in affordable housing, infrastructure, parks and flood mitigation, capital maintenance, and the Mexican American Resource Center, the Asian American Resource Center, and the Carver Museum, among other needed projects. The work being talking about for the bond is long over-due. It will pay dividends far into the future.

If we’re going to do the big things that are needed to plan for the future, we’re going to have to work together.  
And if we’re going to work together, we have to address what can charitably be called a gigantic honking mess in our civic life.

The recent indictments of Russians for influencing our political life have given focus to a gnawing realization that our political discourse – simply the way we talk about our future as a city, as a state, and as a country – has apparently been intentionally poisoned.

It’s not just that it may have happened. Look at the tools they chose to use. The alleged Russian infiltration of our political discourse set out to exacerbate divisions in our country and to increase our distrust of our own institutions. Regardless of whether the allegations are true, we see those divisions and distrust on the rise, even in our own city. Hyperbole in political discourse is making enemies of those that merely have differences of opinion.

We can’t let that happen here in Austin. And some see warning signs. We’re not going to plan successfully for the future unless we fix our present. We need everyone pulling together to be our best selves.

Tonight, let’s take a second to consider that Austin has a rare opportunity to lead the way out of this mess. Austin is emerging as a voice offering reason and progress in a world that isn’t getting enough of either these days.

We can show that to move past this crisis point in politics, we will get better at listening to each other and speaking as if we are all bound together as Americans, Texans, and Austinites.

We are each, so much more than the labels that are used to reduce us to one dimension. As a city, we should reject politics based on dangerous stereotypes and simplifications intended to make us scared of, and to distrust, one another.

This coming year we choose what kind of future our children will face. It’s going to be a big year.

This year we must act deliberatively, affirmatively, and pro-actively to set ourselves on a course to meet the challenges of our future in a way that preserves who we are. We are Austin, Texas.

This year we will be considering and hopefully adopting:

A new land development code, the first in 30 years.

A comprehensive Strategic Mobility Plan.

A first ever, short term, Council Strategic Plan.

A Regional Mass Transit Plan.

Our first ever Regional Workforce Development Plan.

A new Economic Development Incentive Program.

A 100-year Water Plan.

Dedicated funding for homelessness… perhaps an associated…

…Convention Center Expansion.

Bond Propositions, to go before voters in November.

I’m looking at my colleagues… there’s a lot coming to us next year…

That list doesn’t even include other real big issues, like:

…Taking Real Action on Displacement and Gentrification, once we hear from the task force.

…And public safety contracts, including the consideration of a new approach to Public Safety that keeps us safe, honors what’s brought us here, improves processes and institutions, and explores new officers for community policing in the context of a budget that seeks to minimize crime, not just respond to it.

There is a lot on our plates this year.

You want to know who does most of the work? Would all the members of city staff please stand up so we can recognize you and express a city’s appreciation?

City Manager Cronk. Welcome Home. You sat through a 14-hr, midnight Council meeting last week. You’re still here. Please know that you arrive with both great expectations and abundant good will.

Many wonder what the future holds for our great city. So let me say this clearly: Austin can, must and will lead in this new century.

Indeed, the complexities and connections of today’s world have yielded a new Austin moment, a moment when our statewide, national, and global leadership is essential, even if we must lead in new ways.

It is a moment when those things that define us as a community — openness, innovation, and creativity, our determination and devotion to core values of compassion and sustainability… and yes, our keep-Austin-weird, risk-taking attitude — have never been more needed.

This is a moment that must be seized through hard work and bold decisions, with an eye on the future, as we lay the foundation for lasting, and more equitable, prosperity for decades to come.

Yes, we’re still Austin, Texas.

We’ve done big, forward-looking things.

And yes, we’ll keep doing big things to get ready for the future.

It is our moment. Austin is up to the challenge.

Regardless of what happens elsewhere, together, we will show the world what Austin is made of.  
Thank you.