

# City of San Antonio



## Minutes

### Community Health, Environment and Culture Committee

2021 – 2023 Council Members

Chair: Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, Dist. 4

Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2 | Phyllis Viagran, Dist. 3

Teri Castillo, Dist. 5 | Rosie Castro, Dist. 7

Thursday, May 25, 2023

2:00 PM

City Hall

The Community Health, Environment, and Culture Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Media Briefing Room beginning at 2:00 PM. City Clerk Debbie Racca-Sittre took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

**Members Present:** Dr. Adriana Rocha Garcia, *Chair*  
Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, *Member*  
Phyllis Viagran, *Member*  
Teri Castillo, *Member*  
Rosie Castro, *Member*

**Members Absent:** None

#### Approval of Minutes

#### 1. Approval of minutes for April 27, 2023, Community Health, Environment, and Culture meeting.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez moved to Approve the minutes of the April 27, 2023 Community Health, Environment, and Culture Committee meeting. Councilmember Castillo seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

**Aye:** Rocha Garcia, McKee-Rodriguez, Castillo  
**Absent:** Viagran, Castro

#### Public Comments

#### Briefing and Possible Action on

#### 2. Briefing on the Status of Girls in San Antonio Report commissioned by the City of San

**Antonio.** [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager]

Maria Villagomez, Deputy City Manager, provided background on the Report which included hosting of an annual Girl's Summit to promote nontraditional careers for women, at the request of Councilmember Rocha Garcia. Deputy City Manager Villagomez introduced Dr. Rogelio Saenz with the University of Texas at San Antonio who presented the results of the Report. (Full report attached.)

Saenz reported that the purpose of the study was to identify and eliminate gender disparities. Saenz noted that girls and young women were doing better with regard to education and employment than in the past, however, women of color still fared worse than their white counterparts.

Saenz listed the data sources and the methodology for the Report as well as key findings. Saenz compared education data by race/ethnicity with peer cities. He noted that mental health disparities among girls and young women increased during the pandemic and he summarized that girls in San Antonio were much more likely to report greater struggles with mental health compared to their male peers. He added that additionally, gender diverse and LGBTQ individuals were more likely to report mental health issues.

Saenz found racial disparities among justice involved girls and young women with a higher representation of women of color in the Justice Center than their proportion in the community. Major conclusions included income inequality, overcrowded home conditions, digital divide, mental health issues and teen marriage/motherhood.

#### DISCUSSION:

Chair Rocha Garcia acknowledged that much work was needed to improve outcomes for girls and women. She noted that the key findings included building wealth, prestige, status and power. Chair Rocha Garcia recommended a follow up with some trend analysis. Saenz thanked Christina Quintanilla-Munoz, UTSA student of demography, for her work on the Report who stated that she would develop some trend data.

Chair Rocha Garcia noted that since Latina girls were more likely to live with another relative and even more generations, the City's Strategic Housing Implementation Plan (SHIP) needed to address this issue including with affordable 3-4 bedroom homes. Saenz noted that multi-generational households were more likely to have experienced exponential COVID-19 spread and increased death rates.

Chair Rocha Garcia commented that the digital divide was important to address so that girls could access education. Chair Rocha Garcia suggested that there might be a correlation between income and early marriage or pregnancy. Chair Rocha Garcia noted that the City hosted a Teen Mental Health Summit last weekend and girls were represented in leading the effort to provide education. Chair Rocha Garcia recommended creating a municipal commission on the status of girls perhaps through the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Girl Scouts.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez expressed concern about the status of African American

girls and young women and the fact that African American infant girls were more likely to die before their first birthday than any other race. He noted that they were twice as likely to be booked into county jail. He noted that African American young women had a higher maternal mortality even though they worked hard to have improved their employment status. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that these disproportionate health outcomes came at a time when hospitals in equity areas were being shut down. Saenz agreed that the problem was related to lack of access to health care and racism related to health care.

Councilmember Castro asked if the results of the Report could be applied over City programs and determine where the struggles began or recommend mitigation strategies. Saenz stated that the Report mostly looked at demographic data but not the actual source of the disparity.

Councilmember Castro suggested that some of the data could be used to target girls and young women, particularly related to mental health. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that staff could take evidence based programs and focus on investment through the budget process. Councilmember Castro mentioned applying these findings to the Firefighter program “Hero Like Her” and Ready to Work training programs and early career guidance.

Councilmember Castillo commended Chair Rocha Garcia on initiating the program. She recommended working with the Truancy Court for example to connect young women who may have made some mistakes with mentor programs, trainings and other resources. She also expressed concern that African American girls were twice as likely to be booked into county jail and recommended more cite and release.

Councilmember Castillo commended the work of the Youth Commission on developing programs using \$100,000 allocated in FY 2023 that could work for their population and recommended more funding next year. Councilmember Castillo stated that she was looking forward to using the information to make informed policy decisions.

Councilmember Viagran expressed concern about the maternal and infant mortality rate and asserted that our country needed to take better care of our girls, women and mothers. Councilmember Viagran appreciated the comparisons with boys but commented that the demographic comparisons of race were more poignant as policy was needed to address those disparities. Councilmember Viagran welcomed Saenz to review the City’s policies and programs to improve outcomes for women of color.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested more feedback was needed from African American women regarding their lived experiences. He expressed concern that he was often tasked with appointing the sole African American voice on boards and commissions because he represented the East Side but challenged his colleagues to also appoint African Americans. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez supported cite-and-release programs as they addressed disproportionate representation of African American girls being arrested and booked. Deputy City Manager Villagomez stated that the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) would take this information to apply an equity lens to our programs to address the disparities. Councilmember McKee- Rodriguez recommended forming a commission of African American women to discuss their lived experiences.

Chair Rocha Garcia noted that the Teen Mental Health Survey indicated that 33% of the respondents identified as LGBTQ and 16% did not disclose. Chair Rocha Garcia recommended developing a Commission on the Status of Girls.

Item was for briefing purposes only; therefore, no action was taken.

**3. A briefing on the results of a study exploring multiple benefits of food forests and urban agriculture (food, urban cooling, etc.) and how those benefits could be targeted to vulnerable populations** [John Peterek, Assistant to the City Manager; Brian Dillard, Chief Innovation Officer, Office of Innovation].

Brian Dillard, Chief Innovation Officer, stated that in 2021, the Smart Cities team provided seed funding to two urban agriculture pilots. One of those projects was the Food Forest at Padre Park. The project attracted the interest of Stanford University's Natural Capital Project (NatCaP), a research organization focused on building tools that map and quantify the goods and services provided by nature and sustainable development.

In 2022, the NatCap team partnered with the Food Policy Council of San Antonio, Office of Innovation, Office of Sustainability, and Metro Health to develop a tool ("InVEST") that quantified environmental services generated by repurposing city owned properties into food producing land uses, including urban food forests, and urban farms. The "InVEST" tool modeled environmental services based on land use changes and could project food yield, urban heat island changes and water infiltration rates for different types of infrastructure including urban farms and food forests.

Paired with existing case studies like the Padre Park Food Forest, this tool helped quantify return on investment and make the case for how much value alternative land uses bring to the broader city according to Dillard. In 2022, the Stanford NatCap team was awarded a NASA grant to support their work in San Antonio to pilot the new tool, which would be applicable globally.

Dillard introduced Mitch Hagney with the Food Policy Council who presented the report on the benefits of food forests and urban farms in San Antonio which was a collaboration with NatCaP. Hagney reported that one in five children in San Antonio lacked access to healthy food and many of these children lived in areas considered urban heat islands and flood prone areas, which were disproportionately low income.

Hagney advocated for policies that included the creation of more food forests and urban farms. Ann Guerry with NatCaP provided benefits of these programs and recommended adding a food forest to Villa Coronado Park in Council District 3 which could produce 100,000 pounds of fruits and nuts per year with \$525,000 market value per year along with positive environmental impacts at an initial cost of \$50,000 and an annual cost of \$40,000 per year that would benefit many low income neighbors.

Guerry provided a map of underutilized areas around the City that could produce more urban agriculture and provided an example of 237 acres scattered throughout Council District 5. Guerry provided city-wide benefits related to urban heat island mitigation as well as the provision of health foods for the community.

Hagney recommended investment in urban agriculture by the City but also listed USDA and EPA grants as well as private sources available through the sale of carbon credit. Hagney recommended expanding the existing CoSA Community Toolshed to include urban agriculture tools, leasing at least three underutilized City owned lots to qualified farmers and integrating food forests into Parks and drainage areas.

## DISCUSSION:

Chair Rocha Garcia supported the expansion of the CoSA Community Toolshed at an initial cost of \$150,000 as well as seeking grant opportunities to create the farm in Villa Coronado Park.

Councilmember Viagran expressed excitement for the potential policies and supported investment in this plan to support the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and improve our parks.

Councilmember Viagran noted the success in Padre Park and supported Villa Coronado Park which could be a collaboration with South San Antonio High School. She supported expansion of the program into other council districts, especially Council District 5.

Councilmember Castillo thanked the team for visiting Council District 5 and supported the ideas to improve the heat island effect which was extreme. She noted that Council District 5 had many vacant lots that were lost due to unpaid taxes and could be small urban farms or a food forest that required less maintenance. Councilmember Castillo supported the policy recommendations and seeking of grants but also the use of City funding. Councilmember Castillo recommended more trees in Rosedale Park, particularly trees that could produce food.

Chair Rocha Garcia suggested that the vacant building Ordinance include vacant lots and requested an update on the Tree Mitigation Fund.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested that this was a good start to achieving the Food Access Plan recommended in a Council Consideration Request (CCR). Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that making public spaces and city owned vacant lots available to the community was a challenge but he hoped that this would become a priority in the FY 2023 Budget.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested that since Council District 2 had become gentrified in the last few years, it appeared to be less needy, however, there was still no nearby access to a local grocery store in much of the council district and he supported food forests, community gardens and urban farms in San Antonio.

Councilmember Castro noted that the report mentioned Garza Park and noted that fruit trees were supported by the City Manager and also supported including the park in the program.

Councilmember Castro recommended consideration of cultural compatibility of foods in the neighborhoods. Hagman added that the Food Policy Council looked at the entire city and was open to leveraging any properties. Stanford was developing a web based tool using a grant from NASA that would model the impact of changing a parcel into an urban food forest or farm.

Chair Rocha Garcia commented that the City had cut down a tree that had plants around it that was medicinal so she supported the cultural aspect of the potential urban food forest.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez was interested in when the web based tool would be available and felt it would be a useful tool in his council district. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez noted that this plan could mitigate the effects of warehouses on the northern part of his council district and supported adding funding for the plan in the FY 2024 Budget. Assistant City Manager McCary replied that City management would visit with the departments in the interim to see what it would cost to execute but noted that this took time.

Chair Rocha Garcia thanked Councilmember Castro for bringing up the cultural aspect of food and suggested that City Council Project Funds could be used to make some of these smaller projects a reality.

Item was for briefing purposes only; therefore, no action was taken.

**4. A briefing on the Parks and Recreation Youth Services Master Plan.** [David W. McCary, Assistant City Manager; Homer Garcia III, Director, Parks and Recreation]

Homer Garcia, Director of Parks & Recreation, provided background and overview of the planning process and introduced Sarah Sharp, Recreation Manager, who listed youth community programs including: art, science, nature, sports and fitness, teens, cultural, summer youth, out of-school holiday camps, youth leagues and special events.

Sharp mentioned that partnerships with Metro Health, the San Antonio Public Library, and Department of Human Services were included in the Park System Plan (Plan) and provided a map of community centers. Sharp stated that the guiding principles of the Plan was to be a Responsive, Restorative, Resilient and Resourceful parks system.

Sharp reported that the Youth Services Master Plan's purpose was to ensure that service delivery and programming needs were met and guided future operational modifications such as expanded operational hours, additional partnerships, program offerings and analysis of the future needs of specific areas.

Sharp stated that the department had issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to review their programs, analyze trends and best practices, engage with and survey the community, interview stakeholders and review partnerships with City departments. Sharp reported that the plan was to recommend a consultant at the June 15, 2023 City Council A Session meeting, begin planning in the summer and completion in 2024.

Chair Rocha Garcia recommended that the department collect feedback from parents of children participating in their current programs.

Councilmember Viagran supported the efforts of the Parks & Recreation Department and offered to assist with communication with the community. Councilmember Viagran recommended highlighting the work of kids related to coding and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) activities to promote visitors and higher participation of students throughout the city. Councilmember Viagran recommended working with the Department of Arts & Culture to have artists work with kids in the community centers. Sharp stated that the two young female artists that designed the mural at Ramirez Park spoke to the community and provided inspiration to

young women in the area. Councilmember Viagran noted that maintenance of parks equipment including a mobile stage needed to be prioritized in the budget.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez recommended creating experiences and opportunities for youth in the community centers that were unique to the neighborhood or other San Antonio's assets.

Councilmember Castillo praised the work of the recreation centers in Council District 5 and supported the extension of operational hours noting that sometimes youth had nowhere to go.

Councilmember Castro thanked the department for the work they did for youth especially educational events such as Earth Day and Zero Waste Day. She noted that Parks staff were dedicated and often stayed late to ensure the parks were clean.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez mentioned the shortage of lifeguards and suggested a training program. Assistant Director of Parks & Recreation Nikki Ramos stated that the department was looking into a junior lifeguard program for 15 year olds as licensing required lifeguards to be 16 years old.

Item was for briefing purposes only; therefore, no action was taken.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further discussion, meeting was adjourned at 3:59 p.m.

**Approved**

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***Adriana Rocha Garcia, Chair***

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***Debbie Racca-Sittre, City Clerk***