



March 1, 2021

Re: HEAL Initiative Key Outcomes for the East César Chavez Neighborhood

Dear City Manager Cronk, Ms. Grey, and Director Weeks:

On behalf of the East César Chavez Neighborhood Plan Contact Team (ECCNPCT), I am writing to support the City's efforts related to the HEAL initiative by sharing key outcomes that residents and businesses in the ECC Neighborhood expect to see in the City's plan going forward along with some context:

- Restore the Terrazas Library to its intended purpose of serving residents of the ECC Neighborhood;
- Provide a balanced strategy and approach for Austin's homeless services rather than continuing to concentrate services on the east side of I-35;
- Ensure that the DACC's permanent location is part of a cohesive strategy and equitable process; and
- Prioritize open lines of communication with the ECC community.

1. Restore the Terrazas Library to its intended purpose of serving residents of the ECC Neighborhood.

The Terrazas Library has been the temporary location for the DACC for almost a year, creating a tremendous strain on the residents and small businesses of ECC. By unilaterally relocating the DACC, the City effectively induced a large homeless population—and their predators—to move into the ECC Neighborhood.

Residents have experienced incredible distress shouldering the impact of the DACC on neighborhood businesses, homes, and streets that range from blocked sidewalks to drug dealing, trespassing, and attempted assaults. Public spaces including [Festival Beach Community Garden](#) have experienced unprecedented challenges with trespassing and property misuse, damage, and theft. Beyond observable crimes, there's an increased level of stress and subsequent exhaustion that has overtaken residents who feel that they must always be on alert.

The Terrazas Library is a relatively small facility that can and should be a community focal point for the ECC Neighborhood. As the encampments are removed, the ECC Neighborhood expects the City to restore Terrazas Library to residents and also implement sensible safeguards to prevent future occupancy by non-resident transients.

2. Provide a cohesive strategy and balanced approach for Austin's homeless services rather than continuing to concentrate services east of I-35.

There's a growing perception that many stakeholders view East Austin as a convenient place to offload Downtown's challenges. This perception is due in large part to the disproportionate concentration of homeless services in this neighborhood. ECC comprises a **mere 0.7 square miles of Austin**, and yet hosts the DACC, a methadone clinic, two food kitchens, and several shelters. The vast majority of individuals using these services travel into the neighborhood for access and do not originate from ECC.

The existing concentration of services presupposes a large unsheltered population in and around Downtown Austin. As the HEAL initiative is piloted and improved upon, supporting services should also be evaluated more

holistically in the context of a housing-first approach that enables services to be distributed more broadly across the city rather than concentrated in East Austin.

3. Ensure that the DACC's permanent location is part of a cohesive strategy and equitable process.

The decision to temporarily relocate DACC to the Terrazas Library was made without consultation with the local community. While the expediency of COVID-19 makes this approach somewhat understandable, the City's recent efforts to permanently relocate DACC into a residential neighborhood on the east side of I-35 further amplified the perception outlined above.

The City staff proposal was primarily driven by real estate availability and space optimization. It lacked a basic evaluation of how best to serve the homeless and did not assess how it might impact ECC residents and businesses. It further lacked context within the City's overarching strategy to address homelessness, and the recommendation was made without consultation with the local community.

As recommended above, the City should reconsider a decentralized services strategy in concert with the housing-first HEAL initiative. However, even if homeless services remain centralized, there should be a compelling reason—beyond convenience to city workers—to move DACC out of Downtown into a residential neighborhood at the outer boundary of its jurisdiction.

Absent a more inclusive approach tied to a cohesive strategy, the City will likely see a continued growing level of opposition from East Austin constituents. To ensure the HEAL initiative is successful, we urge the City to include a broader services strategy that balances the interests of all stakeholders, including the safety and well-being of residential neighborhoods across Austin.

4. Prioritize open lines of communication with the ECC community.

Our constituents largely feel frustrated and unheard on matters related to homelessness. It is by the [City's design and ordinance](#) that ECCNPCT exists to support city planning and City Council decisions. We encourage the City to prioritize open lines of communication with community members regarding the HEAL initiative by providing reoccurring status updates and responding to inquiries.

Sincerely,

Kristen Heaney
Kristen E. Heaney
Chair, ECCNPCT

cc: Mayor Adler
Council Member Harper-Madison
Council Member Fuentes
Council Member Renteria
Council Member Casar
Council Member Kitchen
Council Member Kelly
Council Member Pool
Council Member Ellis
Council Member Tovo
Council Member Alter
Judge Michael Coffey
Court Administrator Pete Valdez
President Dewitt Peart, Downtown Austin Alliance