



Harris County, Texas

Staff Report

1001 Preston St., Suite 934
Houston, Texas 77002

	YES	NO	ABSTAIN
Judge Lina Hidalgo	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Rodney Ellis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Adrian Garcia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. Tom S. Ramsey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comm. R. Jack Cagle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

File #: 21-3567

Agenda Date: 7/20/2021

Agenda #: 184.

To: Harris County Commissioners Court

Through: David Berry, Executive Director, Budget Management Department

Prepared By: Jesse Dickerman, Chief of Staff, Budget Management

Subject: Recommending the Creation of a Harris County Office of Sustainability

Project ID (If applicable): N/A

Purpose and Request:

Recommendation for the creation of the Harris County Office of Sustainability within the Office of County Administration and outlining the structure and mission of the office.

Background and Discussion:

On June 8, 2021, Commissioners Court asked the Budget Management Department to develop a recommendation for a Harris County Office of Sustainability. Attached is a brief memo with recommendations for the organization and scope of work for the Office of Sustainability.

Fiscal Impact: No fiscal impact. Requesting the transfer of \$125,000 reserved in the FY 22 Budget in Department 202, to the Office of County Administration.

Fiscal Summary			
Expenditures	FY 21-22	FY 22-23 Projected	Future Years Projected [3 additional years]
Service Impacted:	N/A	N/A	N/A
Existing Budget	N/A	N/A	N/A
Additional Appropriation Requested	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Expenditures			
Funding Sources	N/A	N/A	N/A
Existing Department Budget	N/A	N/A	N/A
Please Identify Funding Sources: Special Revenue, Grant, etc.	N/A	N/A	N/A
[INSERT FUNDING SOURCES]	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total Sources	N/A	N/A	N/A

Alternatives: N/A

Attachments: See attached Report to Court

Presented to Commissioners Court

July 20, 2021

Approve: E/G



HARRIS COUNTY BUDGET MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

(713) 274-1100
1001 Preston St. #500 Houston TX 77002
<http://budget.harriscountytexas.gov/>

July 13, 2021

To: County Judge Hidalgo
Commissioners Ellis, Garcia, Ramsey and Cagle

From: Jesse Dickerman, Chief of Staff, Budget Management

Through: David Berry, Executive Director, Budget Management and County Administrator

Re: Harris County Office of Sustainability

The following recommendations are submitted for Commissioners Court's consideration:

1. Create Harris County Office of Sustainability;
2. Locate the Office of Sustainability within the Office of County Administration as a "matrix" organization (further described below) which includes Fleet Services, Engineering, Budget Management, Public Health, and Pollution Control;
3. Transfer the \$125,000 reserved in the fiscal year 2022 budget in Department 202 to the Office of County Administration for the purpose of hiring a Director of Sustainability.

Overview

The global energy transition will have far reaching impacts for Harris County. Sustainability, energy, and climate justice are issues where progress can only be made through collaboration across County departments and regional stakeholders. Establishing the Harris County Office of Sustainability (OS) will move the County towards more resilient, healthier communities, focus County investments on sustainable technology and infrastructure, and address environmental justice issues. It is recommended that the Harris County Office of Sustainability be established within the Office of County Administration.

The work ahead requires a different type of organization within Harris County. The OS should be structured as a matrix department. Strategic leadership and coordinating resources would be located within the Office of County Administration. Other, existing positions within key departments such as Fleet Services, Engineering, Budget Management, Public Health, and Pollution Control, would have dotted-line reporting relationships into OS. Each Precinct could appoint a Sustainability Director to ensure information exchange between precincts and to bring sustainable infrastructure into precinct assets. *Completing the Scope of Work outlined below will require years of effort and a full buildout of the OS.* Work in the first year will focus on public input on climate justice issues and developing a Climate Justice and Action plan which will include measuring Harris County's own emissions.

Executive Summary:

This recommendation builds on past actions by Commissioners Court. On February 23, 2021, the Commissioners Court's Analyst's Office (CCAO) transmitted an "Assessment of County Climate Action Plans." The report recommended that Harris County establish a Climate Justice & Action Plan. **Most jurisdictions reviewed had an Office of Sustainability to develop and manage their local plan.** On April 13, 2021, the CCAO transmitted a "Catalog of Harris County Sustainability Practices" of all Harris County departments that provided a response. This showed inconsistent and limited sustainability policies. On June 8, 2021, Commissioners Court asked the Budget Management Department to develop a recommendation for a Harris County Office of Sustainability. **This memo provides a description of the purpose, scope, and overall structure of a Harris County Office of Sustainability, as well as best practices from other jurisdictions.**

Purpose:

The Harris County Office of Sustainability (OS) will develop equitable sustainability and resiliency policies and practices to protect all Harris County residents, with special consideration of communities that have been historically and disproportionately harmed by environmental and climate injustice.

The OS will take the lead in accomplishing Harris County's stated environmental vision and goal statement to: "Combat the underlying causes and disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities by making community-driven improvements to air, water, and soil quality, committing to the use of clean energy, improving flood resiliency with natural infrastructure practices, reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions, and providing every resident access to quality green spaces."

Scope of Work:

The Harris County Office of Sustainability will be responsible for delivering measurable sustainability, resiliency, and environmental/climate justice solutions to Commissioners Court including:

- Working closely with County departments in the development, coordination, and administration of a County-wide, equity-centered Climate Justice & Action Plan (CJAP);
 - Establishing a small steering committee and issue specific working groups, including department heads, experts, community members, and stakeholders to guide planning, centering climate justice and racial equity;
 - Providing leadership to define climate justice, sustainability, and resiliency goals that reflect Harris County priorities (*See Appendix A: Table 1 for a non-exhaustive list of some County and departmental priorities*);
 - Inventorying and benchmarking current Harris County and regional greenhouse gas emissions;
 - Leading ongoing efforts to lower Harris County's direct and indirect emissions (*See Appendix A: Table 2 for a non-exhaustive list of direct and indirect emission sources*);
 - Establishing the processes for equitable planning, decision-making, and prioritization of issues;
 - Constructing a community engagement plan with affected and historically marginalized communities and organizations;
 - Setting an implementation strategy and timeline.
 - Developing or adopting an equitable climate vulnerability index to guide policy development and center communities who are most affected and historically underserved;
- Coordinating efforts to engage and assist communities vulnerable to climate change and suffering from a history of environmental injustice;
- Planning initiatives with departments that accomplish all levels of sustainable and resiliency development within the County to include green purchasing, recycling, transportation and fleet management, smart technology integration, waste management and diversion, and energy and water efficiency;
- Working with designated Precinct Sustainability Directors who will report on and implement sustainability policies relevant to each precinct;
- Determining appropriate sustainability and resiliency performance metrics to track, measure, and communicate progress on policies (including emissions reduction, energy efficiency, recycling, wastewater management, etc.);
- Performing highly complex forecasting, including equity, impact, and cost analysis to allow Commissioners Court and BMD to make informed decisions that focus on optimizing the community and environmental impacts of initiatives;
- Developing procedures to integrate sustainability policies and practices into the County's operational long-term planning process, the management of its resources and operations, grant development, and capital planning and design;

- Planning and executing communications and marketing strategies in different communities to increase awareness and support of sustainability objectives, assessments, and/or rating systems and practices;
- Identifying and pursuing financial resources, i.e. grants, to obtain funding for development and implementation of resiliency and sustainability measures;
- Representing Harris County publicly on environmental, climate, sustainability, and resiliency topics, serving as the County’s environmental policy expert in chief;
- Creating a public facing website that includes the Climate Justice Plan and ongoing progress on climate action, sustainability, and resiliency polices;
- Reporting to and advising the Office of County Administration and Commissioners Court on Countywide sustainability policies.

‘There are challenges to ensuring environmental justice and equity are at the heart of clean energy infrastructure development.’

Organizational Structure:

The Office of Sustainability is recommended to be housed within the Office of County Administration. The type of overarching coordination for projects such as a county-wide climate action plan as well as comprehensive sustainability, and resiliency policies, are key goals for County Administration. OS will operate as a “Matrix Department” coordinating with existing staff across various departments who will have dotted-line reporting responsibilities into the OS in addition to reporting to their department supervisor. This will allow the County to launch the office quickly without excessive administrative overhead. It will also be consistent with some of the findings of the Commissioners Court Analyst’s Office (CCAO) report on Climate Action Plan best practices undertaken in similar jurisdictions (*See below: Best Practices - King County, WA*).

The Office of Sustainability will initially consist of a Director of Sustainability to launch the office, manage the development of the Climate Justice & Action Plan, work to implement the work product of the County Energy RFP and set the strategy and plan for the office, and a shared analyst (from BMD) to help manage data analysis and metric development. The Office of Sustainability will also be able to draw resources from other existing staff who are already engaged in many of the key tasks required for the office (*See Appendix A: Table 1*).

Additionally, due to the nature of Harris County’s independent precincts, a Precinct Sustainability Director (PSD) should be appointed in each Precinct to lead implementation of County sustainability policies within Precinct operations and aid in community engagement to integrate sustainability across the County. Some of the most significant sustainability work currently undertaken in Harris County—the development of parks, greenspace, bike trails, and transit coordination—is undertaken at the precinct level. The PSDs to implement climate action, resiliency, and sustainability policies across Precinct operations.

Similar shared resources should be considered from other County departments in the initial development of the office to manage the transition to electric vehicles, the County’s energy procurement strategy, and energy efficiency in County buildings.

Departments may need to create additional positions or expand the scope of duties within existing positions as part of the development of the CJAP and long-term strategic sustainability planning. These requests could be considered in next year’s budget.

Initial Funding

The Director of Sustainability will be a new position using funding approved in the FY22 budget for a sustainability position. The Office of Sustainability will likely also contract with third parties to assist in the creation of the CJAP for steering committee facilitation, community engagement, GHG emissions inventorying, plan production, and implementation. Some of this work is already underway through the

Energy RFP. Additional efforts will be needed to contract with experienced third-parties for climate benchmarking & metric development, and public outreach for climate justice issues.

Best Practices:

- The mission of the **City of Providence’s Office of Sustainability** is to “provide a better quality of life for all residents while maintaining nature’s ability to function over time by minimizing waste, preventing pollution, promoting efficiency and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy, as well as reducing energy consumption in city-owned facilities.”¹ The Office is advised by a community-led group, the Environmental Sustainability Task Force, which holds monthly public meetings to discuss and vote on potential edits to the Climate Justice Plan (CJP), discuss outreach strategies, and receive updates from the Office of Sustainability and the Environmental Sustainability Task Force.^{2 3} The Environmental Sustainability Task Force was created to provide a level of accountability for environmental issues in the City, and ultimately voted in support of the Office of Sustainability adopting the Climate Justice Plan framework.⁴ All three actors work on the implementation of the CJP.⁵
- The mission of the **City of Austin’s Office of Sustainability** is to “protect and improve Austin’s quality of life now and for future generations by leading efforts to achieve net-zero community-wide emission reduction, a healthy food system, and a climate resilient and adaptive city.”⁶ The Office manages the Climate Action Plan (CAP) process and provides regular reports to the Assistant City Manager’s Health and Environment Outcome Team to ensure that City leadership has a complete picture of overarching climate change goals and City-wide mobilization efforts.
The Office works with the City’s Equity Office on the best ways to include people of color in the CAP and Community Climate Plan (CCP) Update process, including ensuring people of color participate in the Steering Committee and Technical Advisory Groups; using focus groups to have in-depth conversations about climate action with people of color; engaging “Climate Ambassadors” to collect input from people of color on the revised CCP draft; developing strategies that do not create disproportionate burdens; and creating greater proportional benefit for those in the community who need it most.
- **King County, WA’s** Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) is administered jointly by the County’s Executive Office and the Natural Resources and Parks Department.⁷ The County assigns general staff and “staff leads” within each section and focus area in the SCAP. Staff leads come from several departments and divisions including: Metro Transit, Department of Enterprise Services, Executive Office, and Department of Natural Resources and Parks.

¹ Office of Sustainability. (n.d.). City of Providence. Retrieved February 10, 2021, from <https://www.providenceri.gov/sustainability/>.

² To watch the Environmental Sustainability Meetings or to read the agenda and minutes, visit the Providence Open Meetings Portal at <http://providenceri.iqm2.com/Citizens/Calendar.aspx?From=1/1/2020&To=12/31/2020>.

³ About Us. (n.d.). City of Providence. Retrieved February 10, 2021, from <https://www.providenceri.gov/sustainability/about-us/>.

⁴ Office of Sustainability Adopts Recommendations for a Racially Equitable and Just Providence. (2017, September 1). City of Providence. <https://www.providenceri.gov/office-sustainability-adopts-recommendations-racially-equitable-just-providence/>

⁵ Office of Sustainability Adopts Recommendations for a Racially Equitable and Just Providence. (2017, September 1). City of Providence. <https://www.providenceri.gov/office-sustainability-adopts-recommendations-racially-equitable-just-providence/>

⁶ Sustainability | AustinTexas.gov. (n.d.). Retrieved February 7, 2021, from <http://austintexas.gov/department/sustainability>

⁷ *Assessment of Climate Action Plans* (2021, February 12). Commissioners Court Analyst’s Office.

Appendix A

Table 1: Key Office of Sustainability Projects

<p>The Budget Management Department currently manages the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing County performance metrics; • Coordinating capital planning; • Managing the launch of County Electric Vehicle strategy; • Working with key departments (OCE, US, and Precincts) to operationalize sustainability recommendations for buildings, development, and vehicles; • Participating in the development of the County’s energy procurement RFP and long-term energy strategy. (This effort is being driven by a committee, including representatives from each member of Commissioners Court, as well as BMD and Facilities and Property Maintenance (FPM). This committee is considering adding renewable energy to the County’s portfolio, as well as adding energy efficiency and behind-the-meter generation. The committee could transition into a long-term workgroup under the direction of the Office of Sustainability to implement the County’s sustainable energy strategy) <p>Additional Projects with key departments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying ‘worst first’ areas of clean-up (PCS); • Leveraging existing infrastructure to bring green jobs to Harris County (DEEO).

Table 2: Emissions Sources

Direct Emissions – County Operations	Indirect Emissions – Collaboration with local Cities and neighboring Counties [IGA]
Buildings [OCE, FPM]; Vehicle Emissions [Fleet]; Energy Consumption [Working Group]; Housing [CSD]	Development; Wastewater treatment (MUDs, etc...); Transit; Local industry