



2025 CAPSTONE REPORT

LEAPS AND BOUNDS

THE NOW AND FUTURE AUSTIN METRO

A Call to Lead

Dear Neighbors, Friends, Colleagues,

Central Texas is at a crossroads. Growth is accelerating, and the choices we make today will determine whether it brings shared prosperity or deeper divides. In 2025, CREW Austin launched Leaps and Bounds: The Now and Future Austin Metro to meet this moment. A first-of-its-kind regional research initiative, it was designed to capture resident voices, convene cross-sector leaders, and offer actionable strategies for a resilient future.

Our motivation was simple but ambitious: to rally thought leaders across Central Texas in service of improved outcomes for our communities. CREW Austin members bring expertise in commercial real estate, development, and finance, but also deep connections to healthcare, education, workforce, government, and nonprofit sectors. By leveraging this collective knowledge, we sought to give back to our communities not only through our professional projects but through shared research, insights, and leadership.



Scan the QR code to read the **Roundtable Insights Report**.

Why We Began

The Austin Metro is one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation. Growth brings vitality and investment, but it also strains infrastructure, tests affordability, and raises questions about equity and sustainability. As leaders in the built environment and related industries, we saw an opportunity — and a responsibility — to convene our peers, gather insights, and provide strategic recommendations. This initiative grew from a belief that collaboration, informed by data, can strengthen outcomes for all in Central Texas.

Our Process

We began in February 2025 by convening six roundtables across the five-county region — in Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell Counties, as well as a Metro-wide session. More than 120 leaders participated, representing all sectors including education, healthcare, nonprofits, local government, employers, and economic development organizations. The conversations were candid and forward-looking, surfacing ten overarching priorities for growth in our region as well as individual sets of county priorities.

In April 2025, we published the **Roundtable Insights Report**. That interim publication synthesized the themes of the roundtable discussions and presented county-by-county perspectives. **The report was both a mirror and a catalyst: it reflected the region's diverse voices and invited broader community input.**

During the summer of 2025, we launched the Austin Metro Resident Survey to capture the perspectives of residents themselves. Resident responses across the five Austin Metro counties offered insights into affordability pressures, workforce dynamics, environmental concerns, governance, and quality-of-life priorities. While the survey's sample was limited, it provided valuable directional insights and revealed alignment — and tension — between residents' views and the perspectives of institutional leaders.

The Capstone Report

Now, with this Capstone Report, we bring the threads together. The pages that follow highlight the most critical issues facing the Austin Metro and provide actionable recommendations. Authored by CREW Austin Members, the briefs integrate resident survey data, roundtable findings, and each author's professional perspective. In doing so, they reflect not only the priorities of our communities but also the depth of expertise within CREW, offered as a resource to help leaders in every sector guide more equitable and resilient growth.

Why This Matters

The Capstone Report is not an endpoint but a tool. It is designed for strategic leaders across Central Texas — whether you are an employer considering how to attract talent, an educator shaping curriculum, a public official allocating resources, or a community leader working to improve equity. These insights are meant to help you act today while planning for tomorrow.

This research also represents CREW Austin's belief that commercial real estate professionals play a unique role at the nexus of growth. Our industry influences where and how people live, work, and connect. By convening cross-sector voices, we seek to ensure that growth benefits not just the economy but the communities and families that make this region thrive.



Sincerely,

Nina Murrell, RA, LEED AP, NCARB

Principal Architect & Cultural Strategist, MODA

CREW Austin Board Member

Chair, Research & Governance Committee

CREW Network Industry Research Committee Member

Growth is inevitable. Progress is a CHOICE.

Looking Forward

The title Leaps and Bounds reflects both the pace and the unpredictability of our region's growth. Expansion may come quickly, but progress is not automatic. It takes deliberate choices to ensure that growth translates into healthier, more equitable, and more resilient outcomes for all Central Texans.

This Capstone Report closes the inaugural year of CREW Austin's regional research initiative — from convening leaders, to gathering resident perspectives, to synthesizing findings into actionable briefs. At the same time, it opens the door to continued collaboration. We hope you will use this report as a reference, a catalyst, and an invitation to lead boldly in shaping a positive future for our Central Texas communities.

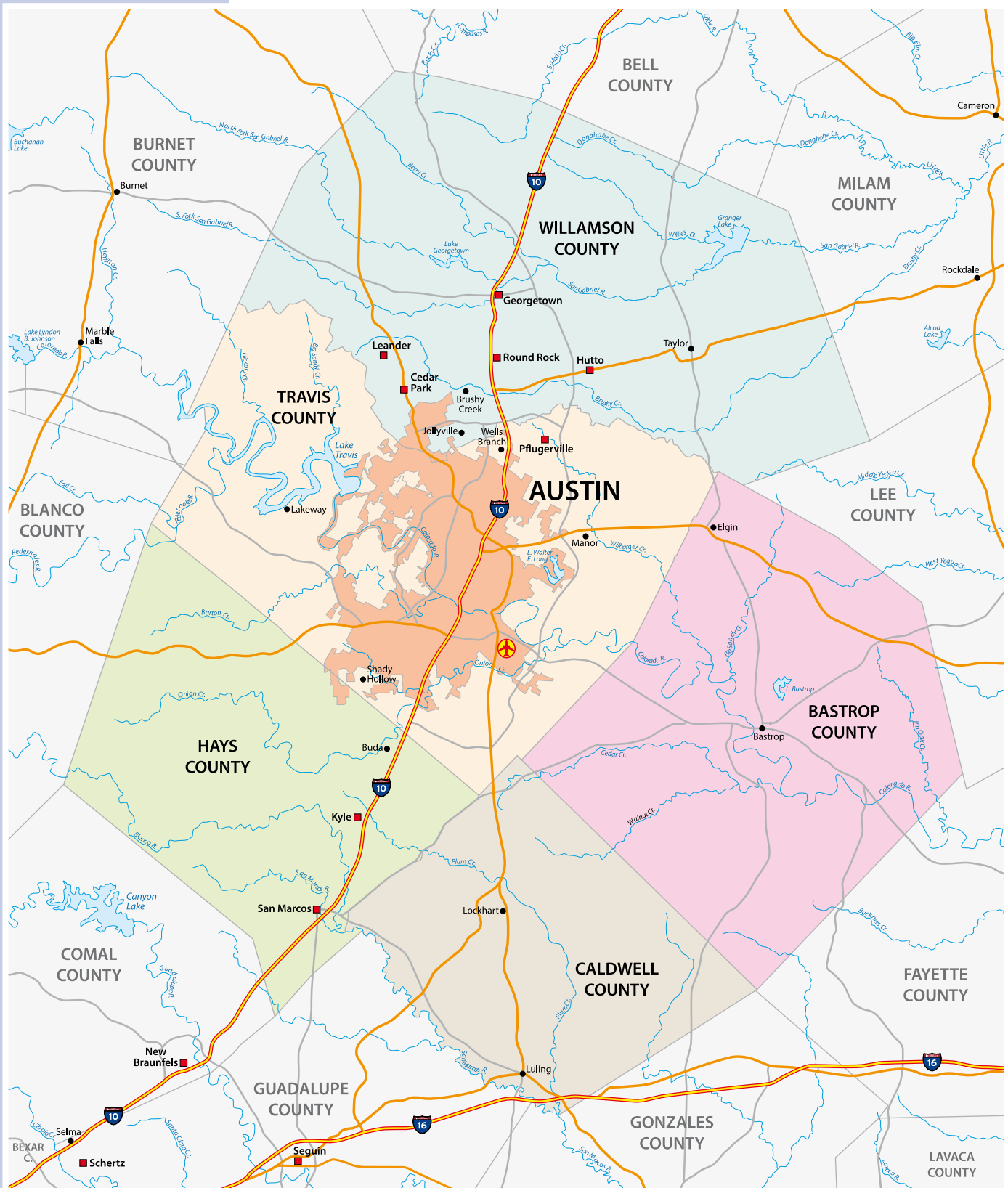


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ABOUT CREW AUSTIN AND CREW NETWORK GLOBAL RESEARCH

SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

If you live / have lived / will live / work in **Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis or Williamson Counties**, take this survey.
We need 5000 responses that are representative of ALL OF US. Please spread the word through your communities!

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE AUSTIN METRO

Our communities are growing – fast. Growth brings big questions.

Will housing stay affordable? Will traffic get better or worse?

Will our schools, healthcare, and jobs keep up with demand?

Will we have enough greenspace? Will we keep our sense of place?

We want to hear from you.

TAKE THE SURVEY:



Scan this QR Code to read the
Roundtable Insights Report
that inspired this survey.



2025 Regional Research

LEAPS AND BOUNDS | THE NOW AND FUTURE AUSTIN METRO

special thanks to our
2025 RESEARCH PARTNER



MILLER
imaging & digital solutions

Postcard used to invite Austin Metro residents' participation in the survey. Larger QR code for the survey is no longer active.

Scan the smaller QR code to read the **Roundtable Insights Report**.

Outreach At-A-Glance

- 120+ roundtable participants invited by email to complete the survey and invite additional participation.
- 200+ printed postcards distributed around the Austin Metro.
- 800+ CREW Austin contacts invited by newsletter to participate and invite additional participation.
- ~20,000 residents invited through Miller IDS newsletter outreach.
- Survey was open May 1, 2025 to August 15, 2025.
- 461 completed surveys (~2% response rate).

What This Means

- 2% response rate seems low even for digital newsletter outreach, underscoring the challenge of engaging residents on broad regional growth issues.
- The voices captured reflect those most civically engaged (predominantly white, professional, Travis County residents), while renters, rural households, youth, and Latino/Black residents remain underrepresented.
- Low conversion may reflect barriers such as survey fatigue, time constraints, language barriers, and skepticism about whether input will influence decisions.

Implications for future studies

- Pair surveys with **community listening sessions** and **partner-hosted events** to build trust and broaden reach.
- Provide surveys in **multiple languages** (Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, etc.) and use **bilingual outreach partners** to ensure broader participation.
- Consider **incentives or visible feedback loops** (showing how input shaped outcomes) to increase participation.
- Work with **grassroots and cultural organizations** to better connect with historically underrepresented groups.

SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

By Karen Kachmar, CREW Austin Research Data Analysis Leader, and
Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Introduction to the Austin Metro Resident Survey

In spring 2025, CREW Austin invited residents across Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson Counties to share their perspectives on growth, development, and quality of life in our region. The survey received **461 responses**. While the sample skews toward white professionals in Travis County, these voices provide valuable directional insights into community priorities and concerns.

This **Survey Insights Report** complements the **30+ Briefs** in this **Capstone Report**. Combined with the **Roundtable Insights Report**, these publications provide a multi-layered view of regional trends, resident viewpoints and future opportunities.

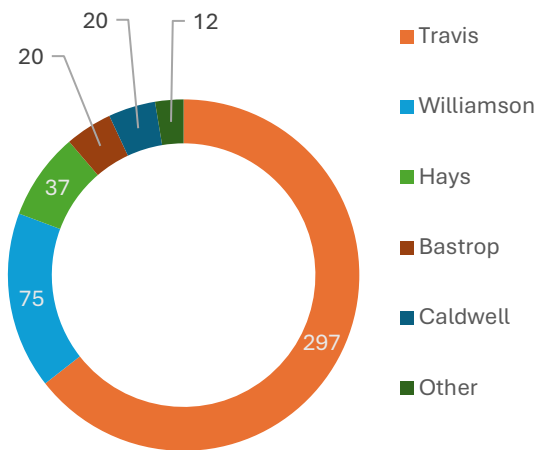
Participant Profile

County distribution: A majority of respondents were from Travis County, with smaller representation from Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell. Many are long-term residents: 66% have lived in the area over 10 years.

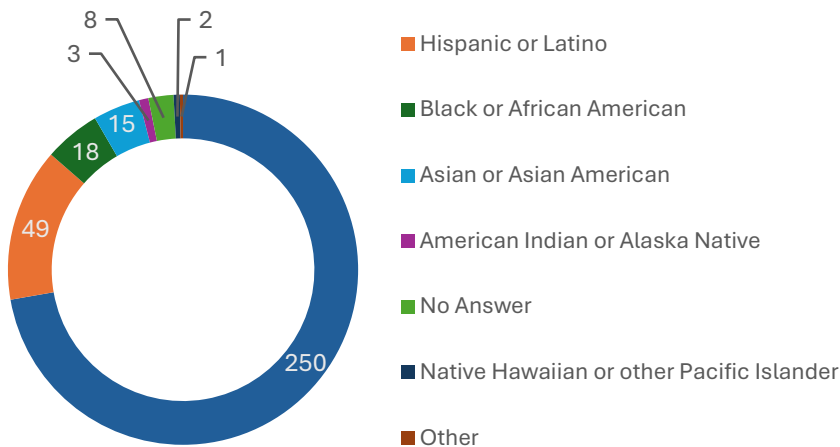
Demographics: Predominantly white, professional respondents; underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic/Latino, rural, youth, and senior voices. Most are married and homeowners with more than 3 people in their household.

Occupations: Many respondents reported professional or managerial roles, reflecting an engaged but not fully representative slice of the metro population.

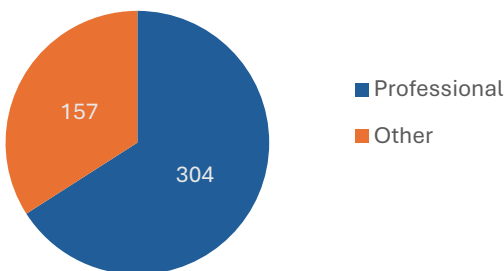
County Distribution



Demographics



Occupations



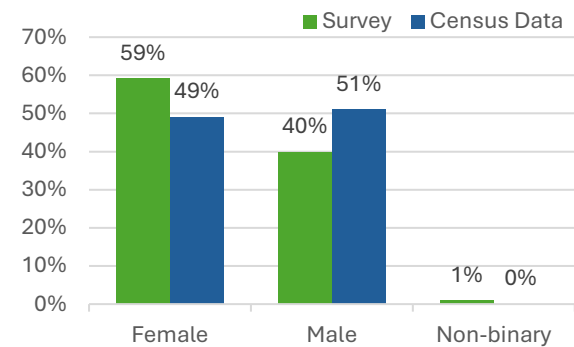
SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

Context and Limits

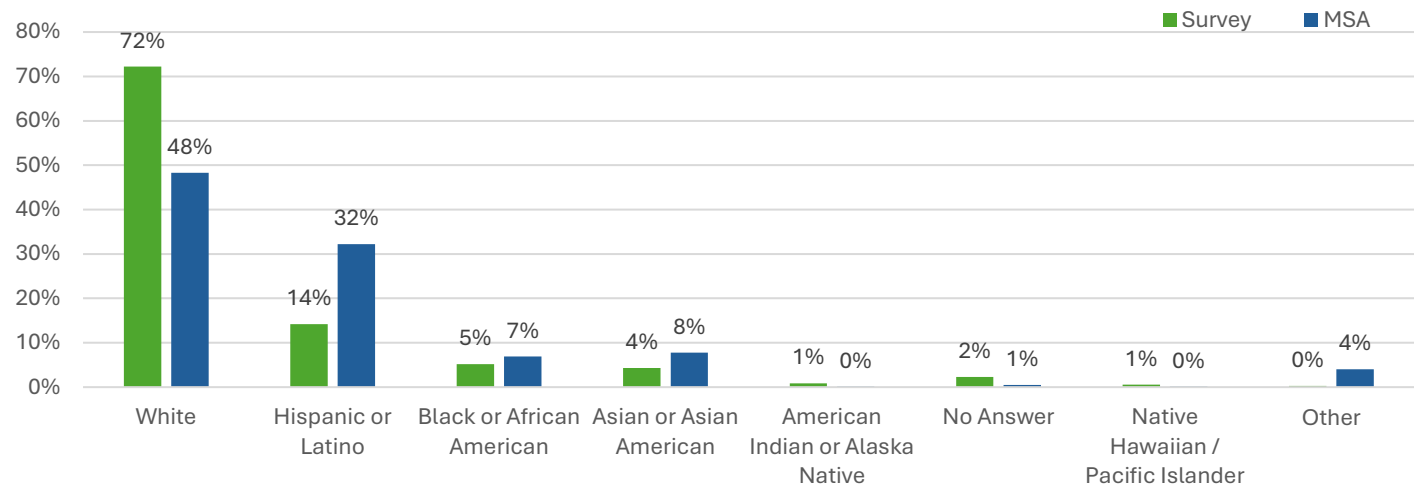
This survey is not statistically representative of the Austin Metro population. It disproportionately reflects white, professional, Travis County voices. Key populations—including Hispanic/Latino and Black residents, rural communities, and younger and older age groups—are underrepresented.

Even so, the findings provide valuable signals. They highlight both convergence (shared concerns such as housing and transportation) and divergence (county-specific priorities) that leaders must weigh in regional decision-making.

Gender

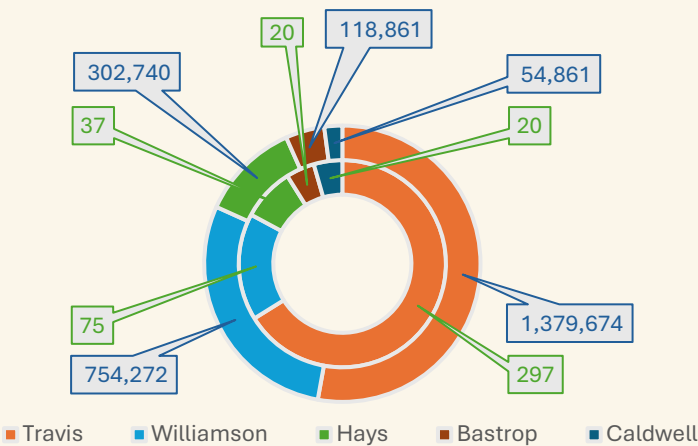


Ethnicity



Participants Compared to 2025 Population

	Participants	%	Population	%	Variance
Travis County	297	66%	1,379,674	53%	13%
Williamson County	75	17%	754,272	29%	-12%
Hays County	37	8%	302,740	12%	-4%
Bastrop County	20	4%	118,861	5%	-1%
Caldwell County	20	4%	54,861	2%	2%
Other	12	3%			
Total excluding Other:	449		2,610,408		



Source: www.texas-demographics.com and the U.S. Census Bureau

SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

Key Findings

1. Shared Regional Priorities

- **Transportation infrastructure and congestion relief** ranked as the single most pressing concern across the metro.
- **Affordable housing and rising costs of living** emerged as top priorities in every county.

2. County-Level Variation

Hays: Housing affordability topped the list.

Caldwell & Bastrop: Greater emphasis on healthcare access and local infrastructure.

Travis: Transportation and mobility issues dominated.

Williamson: Economic growth opportunities were emphasized alongside housing costs.

3. Cross-County Issues

Calls for **regional planning and collaboration** surfaced repeatedly, with residents noting the interconnected nature of housing, jobs, and infrastructure.

*Residents were asked, “What **ONE THING** do you believe would improve life in our Metro?” Their responses are represented in this wordcloud:*

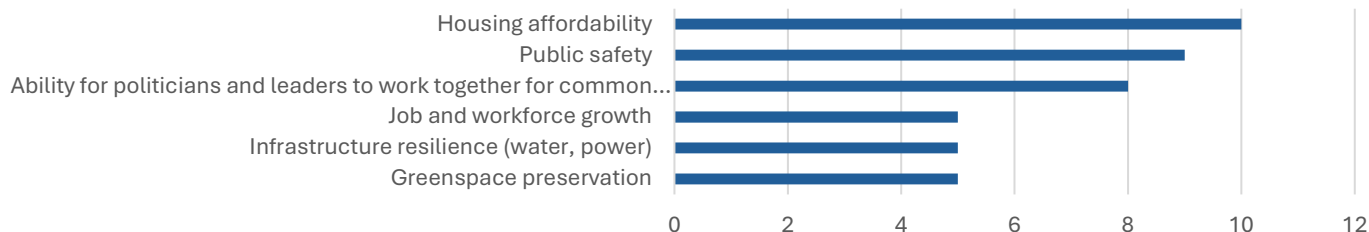


What The Data Says: Priorities Heatmap

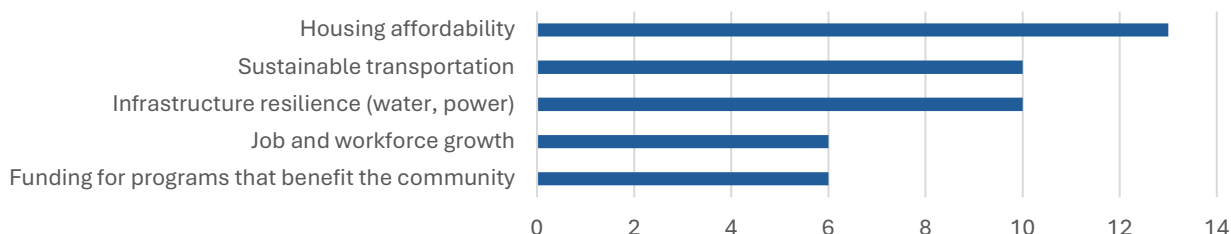
	Population				
	Smallest				Largest
	Caldwell	Bastrop	Hays	Williamson	Travis
Housing affordability	1	1	1	1	1
Infrastructure resilience (water, power)	5	3	2	2	2
Sustainable transportation			5	4	3
Job and workforce growth	4	4		3	
Ability for politicians and leaders to work together for common good	3		4		5
Public safety	2				4
Funding for programs that benefit the community		5	3		
Sustainable transportation		2			
Greenspace preservation				5	

SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

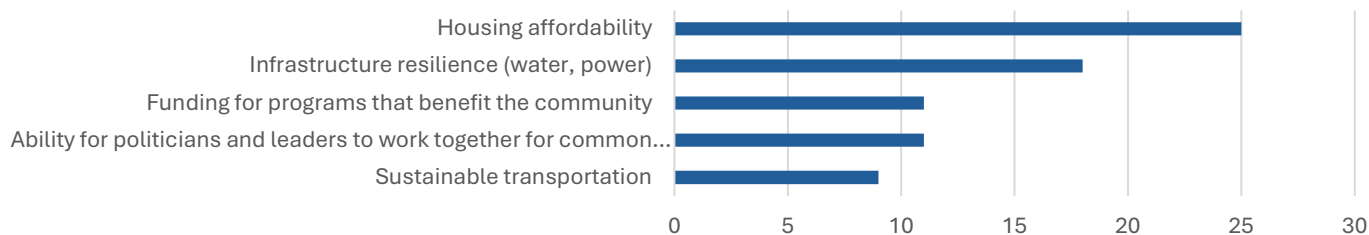
Caldwell County Priorities



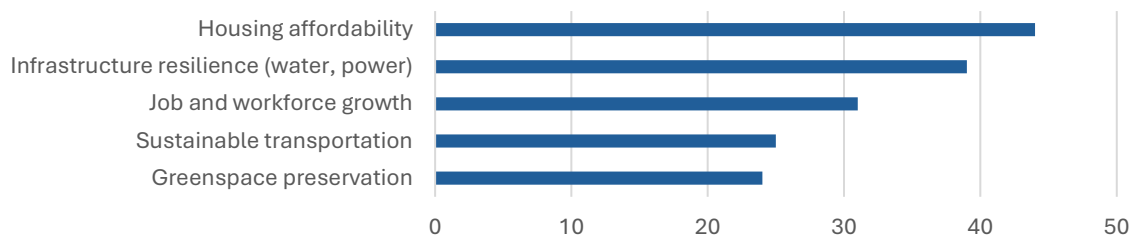
Bastrop County Priorities



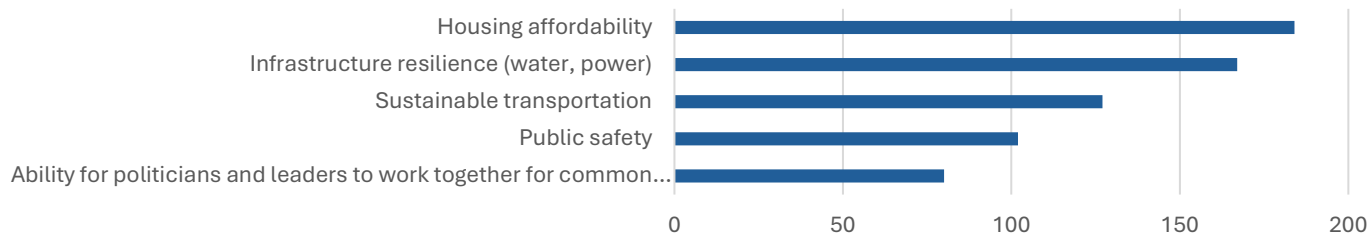
Hays County Priorities



Williamson County Priorities



Travis County Priorities



Housing Data Deep Dive

A Deepening Affordability Crisis Threatens to Displace Residents

The resident survey reveals affordability as the single most urgent and personal challenge facing the Austin Metro. Nearly 92% of respondents report that their cost of living has increased over the past five years, with almost half describing the increase as 'significant.' Looking ahead, 91% anticipate that their cost of living will continue to rise in the next five years. These rising costs are creating widespread financial anxiety: more than 41% of respondents do not believe their income will keep pace with expenses.

This concern is not abstract. When asked what might cause them to leave the Austin Metro, residents overwhelmingly cited 'Cost of Living' (61%) and 'Housing Affordability' (40%) as their top reasons. This sequence of findings – past increases, future expectations, income anxiety, and potential relocation – paints a clear picture of an affordability crisis with direct implications for regional stability.

Affordability is the #1 factor driving potential out-migration.

Snapshot of Findings

- 92% report cost of living increased in past 5 years.
- 91% expect increases over next 5 years.
- 41% don't think income will keep up.
- Top reasons for to leave the region: cost of living (61%); housing affordability (40%).

Current Housing Affordability by County

<i>How Affordable is your current housing?</i>	Caldwell	Bastrop	Hays	Williamson	Travis	Total
Very Affordable	17%	7%	4%	12%	6%	7%
Affordable	67%	36%	29%	26%	38%	36%
Neutral	17%	50%	32%	50%	47%	45%
Not Affordable	17%	14%	39%	24%	14%	18%

Housing Data Deep Dive (cont'd)

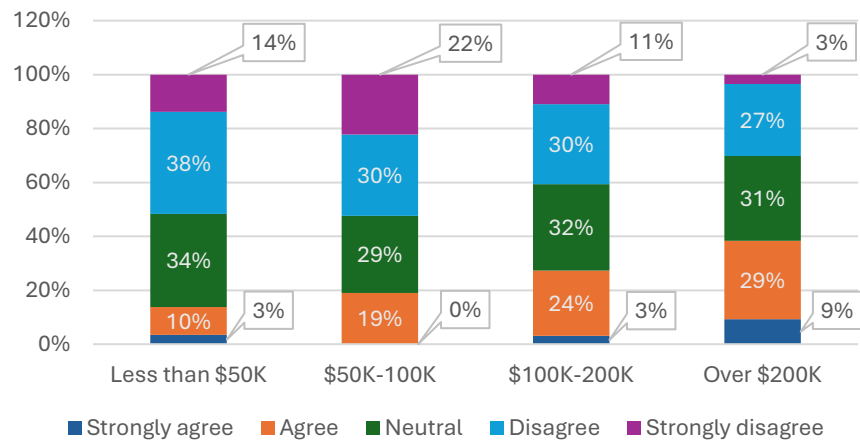
Rising Costs vs. Stagnant Wages

Across income groups, residents expressed doubts that their wages will keep up with the cost of living. Only 27% believe their income will keep pace. Middle-income households earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000 are nearly three times more likely to strongly disagree that they can keep up, while higher-income households (\$200,000–\$399,000) are almost six times more likely to strongly agree that they will. These contrasting perceptions highlight how affordability pressures are felt most sharply among households in the middle of the income spectrum.

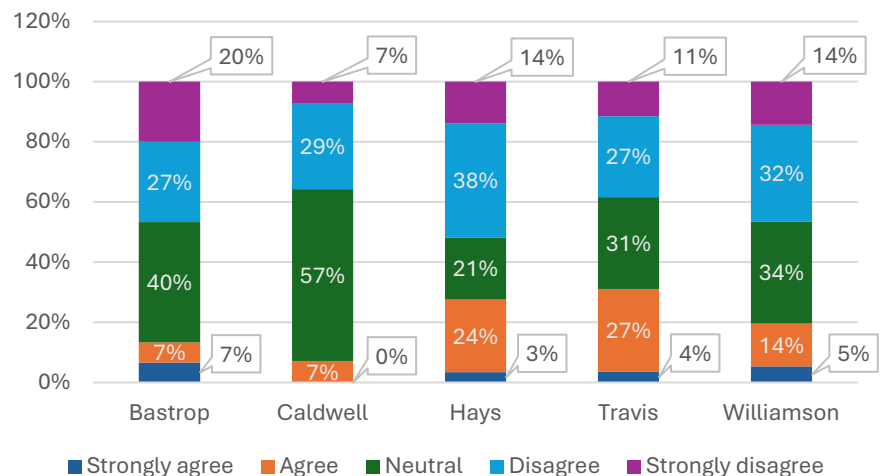
The data underscores a widening gap: some households are positioned to weather rising costs, while others face intensifying vulnerability. For many, particularly those earning under \$100,000, the risk of being priced out of the region is very real.

Do you believe your income will keep pace with the rising cost of living?

By Income Bracket



By County



Middle-income families
feel the squeeze most sharply.

Snapshot of Findings

- Only 27% believe income will keep pace.
- Middle-income households (\$50–75k) nearly 3x more likely to strongly disagree.
- Higher-income households (\$200–399k) nearly 6x more likely to strongly agree.

Housing Data Deep Dive

Affordability Gaps by Income and Tenure

Affordability perceptions differ significantly by both income and tenure. While higher-income households are more likely to describe their housing as affordable, even households earning over \$200,000 report challenges. Middle-income respondents indicate the greatest affordability strain, suggesting that the region’s traditional working and professional families are most at risk of displacement.

Tenure status adds another dimension. Renters are significantly less likely to describe their housing as affordable and are more uncertain about their future in the Austin Metro. **Only 30% of renters said they were confident they would remain in the region over the next 5–10 years, compared to 55% of homeowners.** This gap underscores the heightened vulnerability of renters, who face escalating housing costs without the buffer of equity-building or long-term stability.

When asked what might cause them to leave the Austin Metro, renters most often cited cost of living, job opportunities, and housing affordability. Homeowners also pointed to cost of living but highlighted family/personal reasons and commute times more strongly. Despite these differences, cost of living emerged as the leading factor across both groups.

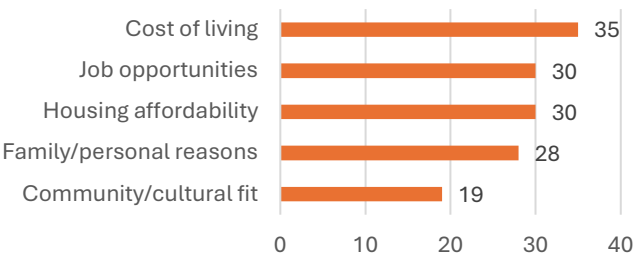
Snapshot of Findings

- **Stability gap:** Only 30% of renters expect to stay in the Austin Metro long-term, compared with 55% of homeowners.
- **Cost of living:** The #1 reason to leave across all groups. (47%)
- **Housing affordability:** Ranked as the #3 reason to leave for both renters and homeowners. (31%)

Renters face **higher stress and greater uncertainty** than homeowners.

What are the top 5 reasons you might consider moving away from the Austin Metro (if any)?

Renter Responses



Homeowner Responses



Aggregate Responses



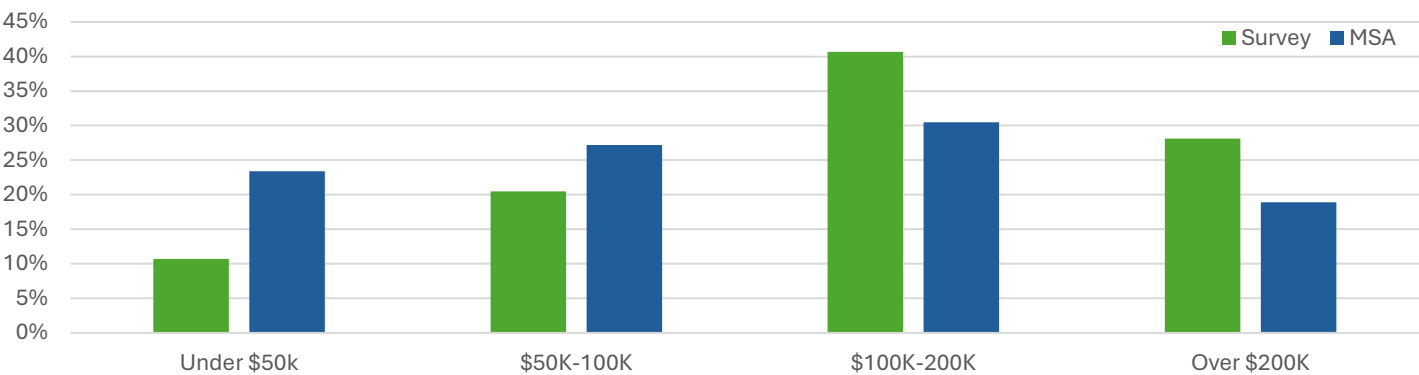
Housing Data Deep Dive (cont'd)

Context and Implications

While the survey provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Respondents skew toward white, professional households in Travis County, with Hispanic/Latino, Black, rural, younger, and lower-income voices underrepresented. These gaps mean that affordability pressures may, in fact, be even more severe than captured here.

The implications are profound. Affordability is not only a housing challenge but a regional stability issue. Rising costs threaten workforce retention, family stability, and the long-term livability of Central Texas. Without targeted strategies – such as expanding workforce housing, creating affordable ownership pathways, and modernizing regional land use policies – the Austin Metro risks losing the very people who sustain its communities and economy.

Participant Household Income Compared to 2025 Census Data



Source: www.texas-demographics.com and the U.S. Census Bureau

Affordability is not just a housing challenge – it is a regional stability issue.

Future Outlook

These findings reinforce roundtable insights: affordability pressures are not just a housing issue but a regional stability issue, influencing **workforce retention, family planning, and long-term livability**. The survey highlights an urgent need for tailored strategies – ranging from **workforce housing and ownership pathways** to **regional land use reforms** – to ensure residents at all income levels can see a future for themselves in the Austin Metro.

SURVEY INSIGHTS REPORT

Strategic Insights for Leaders

- **Transportation is a regional connector:** No matter the county, mobility is seen as central to quality of life.
- **Housing pressures differ by geography:** Urban core vs. rural counties show different stress points, but all recognize affordability as a challenge.
- **Healthcare disparities are regional blind spots:** Stronger in Caldwell/Bastrop responses, suggesting uneven access.
- **Engaged but narrow voices:** The current sample reflects civically engaged professionals; leaders should recognize this perspective while seeking broader inclusion.

Next Steps for Research (2026 and Beyond)

- **Expand reach:** Partner with community organizations in Caldwell, Bastrop, and Williamson to recruit underrepresented residents.
- **Target underrepresented groups:** Hispanic/Latino communities, youth, seniors, and lower-income households.
- **Diversify methods:** Pair surveys with listening sessions or focus groups to capture lived experience.
- **Cross-reference other datasets:** Use Census, health assessments, and regional plans to triangulate findings.

Conclusion

The **Austin Metro Resident Survey** created a baseline—a first step toward capturing community voices in regional growth and development decisions. While its sample is limited, the survey underscores common challenges and emerging divides across Central Texas. When paired with the **Roundtable Insights Report** and **Capstone Briefs**, these findings help regional leaders identify opportunities for collaboration, anticipate county-specific needs, and shape strategies for equitable growth.



Karen Kachmar, MBA

serves as Chief Financial Officer at Structura, a commercial general contractor specializing in complex projects in the healthcare, advanced

technology, institutional, industrial, retail, and corporate office sectors in Central Texas. She is CREW Austin's Research Data Analysis Leader and has been instrumental in ensuring the integrity of the 2025 regional research effort, setting a high bar for quality in data collection, analysis, and reporting. Her commitment to rigorous analysis and transparency has kept the research both credible and impactful, providing leaders across Central Texas with findings they can trust as they navigate the region's growth.



Nina Murrell, RA, LEED AP *is the Founding Principal Architect of MODA | Murrell Office for Development and Architecture, a firm specializing in commercial,*

cultural, educational, and community projects. She serves on the CREW Austin Board as Founding Chair of Research and is a member of the CREW Network Global Industry Research Committee. She also serves as Capital Projects Advisor and Board Member for the Flower Hill Center, an urban homestead museum in Austin. A cultural strategist working at the intersection of design, research, and innovation, she leads boundary crossing initiatives to enrich our collective spirit and add meaning to our lives. She is recognized for tapping larger patterns, convening diverse voices, and mobilizing action for the greater good.



SECTION 1

REGIONAL GROWTH & OUTLOOK

- 1.1 Sector Resilience in the Austin Metro: Real Estate, Health, Education & Beyond (*Kate Dibble*)
- 1.2 Projections & Policy Implications: Forecasting Austin's Growth Trajectory (*Kate Dibble*)
- 1.3 Innovation & Collaboration Trends: Insights for CRE Leaders (*Nina Murrell*)

Sector Resilience in the Austin Metro: Real Estate, Health, Education & Beyond

By Kate Dibble, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research and Governance Committee

An Adaptable Economic Landscape

Austin's metro economy hits 2025 exhibiting both strength and adaptability across key sectors, even amid shifting market conditions and demographic trends. As the region evolves, real estate, healthcare, education, and other industries reveal dynamic responses that underpin Austin's broader economic resilience.

Data Trends Point to Steady Momentum

Dashboard data confirm Austin's steady economic momentum, with a modest but stable employment growth rate and wages inching upward. Notably, education and health services sectors stand out for robust employment gains, highlighting their critical role as anchors within the regional labor market. Meanwhile, commercial real estate reflects nuanced trends: downtown office vacancies have declined slightly even as suburban vacancies rise, and industrial market segments such as logistics and warehouse space show signs of healthy absorption amid expanding supply.

Sector Innovation in Response to Pressures

Roundtable conversations illuminate how leaders across sectors are innovating and pivoting in response to pressures including shifting work patterns, affordability challenges, and the imperative for equity and sustainability. In health care, this translates into expanded outpatient services, telehealth adoption, and workforce training to meet growing demand. Education leaders emphasize hybrid learning models and infrastructure expansion to support rapidly growing student populations while focusing on equity in access and outcomes.

Evolving Real Estate Patterns

Real estate stakeholders observe that evolving tenant expectations—such as demand for flexibility, wellness amenities, and sustainable design—are reshaping development patterns. Multifamily housing markets confront a complex balance of overbuild in some areas alongside continued strong demand in others, particularly in affordable options. Success stories emerge from mixed-use developments integrating office, residential, and retail components that contribute to walkable, vibrant communities attractive to diverse populations.

Industrial Growth and Workforce Challenges

Industrial sectors, driven by continued investments in technology, AI, and manufacturing, demonstrate resilience but also face workforce recruitment and supply chain challenges. Leaders advocate for strengthened partnerships between industry, education, and workforce entities to cultivate talent pipelines aligned with emerging sector needs.

Sector Resilience in the Austin Metro: Real Estate, Health, Education & Beyond (cont'd)

Strategic Takeaways For Regional Leaders

- Leveraging cross-sector collaboration to align economic development, workforce strategies, and infrastructure investments.
- Prioritizing equitable access to services and amenities across education, health, and real estate to support inclusive growth.
- Encouraging innovation in real estate development that anticipates evolving renter and tenant expectations around flexibility and sustainability.
- Supporting workforce development programs tightly coupled with sector-specific demands, particularly in health and industrial fields.
- Monitoring shifting market indicators to proactively adjust strategies that sustain sectoral resiliency within a dynamic macroeconomic environment.

Looking ahead, Austin's sectoral landscape reflects a metropolitan region with vibrant strengths and ongoing adaptive capacity. Strategic leadership, grounded in data and diverse stakeholder engagement, will be essential to sustain vitality across real estate, health, education, and beyond as the city continues to grow and transform.



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Projections & Policy Implications: Forecasting Austin's Growth Trajectory

By Kate Dibble, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research and Governance Committee

Austin Metro's Projected Growth

Austin Metro's trajectory remains one of robust growth, marked by dynamic economic diversification and sustained population expansion. With the metropolitan population expected to climb from approximately 2.5 million to over 4 million within two decades, strategic foresight and coordinated policy will be vital for aligning this growth with community goals.

Economic Diversification and Emerging Pressures

Current dashboard projections indicate continued expansion across technology, life sciences, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing as foundational economic drivers. This diversification offers resilience against sector-specific downturns and positions Austin as a leading hub for innovation nationally. Yet, these opportunities come with uncertainties including infrastructure capacity, housing affordability, and maintaining quality of life amid rapid change.

The Case for Proactive Policy

Regional leaders emphasize a critical need for forward-looking policies that anticipate growth's pressures rather than react to them. Core priorities identified include balancing density with livability, investing in multi-modal transit to ease congestion, expanding affordable housing, and ensuring equitable access to education and healthcare.

Coordinated Planning and Infrastructure Investments

Policy frameworks must leverage data-driven forecasting alongside stakeholder insights to coordinate land use, infrastructure, and economic development effectively. Scenario planning and timely investments in public infrastructure will shape Austin's competitive positioning for decades. Transit expansions, water and energy systems, and digital connectivity are key needs for infrastructure attention.

Innovative Policy Tools for Shared Prosperity

Innovative approaches such as performance-based zoning, impact fees tied to growth metrics, and expanded public-private partnerships can fund and accelerate critical projects aligned with growth corridors. Additionally, embedding equity and climate resilience into policy design will bolster long-term inclusive prosperity and environmental sustainability.

Projections & Policy Implications: Forecasting Austin's Growth Trajectory (cont'd)

Strategic Recommendations For Leaders

- Use integrated growth models combining demographic, economic, and infrastructure data to guide investments and policy adjustments.
- Foster multi-jurisdictional collaboration to ensure regional alignment on housing, transit, and land use policies, minimizing fragmented approaches.
- Prioritize policies that encourage mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods linked to transit, to support compact and sustainable urban form.
- Incorporate flexibility in regulatory frameworks to adapt to evolving market conditions and technological advances, such as electric vehicles and smart infrastructure.
- Engage communities transparently to build trust and co-create solutions that reflect diverse needs and aspirations.

Austin's growth forecast is not simply a matter of numbers, but a call to strategic leadership that integrates data insights with visionary policy, shaping a metropolitan region that is economically vibrant, equitable, and resilient for generations to come.



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Innovation & Collaboration Trends: Insights for CRE Leaders

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The pace of growth in Central Texas is testing the limits of infrastructure, housing, and workforce systems. At the same time, it is fueling new models of collaboration and innovation among commercial real estate (CRE) leaders, employers, and civic organizations. Our 2025 research makes clear that thriving in this environment requires not just technical expertise, but a willingness to build cross-sector partnerships and experiment with fresh approaches.

A Shift Toward Cross-Sector Collaboration

Roundtable discussions underscored how traditional silos—public vs. private, developer vs. nonprofit, employer vs. educator—are giving way to new partnerships. In Austin, for example, **St. David's Foundation** is collaborating with housing developers to embed health clinics in mixed-use projects. The **Austin Community College System** is working with major employers to tailor curricula for emerging industries, including advanced manufacturing and biosciences. Nonprofits are stepping into the development conversation to advocate for equity, environmental stewardship, and long-term community benefit. For CRE leaders, this is a reminder that real estate does not operate in isolation; it is increasingly a platform for multi-stakeholder problem solving.

Innovation in Financing and Project Delivery

Several innovative financing approaches surfaced in both the survey and roundtables. Public-private partnerships are becoming the norm in high-growth corridors, particularly where infrastructure investment lags. Employers and developers are co-investing in transportation solutions or workforce housing near job centers. A recent example is Samsung's investment in workforce housing strategies in Williamson County, in tandem with local government. Institutions are also experimenting with shared facilities—such as co-located schools, libraries, and workforce hubs—that leverage combined resources. These models require CRE leaders to think creatively about capital stacks, governance structures, and long-term maintenance, but they also expand opportunity by spreading both cost and impact across partners.

Technology as a Catalyst

The Austin Metro's reputation as a tech hub is shaping real estate in visible ways. Smart building systems, data-informed site selection, and virtual community engagement platforms are now standard practice. Dell Medical School and Seton Healthcare have piloted virtual care hubs that use real estate more efficiently while expanding access. Survey respondents emphasized how technology enhances quality of life—whether through remote work options, more efficient transportation planning, or digital access to public services. For CRE leaders, innovation is not just about “smart” buildings; it's about embedding technology into planning and operations in ways that respond to evolving resident and workforce expectations.

Innovation & Collaboration Trends: Insights for CRE Leaders (cont'd)

Collaboration for Equity and Inclusion

Equity concerns were consistently raised by both residents and leaders. Affordable housing, access to green space, and reliable transportation remain top regional challenges. Innovative collaborations—such as community land trusts led by the City of Austin, employer-sponsored housing pilots, and community benefit agreements negotiated in East Austin redevelopment projects—are gaining traction. These approaches require CRE leaders to collaborate with nonprofits, advocacy groups, and local governments in ways that balance financial performance with long-term community resilience. Increasingly, reputation and project success are tied to whether developments are perceived as inclusive and responsive to diverse needs.

Future-Ready Leadership

The data and conversations point to a clear takeaway: innovation and collaboration are no longer optional. CRE leaders must act as conveners—bringing together employers, educators, nonprofits, and public officials to align strategies. They must be comfortable navigating shared governance and collective decision-making. They must also build internal cultures that embrace experimentation, from piloting new materials and design strategies to testing flexible lease models and adaptive reuse. Austin's Mueller neighborhood, once a city airport, is a powerful case study of this mindset—its transformation into a mixed-use, mixed-income community emerged from long-term collaboration among public agencies, private developers, and residents.

Strategic Takeaways for CRE Leaders

- Lean into partnerships. Seek cross-sector collaborations that strengthen both project value and community outcomes.
- Innovate financing and delivery. Use shared capital stacks, joint ventures, and co-located facilities to expand impact.
- Adopt technology with purpose. Integrate smart tools that directly address workforce and resident needs.
- Prioritize equity. Design projects and partnerships that expand access to housing, transit, and green space.
- Model future-ready leadership. Embrace collaboration, adaptability, and systems thinking as core competencies.
- Highlight Austin examples. Learn from successful collaborations like ACC-industry partnerships, Samsung's housing strategies, and the Mueller redevelopment to inspire future projects.

Innovation and collaboration are reshaping the landscape of commercial real estate in the Austin Metro. Leaders who embrace this shift will not only deliver stronger projects but also help shape a more resilient, equitable, and competitive region.



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SECTION 2

INFRASTRUCTURE UNDER STRAIN

- 2.1 Public Infrastructure Strain: What the Data Reveals and Leaders Urge (*Kate Dibble*)
- 2.2 Traffic & Transit Priorities: Where Data and Leaders Align (*Kate Dibble*)
- 2.3 Freight, Logistics & Regional Mobility Systems (*Nina Murrell*)
- 2.4 Water Sustainability & Infrastructure in Central Texas: Meeting the Challenges Ahead (*Kira Dell*)
- 2.5 Heat, Flood and Grid Resilience for Critical Facilities (*Nina Murrell*)

Public Infrastructure Strain: What the Data Reveals and Leaders Urge

By Kate Dibble, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research and Governance Committee

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Policy frameworks must leverage data-driven forecasting alongside stakeholder insights to coordinate land use, infrastructure, and economic development effectively. Scenario planning and timely investments in public infrastructure will shape Austin's competitive positioning for decades. Transit expansions, water and energy systems, and digital connectivity are key needs for infrastructure attention.

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- Use integrated growth models combining demographic, economic, and infrastructure data to guide investments and policy adjustments.
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Traffic & Transit Priorities: Where Data and Leaders Align

By Kate Dibble, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research and Governance Committee

Growth Intensifies Transportation Strain

As Austin's population continues to surge, growing pains are unmistakable, especially on regional roadways. The Austin Metro area added thousands of residents in recent years, placing mounting pressure on commuting corridors already struggling with congestion. Traffic data and leader insights together paint a clear picture of the challenges and promise inherent in addressing mobility across high-growth transit corridors.

Congestion Data and Commuter Realities

Traffic congestion remains a defining issue locally. Recent analysis shows drivers lost an average of 38 hours in traffic delays in 2023—consistent with Austin's ranking as 21st worst for traffic in the U.S. Key corridors such as Interstate 35, MoPac, and US Highway 183 experience heavy commute volumes that strain infrastructure and frustrate residents. Yet, despite more vehicles on the road due to workforce's returns to offices, peak travel speeds have not worsened dramatically, reflecting complex factors such as flexible work hours and strategic traffic signal timing that already mitigate some pressure points.

Leaders Call for Layered Mobility Solutions

Leaders in roundtables reinforce this reality, emphasizing the importance of targeted transit solutions that balance immediate congestion relief with long-term regional planning. A common thread is the recognition that mobility challenges cannot be solved by expanding roads alone but require a layered approach mixing transit investments, demand management, and improvements to multimodal options.

Shared Priorities in Transit Planning

Key insights from transportation discussions highlight several priorities: identifying congestion hotspots and improving transit along high-growth corridors; boosting transit frequency and reliability to shift commuters from personal vehicles; and integrating land use and transportation planning to support walkable, mixed-use development connected to transit hubs.

Innovative Strategies and National Models

Case examples from peer metro areas show the value of data-driven corridor prioritization combined with flexible funding mechanisms to accelerate transit projects in equity-focused ways. For Austin, leveraging technologies that provide real-time transit tracking and seamless fare integration can improve rider experience, while targeted messaging and incentives encourage commuters to adopt transit or carpooling.

Traffic & Transit Priorities: Where Data and Leaders Align (cont'd)

Strategic Recommendations

For strategic leaders shaping Austin's mobility future, the following takeaways offer actionable guidance:

- Prioritize transit investments along identified congestion hotspots in growing suburban corridors to serve shifting travel patterns.
- Enhance transit service quality—frequency, safety, and reliability—to drive mode shift and reduce single-occupancy vehicle use.
- Align land use policies with transit infrastructure expansion to encourage compact, walkable communities around transit hubs.
- Implement transportation demand management strategies, including flexible work hours promotion and incentives for alternative commute modes.
- Foster cross-jurisdictional coordination among city, county, and state agencies to synchronize transit projects, roadway improvements, and land use goals.

Looking ahead, Austin's transit future hinges on balancing rapid growth with innovative, collaborative solutions that offer diverse, equitable mobility choices. Leaders who strategically integrate data insights with community priorities will enable a region where access, efficiency, and quality of life continue to strengthen despite increasing demands on the transportation network. This balanced approach is vital to ensure transit investments create lasting impact across Austin's evolving metropolitan landscape.



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Freight, Logistics & Regional Mobility Systems

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Central Texas leaders and residents agree that mobility is one of the region's defining challenges. Yet most of the public conversation — and most of the planning to date — has focused on commuter travel. Freight, logistics, and airport systems are less visible but equally critical. As one Caldwell County roundtable participant put it, “Our roads weren’t built for the trucks, but they’re carrying our economy now.”

Congestion, rural road damage, and gaps in airport access shape household quality of life, business competitiveness, and the region's ability to absorb growth. In the Austin Metro Resident Survey, congestion and commute times were repeatedly cited as reasons families might leave the region. Residents often mentioned the visible strain of trucks on local roads and the wear-and-tear that accelerates costs for counties and municipalities.

Bottom Line

Freight and logistics are invisible to many commuters, but they are central to the Austin Metro's economic future. Roundtables revealed the pressure on rural roads and airport access, while the resident survey made clear that congestion is driving relocation decisions. Equity, sustainability, and workforce factors only sharpen the stakes.

For strategic leaders, the mandate is to expand planning beyond cars and commuters. A comprehensive freight and logistics strategy will reduce congestion, protect neighborhood livability, and strengthen competitiveness—ensuring growth that is faster, fairer, and more resilient.

Key Insights from Research

• Freight Growth Tied to Industrial Expansion

Tesla's gigafactory in eastern Travis County and Samsung's expansion in Williamson County have intensified freight volumes along SH 130, SH 45, and surrounding arterials. E-commerce distribution hubs in Hays County are adding pressure to I-35, already one of the most congested freight corridors in the country.

• Rural Roads Under Strain

Caldwell County leaders emphasized the fragility of local roads, where heavy freight detours from I-35 and SH 130 cause rapid deterioration. Counties often lack the revenue base to keep pace with the damage. Bastrop roundtables noted similar issues along SH 71, where airport-related freight mixes with regional traffic.

• Airport Growth as a Regional Anchor

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) is expanding rapidly, serving both passengers and cargo. Williamson and Bastrop leaders highlighted the importance of linking airport growth with regional logistics planning. Without coordinated access, congestion near ABIA will ripple across the metro economy.

• Resident Concerns About Congestion and Livability

In the survey, congestion ranked as one of the top frustrations. Respondents linked commute stress not just to lost time, but to quality of life decisions — whether to remain in the Austin Metro or relocate. Freight contributes significantly to this daily congestion picture.

• Equity and Environmental Impacts

Freight corridors often pass through lower-income neighborhoods, where residents bear disproportionate exposure to diesel emissions, noise, and safety risks. Communities near I-35 and SH 71 described this as a public health concern as well as a mobility issue.

Freight, Logistics & Regional Mobility Systems (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

1. Integrate Freight into Mobility Planning

Expand CAMPO and TxDOT regional models to include freight movement, logistics hubs, and airport access as core components — not secondary considerations. Ensure freight planning is visible to the public, with clear connections to economic competitiveness.

3. Coordinate Airport and Logistics Strategy

Align ABIA's expansion with housing, transit, and workforce planning. Explore dedicated freight access routes and intermodal connections to reduce congestion and improve reliability for both cargo and passengers.

5. Advance Freight Sustainability

Incentivize adoption of electric and hydrogen trucks through charging and fueling infrastructure along key corridors. Work with airport authorities to incorporate sustainability standards into logistics expansion.

7. Recognize Logistics as a Workforce Sector

Logistics is not just infrastructure; it is a major employer. Partner with community colleges and workforce boards to expand training in trucking, warehouse management, and airport logistics. Linking mobility investment with job pipelines creates a win-win for the region.

2. Invest in Last-Mile Logistics Solutions

Designate and build urban distribution centers, truck parking, and delivery zones that reduce congestion in residential neighborhoods. Encourage employers and developers to co-fund last-mile facilities as part of site approvals.

4. Upgrade Rural Connectors

Prioritize improvements to Caldwell and Bastrop County roads that are absorbing freight spillover from I-35 and SH 130. Use state and federal infrastructure funding to offset local fiscal stress.

6. Protect Neighborhood Livability

Implement buffer zones, noise mitigation, and air quality monitoring in communities most affected by freight traffic. Tie these protections to corridor improvement funding.



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Water Sustainability & Infrastructure in Central Texas: Meeting the Challenges Ahead

By Kira Dell, Research & Governance Committee, CEO of Adaptive Water

Central Texas is experiencing immense growth, but its long-term prosperity depends on addressing critical water challenges. Austin's rapid expansion, combined with climate stress and aging infrastructure, places water sustainability at the forefront of regional priorities. Texas's population is projected to rise from 30 million in 2020 to more than 42 million by 2050, dramatically increasing water demand. Unchecked groundwater extraction has already created an imbalance where demand often exceeds supply, limiting development. As of 2020, 55% of Texas's water supplies still come from groundwater, with most major aquifers managed for depletion, while only 3% is from reliable water reuse. This situation impacts residential communities and can even mothball major industrial facilities like data centers and manufacturing plants that require substantial water. Texas also faces a multi-billion-dollar funding gap to repair aging infrastructure and expand utility capacity.



Kira Dell is the founder and CEO of Adaptive Water, a company that designs, builds, and operates building- and campus-scale water systems. Adaptive empowers commercial and industrial

facilities to capture, treat, and reuse diverse water sources—including greywater, rainwater, and AC condensate—helping reduce costs, ensure long-term water security, and protect ecosystems. Kira is a member of CREW Austin's Research & Governance Committee and serves on the Boards of Directors of several local nonprofits, including Texas Water Trade, Great Springs Project, and TreeFolks.

Strategies and Tactics for Success

Onsite water systems offer a resilient and cost-effective alternative to conventional water management. These systems harness diverse water sources available on a specific site—such as rainwater, graywater, and air conditioning condensate—and treat them to the quality needed for their intended use, all within the same location. This "fit-for-purpose" approach significantly reduces reliance and strain on municipal utilities, while boosting overall water security, much like rooftop solar stabilizes the electric grid.

When correctly designed and implemented, onsite water systems provide clear financial benefits. The "One Water" approach, which treats all water as a valuable resource, has demonstrated significant savings in water consumption, runoff reduction, and energy use, often with a potentially lower total cost range compared to conventional construction. Furthermore, embracing these solutions contributes to building climate-resilient communities that protect biodiversity and foster beneficial relationships with the natural world. Austin's 100-year Water Forward Plan exemplifies this by prioritizing expanded reclaimed water systems for non-potable uses and mandating water-saving technologies in new developments, including rainwater capture and AC condensate reuse.

Water Sustainability & Infrastructure in Central Texas: Meeting the Challenges Ahead

Examples In Texas

Austin's Permitting and Development Center (PDC) hosts Texas's first integrated onsite blackwater reuse system. The project features two key systems:

1 - OSCAR (On-Site Collection and Reuse): a 40,000-gallon underground system that collects rainwater and AC condensate for irrigation, conserving drinking water and saving energy.

2 - CLARA (Closed-Loop Advanced Reclaimed Assembly): treats up to 5,000 gallons of blackwater daily for toilet and urinal flushing. Dual plumbing ensures safe reuse, with purple-coded pipes for non-potable water. The project is projected to save 1.5 million gallons annually and cut potable use by 75%. Lessons from CLARA—like early coordination on backflow prevention—have streamlined future projects.

Blue Hole Primary School uses rainwater and AC condensate for flushing and irrigation, while treating graywater and blackwater for athletic fields. Paired with low-flow fixtures and rain gardens, the campus reduces demand and manages stormwater effectively.

San Antonio's Edwards Aquifer Protection Program (SAEPP), funded by a sales tax, has conserved over 240,000 acres, protecting the city's vital water supply.

Challenges and Opportunities

Community roundtables highlighted widespread concern over water reliability, environmental impact, and costs—underscoring the need for innovation and sustainable management. This presents a significant opportunity for commercial real estate leaders in Central Texas:

1 - Enabling Development: Onsite water solutions can remove water supply or wastewater capacity as a barrier for new projects, a critical factor for large industrial and commercial campuses that might otherwise face development halts due to insufficient water.

2 - Conducive Regulatory Environment: Texas has a unique regulatory landscape where water that is neither groundwater nor surface water is considered the property of the landowner. This water can be stored indefinitely and fully consumed without permits, allowing for virtually unlimited reuse. Austin's new ordinance requiring onsite reuse in most large developments further supports this trend.

3 - Addressing Capital Investment: While onsite solutions require substantial upfront capital, this challenge can be mitigated through phased implementation plans and by leveraging public and private partners to bridge funding gaps.

By embracing onsite solutions, Central Texas can secure its water future, meet regulatory requirements, and fuel economic growth. These systems reduce risk, conserve resources, and position the region as a leader in sustainable water management. The path forward is not just about solving immediate shortages but redefining water for the next century.

Heat, Flood and Grid Resilience for Critical Facilities

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Central Texas is warming, storms are intensifying, and grid disruptions remain fresh in memory. In this environment, resilience is not a “nice-to-have”—it is life-safety and continuity for the facilities that must not fail: hospitals and clinics, schools and shelter sites, water/wastewater utilities, and data centers.

CREW roundtables and resident input consistently elevated environmental risk, infrastructure reliability, and coordination gaps. Residents want credible action on water conservation, shade and cooling, and dependable services during extreme events. Leaders across the five-county Austin Metro can answer with a targeted portfolio that keeps lights on, water safe, schools open, and servers cool—even when the grid, heat, or floods say otherwise.

What’s At Risk – and What Works

Hospitals & clinics. Care delivery cannot ride out long outages or water loss. Emergency Water Supply Plans (EWSPs), on-site storage or alternate sources, and islandable power for ICUs, labs, pharmacies, and medical gases are essentials. Hospital or medical campus microgrids—often solar + battery + dispatchable generation—keep critical loads online when the grid fails.

Schools & resilience hubs. Schools double as community shelters. Designing “school-resilience hubs” with backup power, cooling, and water access ensures safe refuge and faster recovery. Priority upgrades include critical circuits on backup, select classroom and gym cooling, refrigeration for medications, and clean-air rooms during smoke or ozone days.

Water & wastewater. Power loss at plants or pump stations cascades into public health crises. Utilities should harden priority assets with backup generation, fuel plans, and flood-safe elevations for switchgear and controls, and establish system inerties so neighboring providers can share capacity during emergencies.

Data centers & essential businesses. Beyond diesel gensets, grid-interactive microgrids stabilize operations, shave peak demand, and create value on blue-sky days—improving ROI while hardening for extremes.

Extreme heat along everyday routes. “Cool corridors”—dense shade, reflective or cool pavements, hydration access—reduce heat stress along routes to schools, clinics, transit, and workplaces. Pairing urban forestry with cool surfaces yields the biggest temperature and comfort gains, especially in high-exposure neighborhoods.

Tools Leaders Can Deploy Now

- 1) Critical-facility microgrids (with storage).** Prioritize hospitals, emergency operations centers, high-need schools, and key water/wastewater nodes. Pre-design typical configurations, standardize interconnection requirements with utilities, and structure long-term service or energy-as-a-service contracts to lower upfront cost.
- 2) Backup water & inerties.** Require EWSPs for hospitals, large shelters, and high-occupancy facilities. Add on-site storage where feasible and build inerties between water systems. Map portable treatment/booster assets for rapid deployment.

Heat, Flood and Grid Resilience for Critical Facilities (cont'd)

Tools Leaders Can Deploy Now (Continued)

- 3) **Cool-corridor standards.** Adopt corridor typologies (school routes, clinic approaches, transit feeders) with minimum shade factors, cool-surface specifications, and hydration access. Align with canopy targets and equity maps to prioritize vulnerable areas.
- 4) **Resilient materials & design.** Elevate critical equipment above base flood levels; use flood-resistant materials on ground floors; specify cool roofs and façades for shelters and clinics; add floodproofing at pump stations and substation controls.
- 5) **Finance at scale.** Braid funding: combine hazard-mitigation grants, local bonds, utility resilience programs, and private capital. Consider resilience or environmental impact bonds to share performance risk on innovative cooling or stormwater projects. Structure district-scale energy/water projects as public-private partnerships where appropriate.

A Regional Playbook for Action

- **Set the list.** Identify 20–30 priority critical facilities across the five counties (hospitals/clinics, high-need schools, key pump stations, and one data center cluster). Publish a shared slate with owners, utilities, and emergency managers.
- **Standardize design.** Adopt a Resilient Critical Facilities Standard covering islandable power, EWSPs, equipment elevation, air quality zones, and cool-corridor access to each site.

- **Sequence funding.** Build a rolling pipeline: quick wins (portable backup, selective hardening), mid-term (microgrids/EWSPs), long-term (district-scale thermal or water loops). Align grant cycles with local bonds to maximize match.

- **Measure what matters.** Track outage-hour reduction at critical loads, avoided service disruptions (e.g., boil-water notices), wet-bulb globe temperature improvements along corridors, and time-to-reopen metrics for schools and clinics.

- **Collaborate—visibly.** Establish a cross-jurisdiction Resilience Steering Group (utilities, health systems, ISDs, counties/cities, major employers). Report progress publicly to rebuild trust and accelerate replication.

Bottom Line: Residents want conservation, shade, and reliability. Leaders can deliver with a focused, fundable, and measurable resilience portfolio that protects life-safety and keeps essential services running when it matters most.



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SECTION 3

HEALTH, SAFETY & WELLBEING

- 3.1 Investing in Health Infrastructure for Resilient Communities *(Nina Murrell)*
- 3.2 Public Safety: The Foundation of Thriving Communities *(Tom Walsh)*
- 3.3 Climate Readiness Beyond Infrastructure — Air, Land & Water Stewardship *(Nina Murrell)*
- 3.4 Green Space & Quality of Life: Growth Impacts on Livability *(Dawn James)*
- 3.5 Wellness & Inclusivity in the Green Space Equation *(Dawn James)*
- 3.6 Equity & Inclusivity in Green Spaces: Meeting Communities Where They Are *(Dawn James)*
- 3.7 Aging in Place & the Care Economy *(Dawn James)*

Investing in Health Infrastructure for Resilient Communities

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

As the Austin Metro grows, leaders face a pressing truth: health is infrastructure. Just as schools, roads, and utilities anchor community growth, access to healthcare and mental health services is foundational to economic vitality, workforce stability, and quality of life. Roundtables across the region flagged gaps in hospital capacity, behavioral health, and primary care as urgent issues. Participants emphasized that without stronger health systems, population growth will outpace care access—straining families, employers, and communities alike.

Why Health is Infrastructure

Economic Competitiveness.

Communities with strong healthcare access attract residents and employers. Businesses weigh access to quality care when deciding where to locate, knowing it directly affects workforce productivity.

Resilience.

The pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of regions lacking adequate health systems. Hospitals, clinics, and mental health services are as vital to resilience as roads and power grids.

Equity.

Disparities in health access mirror inequities in housing, education, and employment. Addressing them is essential to inclusive growth.

Building a Health-Ready Region

Positioning health and wellbeing as infrastructure is not only about hospitals—it is about building a health-ready region that can sustain growth, attract employers, and protect residents. Just as strategic leaders invest in roads to move goods or schools to educate workers, they must now invest in clinics, mental health systems, and preventative care to keep people thriving.

Communities that align health with infrastructure planning will stand out as destinations of choice for families and businesses. Those that do not will face stalled growth, workforce shortages, and deepening inequities. The choice is clear: leaders who champion health as infrastructure will secure not only resilience but also competitiveness in the decades ahead.

Investing in Health Infrastructure for Resilient Communities (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

Include Healthcare in Planning Like Roads or Schools.

Growth plans should designate healthcare facilities as core infrastructure. Just as every new subdivision accounts for roads and schools, comprehensive plans should project demand for clinics, hospitals, and mental health centers. This ensures health capacity grows alongside population.

Incentivize Healthcare Investment in Underserved Areas. Counties and cities can use tax incentives, expedited permitting, or land grants to attract providers to communities where access is thin. Partnerships with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and nonprofits can expand services in rural and low-income areas.

Expand Mental Health as a Workforce Strategy.

Employers report that untreated stress and burnout reduce productivity and retention. Regional leaders can support workplace wellness collaboratives, expand Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), and integrate behavioral health providers into primary care clinics.

Integrate Health Facilities into Community Hubs. Co-locating health services with schools, libraries, and community centers increases access and reduces stigma. Williamson and Hays counties are already experimenting with multi-service hubs that bring healthcare closer to residents. Leaders should expand these models region-wide.

Partner with Education and Workforce Systems.

Training more healthcare professionals locally is critical. Collaborations with community colleges and universities can expand nursing, behavioral health, and medical technician pipelines. Scholarships and loan forgiveness programs tied to local service can help retain talent.

Use Data to Target Resources. Survey insights show residents are highly concerned about quality of life and public services. Leaders should map gaps in healthcare access, track wait times and use health equity data to direct investments where need is greatest.



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Public Safety: The Foundation of Thriving Communities

By Tom Walsh, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

The Overview

Public Safety is more than police stations and firehouses — it is the foundation that allows Central Texans to live, work, and play with confidence. Communities thrive when residents feel safe on their streets, confident in their emergency response systems, and assured that their health and well-being are protected. Safety is not an isolated service; it is the connective tissue linking quality of life, economic vitality, and community resilience.

CREW Austin's Leaps & Bounds 2025 research reinforced this reality: "Transportation safety, mental health support, and emergency preparedness were identified across Central Texas as essential foundations for quality of life." These findings echo what residents and leaders know intuitively — that Public Safety is the prerequisite for every other aspiration we hold for the region.

Central Texas is experiencing unprecedented growth. From Travis County's urban core to Williamson's suburban boom and Hays and Bastrop's expanding communities, population and economic expansion are transforming the region. With this growth comes opportunity, but also pressure. Public Safety has emerged as a critical enabler of sustainable growth, one that influences nearly every facet of community life.

Key Dynamics

Economic Development: Safe communities attract investment. Businesses want to locate where employees and customers feel secure, and visitors are more likely to support local commerce in vibrant, well-protected districts.

Placemaking & Identity: Cultural districts, parks, and historic downtowns depend on a strong sense of security. Public Safety allows communities to showcase their identity without fear of crime, neglect, or deterioration.

Work/Life Balance: For families and employers alike, safety is central to livability. From commuting to recreation, residents expect to move through their day without anxiety about basic security.

Mental & Public Health Access: Leaders stressed that expanded behavioral health care, mobile crisis units, and integrated community health services are inseparable from Public Safety. A community is not truly safe if residents cannot access timely and affordable care.

Emergency Preparedness & Resilience: Wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events are pressing regional threats. Proactive investments in resilient infrastructure, fire-resistant building, and regional response hubs are no longer optional — they are essential elements of Public Safety.

Public Safety: The Foundation of Thriving Communities (cont'd)

Shared Regional Concerns

Travis County: Trust between public officials and residents was highlighted as critical for effective safety and resilience efforts.

Williamson County: Rapid growth is driving demand for crisis intervention and expanded healthcare infrastructure.

Hays County: Sidewalks near schools, safe multimodal transit, and transportation safety were flagged as urgent public safety priorities.

Bastrop County: Sustainability and wildfire-resilient infrastructure were identified as essential for long-term community safety.

Caldwell County: Road safety, affordable housing, and workforce training were emphasized as essential to reducing long commutes and supporting community resilience.

The Path Forward

As Central Texas continues to attract residents and businesses, Public Safety must remain a focal point of growth management. This means building modern facilities, expanding healthcare and behavioral health access, and investing in resilient infrastructure designed to withstand natural disasters. It also means fostering trust, communication, and equity so that safety is shared across every neighborhood.

A thriving Austin Metro is not possible without a strong foundation of Public Safety. By centering health, preparedness, and trust, we can ensure that Central Texas remains the place we all love to live, work, and play.



Tom Walsh is a Business Development Leader at DLR Group, an integrated design firm, where he specializes in growing the firm's Justice + Civic practice across Texas.

With a focus on public safety, courts, detention, and civic facilities, Tom works closely with stakeholders and industry partners to help communities translate growth into long-term, sustainable facility solutions. Drawing on DLR Group's integrated design expertise and national subject matter expertise, Tom is dedicated to building trusted relationships and aligning stakeholders around data-driven planning, operational efficiency, and long-term maintainability. He is actively helping local governments prepare for upcoming bond programs, capital improvement plans, and aggressive project timelines.

Climate Readiness Beyond Infrastructure — Air, Land & Water Stewardship

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Issue

In the Austin Metro, climate impacts are not abstract. Roundtable participants and resident survey responses consistently voiced concerns in personal terms:

“Can I breathe clean air?”

“Will my family have water?”

“Is it safe to live here with fires, floods, and heat?”

These are not simply questions of infrastructure planning—they are matters of daily wellbeing.

Air quality, drought, wildfire, and sprawl-related land loss are pressing realities that shape whether residents feel they can stay and thrive in Central Texas. While leaders often categorize these issues under utilities or environmental compliance, communities experience them as health, equity, and resilience challenges. Unless strategic action is taken, the Austin Metro risks eroding its most valued assets: livability, attractiveness to employers, and public confidence in regional leadership.

Key Insights from Research

Air Quality as a Workforce & Health Issue

Survey respondents emphasized health and quality of life as top priorities. Increasing ozone days and degraded air quality directly affect children, older adults, and outdoor workers—cutting into school readiness, labor productivity, and healthcare costs. Poor air quality is no longer a background issue; it is a determinant of whether families feel safe raising children in the region.

Drought & Water Security as Daily Worries

Residents in Bastrop and Caldwell Counties voiced anxiety about whether basic water supplies can keep pace with rapid housing development. In Travis and Williamson Counties, businesses raised concerns about water reliability as a factor in site selection. Drought is not just about reservoirs—it is about whether households and employers can count on a stable, affordable water supply.

Wildfire & Floods as Community Safety Issues

Roundtables in Hays and Bastrop highlighted wildfire preparedness as a rising priority. Families worry about property loss, insurance costs, and evacuation safety. Flooding in low-lying neighborhoods compounds these risks. These are not episodic events; they are recurring stresses shaping household stability and insurance markets.

Stewardship as Equity

Survey data revealed strong support for green space, clean water, and livability—particularly in underserved neighborhoods where access to nature and climate buffers is limited. When air, water, and land stewardship are uneven, inequities deepen. Those least able to relocate are the ones most exposed to risk.

Climate Readiness Beyond Infrastructure — Air, Land & Water Stewardship (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

1 - Frame Stewardship as Health Infrastructure

Treat air quality, water security, and wildfire planning with the same urgency as hospitals, roads, or schools. Position these systems as foundational to public health and economic resilience, not optional amenities.

2 - Publish Regional Climate Dashboards

Residents and employers want transparency. A shared, five-county dashboard tracking ozone levels, drought severity, and wildfire risk would build public trust and allow coordinated decision-making.

3 - Protect and Expand Natural Buffers

Preserve tree canopy, riparian corridors, and open lands through conservation easements, tax incentives, and land trust partnerships. Natural buffers are cost-effective defenses against both heat and flooding.

4 - Embed Stewardship in Growth Approvals

Condition large-scale development approvals on plans for water conservation, air quality mitigation, and heat-resilient design. Require clear metrics—such as gallons per day secured or canopy added per acre—and enforce them through transparent reporting.

The Opportunity

Stewardship is not just about climate resilience; it is about daily wellbeing. Residents feel climate impacts through air quality, water reliability, and home safety. For Central Texas leaders, the charge is clear: treat stewardship as core infrastructure, build it into growth decisions, and share the benefits equitably. Communities that act now will both withstand climate stresses and remain places where families and businesses choose to thrive.

5 - Strengthen Cross-County Emergency Planning

Expand interlocal agreements for wildfire suppression, evacuation routes, and drought response. Residents experience climate risks across county lines; our planning must do the same.

6 - Engage Employers in Resilience

Encourage employers to invest in shade, air filtration, and water efficiency at worksites, and to adopt flexible scheduling during high-risk climate days. This protects workforce health and reduces economic disruption.

7 - Link Stewardship to Equity Goals

Target investments in vulnerable neighborhoods where survey data show residents already lack access to safe green space or reliable utilities. Co-locate climate investments with parks, clinics, and transit to maximize community benefit.



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Green Space & Quality of Life: Growth Impacts on Livability

By Dawn James, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member, Design Team Lead

Keeping Nature at the Heart of our Metro

Greater Austin is at an inflection point. Rapid population and employment growth are reshaping land use, transportation, housing and *the availability and feel of our green spaces*. Across CREW Austin's roundtables and resident survey, a clear theme emerged: as development intensifies, green space is too often pushed to the margins, especially in fast-growing corridors and historically underserved neighborhoods.

What We Heard from the Research

Participants described patterns across the metro:

- Diminishing and fragmented green space in new growth areas—fewer shaded streets, hotter public realms, and less everyday contact with nature.
- Uneven access and quality—residents in lower-income neighborhoods reported longer trips to reach safe, usable parks and fewer comfortable places to gather close to home.
- Heat and comfort pressures—loss of canopy makes outdoor life harder for children, elders, and workers, limiting activity during much of the year.
- Identity and cohesion at risk—fewer shared green places mean fewer chances to meet neighbors, build trust, and sustain neighborhood character.

These are not abstract concerns. They affect daily life walks to school, lunchtime breaks, after-work decompression, and they shape how people feel about staying in Austin over time.

Why It Matters to Livability

Green space is essential infrastructure. It supports physical and mental health, reduces heat exposure, invites social connection, and anchors neighborhood identity. For employers and civic leaders competing for talent, it's also a retention strategy: people are more likely to put down roots where everyday environments feel restorative, welcoming, and connected.

From Concern to Opportunity

Austin already has a strong local north star. The **Climate Equity Plan** elevates equitable access to parks and nature, expanded tree canopy, and protection of natural lands as pillars of resilience. **Austin Energy Green Building** guidelines encourage native landscaping, mature tree protection, and biophilic design across project types. And, as an optional global reference point, **LEED for Cities & Communities** offers a benchmarking framework for park proximity, per-capita green space, and natural resource protection.

The win for leaders is to **pair Austin's goals with clear implementation moves** so growth decisions consistently deliver shade, access, and a sense of place in the neighborhoods that need them most.

Green Space & Quality of Life: Growth Impacts on Livability (cont'd)

What Leaders Can Do Now

1. Make Green Infrastructure a Growth Catalyst

Incentivize (and in key corridors, require) green roofs, living walls, and shaded public plazas so new development delivers both climate performance and market appeal.

2. Build Pocket Parks and Micro-Nature Networks

Convert underused parcels, easements, and parking edges into small parks connected by “cool routes” – continuous, shaded walking and biking links that stitch daily life back to nature.

3. Braid Green Space into Mobility Investments

Treat sidewalks, transit stops, trails, and complete streets as **green infrastructure projects** with canopy targets, native plantings, and heat-safe waiting areas designed in from the start.

4. Bring Nature into the Workplace

Encourage employers to integrate rooftop terraces, courtyards, pollinator gardens, and views to landscape boosting well-being and making on-site time more attractive.

5. Co-Create and Protect with Communities

Form partnerships among city leaders, developers, and community land trusts to acquire, program, and steward green space in fast-changing areas so amenities reflect local culture and remain accessible over time.

The Path Forward

Greater Austin’s growth story is being written now. If we embed green space into site plans, corridor investments, and district frameworks, guided by local equity goals and informed by widely recognized benchmarks, we can add people and jobs **without** losing the everyday nature that makes this place beautiful and livable.

This is CREW’s takeaway from the research: **treat green space as core infrastructure**, design for comfort and inclusion in the places residents actually move through, and measure success by whether every neighborhood gains real, daily access to nature. That’s how growth and quality of life move forward together.



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Wellness & Inclusivity in the Green Space Equation

By Dawn James, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member, Design Team Lead

Designing a Metro Where Everyone Thrives

Greater Austin's story isn't just about how fast we're growing, it's about who gets to benefit from that growth. Green space is an essential part of public health, social equity, and the identity of our communities. CREW Austin's research, built from cross-sector roundtables and resident insights, shows that when green space is unevenly distributed or disappears altogether, we're not just losing trees and trails. We're losing daily opportunities for connection, restoration, and belonging.

Shade on a walk to school, a safe park to meet neighbors, a quiet green corner to decompress after work—these small, daily moments shape health outcomes and community pride. When they disappear, the impact is felt most in neighborhoods already facing environmental and social inequities.

The Wellness & Inclusivity Imperative

When we talk about parks, trails, and natural areas, we're really talking about access. And access is more than just distance on a map—it's about how safe, welcoming, and functional those spaces are for everyone. That means:

- **Designing for diverse abilities:** sensory-friendly spaces, accessible trails, and features that invite participation from people of all ages and abilities.
- **Culturally relevant spaces:** programming and design that reflect the heritage, values, and needs of the surrounding community.
- **Daily-life integration:** green spaces woven into the routes we already take, not just weekend destinations.

Why This Matters Now

Austin's **Climate Equity Plan** already makes the link clear: expanding tree canopy, protecting natural lands, and ensuring equitable access to parks are as much about people as they are about the environment. CREW roundtables echoed this priority, emphasizing that green space is just as critical to mental health and social cohesion as it is to climate resilience.

Global frameworks such as the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** reinforce the connection. Green space contributes directly to:

- Good Health & Wellbeing (SDG 3): reducing stress, encouraging activity, cooling urban heat.
- Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10): addressing historical imbalances in access to nature.
- Sustainable Cities & Communities (SDG 11): embedding social infrastructure into growth plans.
- Climate Action (SDG 13): buffering extreme heat and flooding.
- Life on Land (SDG 15): preserving habitats and biodiversity.

By aligning Austin's plan with these broader objectives, local leaders can amplify progress and strengthen the metro's reputation for sustainable, people-centered growth.

Wellness & Inclusivity in the Green Space Equation (cont'd)

Innovative Ideas for a Wellness-Centered Metro

1. **Community Co-Design Studios.** Bring residents, designers, and public health experts together early in the planning process to shape parks and public spaces that feel safe, inclusive, and welcoming.
2. **Neighborhood Healing Spaces.** Create small, distributed green “restorative zones”—benches under shade trees, gardens near clinics, contemplative spaces in busy commercial areas—to give people a quick mental health reset.
3. **Equitable Park Programming.** Pair physical improvements with free or low-cost programs like fitness classes, cultural events, and gardening workshops to activate spaces for everyone.
4. **Climate-Responsive Comfort.** Use shaded walking routes, misting stations, and native plantings to make outdoor spaces usable in extreme heat, especially in historically heat-vulnerable neighborhoods.
5. **Green Jobs for Local Talent.** Partner with workforce programs to train and employ residents in planting, maintaining, and programming green spaces, creating local economic and environmental benefits.

From Vision to Reality

This is not a “nice to have.” The future health, resilience, and identity of the Austin metro depends on how well we integrate green space into the daily lives of every resident. By aligning Austin’s Climate Equity Plan with globally recognized wellness and equity goals, we can build a metro where access to nature is not a privilege—it’s a shared right.

A greener, more inclusive Austin is a healthier, stronger Austin. And that’s a legacy worth leaving.



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Equity & Inclusivity in Green Spaces: Meeting Communities Where They Are

By Dawn James, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member, Design Team Lead

CREW Austin's research makes clear that the region's growth is not shared equally. While some neighborhoods enjoy well-connected parks, shaded trails, and recreational amenities, others, particularly in historically underserved parts of the metro, face fragmented or absent green space. Our roundtables and resident surveys show that the question isn't whether Austin grows greener, but who gets to benefit from that green.

Survey results highlighted disparities in how residents experience the outdoors. For some, nearby trails and parks are essential to daily routines, while others described long travel times, unsafe conditions, or lack of facilities that meet their needs. This uneven distribution of green space deepens health inequities and undermines community cohesion.

What Inclusivity Looks Like

To bridge these gaps, green spaces must move beyond being simply "available" to being truly **welcoming and functional**. Roundtable discussions surfaced several promising practices:

- **Inclusive Design Standards:** ensuring paths, signage, and amenities meet accessibility standards while also considering sensory and cognitive needs.
- **Community-Defined Programming:** events, classes, and cultural celebrations shaped with local residents to reflect shared values.
- **Everyday Integration:** embedding safe, shaded, and well-marked green routes into commutes, school walks, and transit connections so access is woven into daily life.

Why Equity & Inclusivity Matter

Equitable access to green space is not just about environmental benefits—it is about belonging, health, and social trust. Roundtable participants emphasized that when spaces reflect the culture, needs, and safety of surrounding residents, they become true community assets. Without that alignment, parks risk being underused or even avoided.

Leaders across real estate, public health, and policy pointed to three key gaps:

- **Design gaps:** parks and trails not designed with accessibility in mind, limiting use by older adults, children, and people with disabilities.
- **Cultural gaps:** lack of programming or design elements that reflect community heritage or multilingual needs.
- **Safety gaps:** concerns about lighting, crime, or maintenance that discourage families and individuals from using available green space.

Equity & Inclusivity in Green Spaces: Meeting Communities Where They Are (cont'd)

Innovative Ideas for a Wellness-Centered Metro

Several actionable strategies emerged from CREW Austin's research:

1. **Neighborhood Partnerships.** Partner with schools, clinics, and local nonprofits to co-locate green space with trusted community anchors.
2. **Safety by Design.** Incorporate lighting, clear sightlines, and regular maintenance plans to ensure that residents feel secure using parks and trails at all times of day.
3. **Heritage & Cultural Reflection.** Include art, signage, and programming that honor local histories and cultural traditions, reinforcing pride of place.
4. **Flexible & Multi-Use Spaces.** Design spaces that adapt—from playgrounds doubling as event sites to shaded plazas that serve as both markets and community meeting points.
5. **Resident Leadership.** Establish neighborhood advisory councils with decision-making authority over green space design, programming, and upkeep.

From Vision to Action

Green space equity cannot be solved by acreage alone. True inclusivity requires designing with, not just for, the community—meeting people where they are and ensuring that all residents, regardless of neighborhood or background, can share in the health and social benefits of nature.

Austin's future depends on it. As the metro continues to expand, embedding inclusivity into green space strategies is essential to building a healthier, more cohesive, and more equitable region.



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Aging in Place & the Care Economy

By Dawn James, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member, Design Team Lead

Design for Austin's Growing 65+ Population

Austin's rapid growth isn't just about attracting young professionals or building new tech campuses. The region's 65+ population is one of the fastest-growing demographics, and with it comes a new set of design and service needs that will shape the future of our metro. Roundtable discussions and survey responses revealed a consistent concern: How do we create an Austin where older adults can thrive, remain connected, and access care without leaving their communities?

The Local Challenge

Across Greater Austin, residents described gaps in housing and transportation that directly impact aging in place. For some, aging comfortably means modifying an existing home or living close to family. For others, it means downsizing into more accessible, community-oriented housing. But with affordability pressures mounting and uneven access to transit and services, the reality is that many older adults may be pushed to the margins — both physically and socially.

Survey participants echoed these concerns, flagging mobility limitations, long travel times to medical services, and the lack of affordable options as barriers to remaining in their neighborhoods. Without intentional planning, Austin risks creating pockets of isolation rather than communities of connection.

Why This Matters for Growth

Planning for aging is not a niche issue — it's central to building a resilient metro. Designing housing, transportation, and care solutions for older adults has ripple effects across the economy and the entire population:

- **Housing flexibility** supports both aging residents and younger families navigating affordability challenges.
- **Mobility and access improvements** benefit workers, students, and caregivers alike.
- **Caregiver pipelines** strengthen not only healthcare but also the broader workforce, addressing one of Austin's most pressing labor shortages.

In short, what works for aging residents works for everyone.

Aging in Place & the Care Economy (cont'd)

Key Opportunities for Leaders

1. Neighborhood-Based Housing Diversity

Accessory dwelling units (ADUs), senior-friendly apartments, and mixed-age communities can provide affordable, accessible housing while supporting family care networks. Austin's land development code revisions and ongoing density debates make this a timely opportunity to align housing policy with aging-in-place strategies.

2. Mobility on Demand

Roundtable participants highlighted that access is often the dealbreaker. Investing in neighborhood mobility hubs, micro-transit, and walkable corridors reduces isolation and creates age-friendly connectivity that benefits all residents.

3. Home Modification Programs

Small changes like ramps, wider doorways, and accessible bathrooms can extend the livability of existing homes by decades. Expanding local funding and partnerships with developers and contractors can scale these interventions quickly.

4. Caregiver Workforce Development

Survey results underscored the stress families face in finding reliable, affordable caregiving. By supporting caregiver training pipelines, employers and civic leaders can both stabilize a critical workforce and meet growing community needs.

5. Mixed-Use Wellness Anchors

Embedding clinics, wellness centers, and social spaces into neighborhood growth plans ensures that aging residents don't need to travel across the metro for basic services. These hubs double as gathering places, strengthening community ties across generations.

A Design Imperative for Austin's Future

Aging in place is not just about healthcare—it's about dignity, connection, and choice. Austin's growth offers an unprecedented chance to design neighborhoods that work for residents across the lifespan. By integrating housing diversity, mobility, and care solutions into growth plans, we can create a metro where older adults remain vital members of their communities.

The care economy is not on the horizon—it's here. Strategic leaders who embrace this reality now will help shape an Austin where aging is not an afterthought, but a shared success. **CREW Austin's research highlights this moment as both a challenge and an opportunity, calling on civic, corporate, and community leaders to design for inclusion across generations.**



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SECTION 4

CULTURE, HERITAGE & COMMUNITY IDENTITY

- 4.1 The Art of Well-Being: Linking Culture & Health in Central Texas (*Nina Murrell*)
- 4.2 Preserving Central Texas' Culture Amid Accelerated Growth (*Tom Walsh*)
- 4.3 Preserving Historic Legacies: A Strategic Imperative for Regional Leaders (*Nina Murrell*)
- 4.4 The Case for Creativity: Protecting Cultural Heritage in a Time of Growth (*Nina Murrell*)

The Art of Well-Being: Linking Culture & Health in Central Texas

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Central Texas leaders are facing dual pressures: a growing population with rising health needs, and the demand to maintain livability in one of the nation's fastest-growing metros. The arts—often viewed as entertainment or tourism assets—are emerging as a proven tool for health, resilience, and community well-being. National research shows that integrating the arts into healthcare reduces stress, shortens recovery times, and improves mental health outcomes. For Central Texas, where affordability pressures, aging populations, and workforce stress are mounting, the arts represent not a luxury, but essential infrastructure for health.

Health Pressures Across the Metro

Growth around the region has fueled opportunity but also strain:

- **Mental health challenges are rising**, with residents citing stress from cost-of-living and long commutes as top reasons they might leave the region.
- **Aging populations** in Williamson and Hays Counties are creating demand for services that support independence and social connection.
- **Community resilience is tested** in counties across our region as residents face recovery and displacement from natural disasters.

Traditional healthcare models cannot solve these challenges alone. Leaders need new tools.

The Case for Arts in Health

Evidence is clear:

- Patients exposed to art or music in hospitals experience less pain, lower anxiety, and shorter recovery times.
- Older adults in creative aging programs show improved cognitive function, reduced isolation, and lower healthcare costs.
- Community arts programs following disasters foster collective healing and social resilience.

The **Texas Cultural Trust's 2025 State of the Arts Report** underscores the broader economic value: the arts contribute \$8.9 billion to Texas GDP annually and support 1 in 15 jobs statewide. In health, the ROI is just as powerful: every dollar invested in arts-based therapies saves multiple dollars in reduced hospital stays and improved patient outcomes.

Emerging Central Texas Examples

- Dell Children's Medical Center integrates music therapy and storytelling into patient care.
- San Marcos and Georgetown senior centers offer arts-based programs that reduce isolation among older adults.
- Bastrop County community mural projects after wildfires have supported trauma recovery and community pride.

These initiatives are proof points. Scaling them across the metro could position Central Texas as a national leader in creative care.

The Art of Well-Being: Linking Culture & Health in Central Texas (cont'd)

Levers to Advance Arts and Health Initiatives

- **Policy and Funding:** Dedicate a small portion of healthcare budgets, hotel occupancy taxes, or city arts funds to arts-in-health programs. For example, cities could expand Austin's cultural funding model to include partnerships with hospitals and senior centers.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Encourage hospitals, health insurers, and employers to co-fund creative care pilots with arts nonprofits. A single pilot in a senior living facility could demonstrate savings and scalability.
- **Creative Aging Programs:** Launch low-cost, high-impact arts programs in senior centers across Williamson and Hays Counties, where aging populations are rapidly growing.
- **Workforce Integration:** Partner with Austin Community College and Texas State to train healthcare providers in arts-based interventions, expanding reach while creating new career pathways.
- **Resilience Planning:** Integrate arts into county emergency recovery plans, ensuring cultural expression is part of how communities rebuild after disasters.
- **Philanthropy & Corporate Sponsorship:** Companies can align giving with community health goals by supporting arts-in-health initiatives, gaining both brand visibility and workforce wellness benefits.

Moving Forward

For Central Texas, investing in the arts as a health strategy is not about nostalgia or “extras”—it is about saving money, strengthening resilience, and building healthier communities. As the region grows, leaders have a choice: treat the arts as an afterthought, or embrace them as essential infrastructure for health and well-being.

By committing to creative care strategies—whether through hospital partnerships, senior programs, or community recovery initiatives—Central Texas can set a national example. Growth and health challenges will continue, but the arts give us a human-centered tool to address them, ensuring this region thrives not only in numbers, but in spirit and well-being.



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Preserving Central Texas' Culture Amid Accelerated Growth

By Tom Walsh, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

Austin's explosive growth story brings both promise and peril. From thriving tech hubs to evolving neighborhoods, the region is in the midst of transformation, but not without costs. During this evolution, one local voice captures the stakes succinctly. Actor and Austin native Matthew McConaughey has said:

"What we have to watch in Austin is the preservation of our DNA... the two words I hear over and over again are 'hospitality' and 'optimism.'... Our challenge is going to be how we handle this great influx. If any place has an identity in the soul that we need to preserve, it's Austin."

McConaughey's words resonate with what leaders and residents are saying: safeguarding cultural character isn't just sentimental, it's strategic.

Why Identity Matters for Regional Strategy

A distinctive sense of place is a competitive advantage. It attracts talent, supports local economies, and fosters civic pride. If the Austin Metro loses that uniqueness, it risks becoming indistinguishable from other fast-growing regions. Leaders across sectors agree that preservation is not about resisting growth but shaping it so it reflects community values.

Calls For Cultural Legacy Stewardship

In CREW Austin's Leaps and Bounds roundtables, leaders from every county voiced concern about balancing growth with identity:

- **Travis County:** Calls for cultural district zoning, "community character audits," and legacy business protections.
- **Williamson County:** Linking heritage tourism to historic preservation, while large tech giants like Samsung enter the neighborhood
- **Hays County:** Conservation development to retain open space and placemaking on the San Marcos River
- **Bastrop County:** Storytelling and cultural initiatives to resist becoming a bedroom community of Austin.
- **Caldwell County:** Zoning updates to protect historic town centers.
- **Metro-wide:** Creative placemaking, public art, and small business incubators to keep communities grounded amid change.

Survey responses underscore the same themes:

- **91%** report rising living costs, with housing affordability the second-most common reason they might leave.
- **69%** say parks and public spaces are among the top features keeping them rooted.
- **Over half** rate regional collaboration as ineffective, citing disconnects between leaders and community priorities.

These pressures—affordability, green space, and trust in governance, are inseparable from the preservation conversation.

Preserving Central Texas' Culture Amid Accelerated Growth (cont'd)

Strategies That Work

From the research, several actionable pathways emerge:

1. Make identity a policy priority: embed preservation into economic development, zoning, and infrastructure plans.
2. Support cultural anchors: provide targeted tax relief, grants, or rent stabilization for legacy businesses and cultural institutions.
3. Use placemaking to blend old and new: integrate public art, history, and walkability into new projects.
4. Pair preservation with affordability: prevent displacement in culturally significant areas through land trusts and mixed-use zoning.
5. Engage communities directly: participatory planning, multilingual outreach, and cultural advisory boards.

Spotlight: Bastrop County

Bastrop is weaving cultural preservation into growth through storytelling, design guidelines, and local business incubation. By connecting identity to economic opportunity, leaders are ensuring that growth amplifies the community character.

Conclusion

As the Austin Metro grows, the question isn't whether change will happen— it's whether the region will manage that change in a way that preserves the DNA McConaughy describes. Leaders who succeed will ensure that as the Region grows, the sense of belonging, creativity, and local pride endures.



Tom Walsh is a Business Development Leader at DLR Group, an integrated design firm, where he specializes in growing the firm's Justice + Civic practice across Texas. With a focus on public safety, courts, detention, and civic facilities, Tom works closely with stakeholders and industry partners to help communities translate growth into long-term, sustainable facility solutions. Drawing on DLR Group's integrated design expertise and national subject matter expertise, Tom is dedicated to building trusted relationships and aligning stakeholders around data-driven planning, operational efficiency, and long-term maintainability. He is actively helping local governments prepare for upcoming bond programs, capital improvement plans, and aggressive project timelines.

Preserving Historic Legacies: A Strategic Imperative for Regional Leaders

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Across the Austin Metro, rapid growth brings both opportunity and risk. Our region is celebrated for vibrant downtowns, historic main streets, and cultural districts that anchor community identity. Yet rising costs, displacement pressures, and uneven development are threatening these very assets. CREW's survey revealed that residents deeply value a "sense of belonging" and strong local culture, but fear losing it as affordability declines and growth accelerates. Whether a century-old courthouse, a family-owned business, or a beloved music venue, Roundtable participants likewise warned that cultural anchors cannot be taken for granted. Without deliberate action, growth will erode the very places that distinguish Central Texas from anywhere else.

Historic downtowns from Georgetown's courthouse square to Bastrop's art-centered main street demonstrate how adaptive reuse and cultural programming can fuel both economic vitality and social connection. When vacant or underused buildings are repurposed into mixed-use hubs, coworking spaces, or cultural venues, they not only reduce waste and preserve history but also reinforce pride of place. Cultural districts play a similar role: they act as "identity engines," drawing visitors, supporting the creative economy, and strengthening a community's brand. Survey respondents affirmed that preserving local culture is as important to livability as affordable housing or reliable infrastructure.

Tools for Preservation and Renewal

Adaptive Reuse as a Development Strategy. Tax incentives, grants, and expedited permitting can tip the scales in favor of rehabilitation. Flexible zoning codes and public-private partnerships also help bring historic buildings back to life. In Bastrop, the Lost Pines Art Center transformed a historic school into a thriving arts complex with studios, galleries, and community programming. In San Marcos, warehouse districts are being adapted into cultural and entrepreneurial hubs, although these projects also highlight the need for infrastructure upgrades, parking solutions, and strong community buy-in to avoid displacement.

Strengthening Cultural Districts. Formal designation brings funding and tourism promotion, but strong governance is essential. Districts that include residents, artists, and small business owners in decision-making avoid exclusionary redevelopment. Georgetown's Downtown Cultural District is a leading example, balancing boutique retail with community-oriented events like the Red Poppy Festival. Creative placemaking strategies such as murals, pop-up performances, and public art further strengthen these districts. The Roundtables emphasized that cultural districts succeed when they evolve with their communities rather than cater only to visitors.

Preserving Historic Legacies: A Strategic Imperative for Regional Leaders (cont'd)

Tools for Preservation and Renewal (cont'd)

Aligning Preservation with Equity and Affordability.

CREW's survey confirmed that cost of living is the number one reason residents consider leaving. Preservation must intersect affordability strategies: pairing downtown revitalization with mixed-income housing, creating cultural land trusts, and supporting legacy businesses through stabilization funds. San Marcos and Lockhart have piloted microgrant programs to help family-owned businesses survive alongside redevelopment, protecting cultural roots even as property values rise. Leaders repeatedly stressed that preservation cannot succeed if the residents and businesses who embody a place are forced out.

Community Engagement and Storytelling. Preservation must reflect community values, not just architectural merit. Participatory mapping allows residents to identify meaningful places. Digital storytelling and archival projects layer history into the present. Bastrop has woven historic interpretation into walking tours and archives, while volunteer programs give residents tools to advocate for preservation. Roundtable participants underscored that preservation efforts build lasting impact when they empower local voices to define what is worth saving.



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Embedding Culture in Regional Planning. Cultural assets should be treated as core infrastructure, not amenities. Growth plans should integrate cultural districts alongside utilities and parks. Metrics should track not just property values but also cultural participation and resident satisfaction. Cross-sector coalitions including city staff, developers, and cultural institutions can embed these goals into long-term plans. This approach also addresses survey findings about weak collaboration among leaders and the need for more cohesive regional planning.

A Resilience Strategy for Growth

Protecting cultural identity is not a luxury—it is a resilience strategy. By weaving adaptive reuse, cultural preservation, and affordability into the same fabric, communities can guard against the homogenizing pressures of growth. The lessons from Georgetown, Bastrop, San Marcos, Lockhart, and Taylor show that it is possible to grow while staying grounded.

For commercial real estate leaders, adaptive reuse offers a sustainable, market-tested path to revitalize downtowns. For local governments, cultural districts are engines of both tourism and belonging. And for residents, preservation secures the places that make a community feel like home. As growth reshapes the Austin Metro, leaders have an opportunity to safeguard identity by treating cultural assets as essential infrastructure—ensuring the region remains competitive while protecting the cultural soul that makes Central Texas unique.

The Case for Creativity: Protecting Cultural Heritage in a Time of Growth

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

Preserving and Cultivating Arts in the Metro

Austin's reputation as a creative capital has long been a cornerstone of its economic vitality and cultural identity. The city's music, film, and visual arts scenes not only define its character but also attract visitors, businesses, and talent from around the world. Yet, as the metro region continues to grow, its artists, venues, and cultural legacies face increasing pressure from rising costs, redevelopment, and inequitable access to resources. Strategic leaders have a unique opportunity to protect the region's artistic heritage while expanding opportunities for creative growth across all five counties.

Affordability Pressures and Artist Relocation

The Austin Metro's affordability crisis (highlighted in our resident survey, where 91% reported rising costs of living and 60% cited affordability as the top reason they might leave the region) has immediate implications for the arts. Musicians, visual artists, and cultural workers often earn less than the regional median wage, making them particularly vulnerable to displacement. As central Austin rents rise, many are relocating to more affordable towns in Bastrop, Hays, and Williamson Counties. This dispersal strengthens local creative scenes outside Travis County, but also erodes the concentration of talent that has historically fueled Austin's identity as a global cultural hub.

Growth of Creative Industries

While displacement poses challenges, the region's creative industries are also evolving. Film production is gaining traction, fueled by Austin's talent base, distinctive landscapes, and competitive incentives. New studios and production facilities are emerging across the metro, creating jobs but also heightening the need for infrastructure and workforce pipelines. Meanwhile, smaller cities such as Lockhart and San Marcos are establishing reputations as live music and arts hubs, offering more affordable platforms for emerging artists. Visual arts organizations are likewise moving into Williamson County and Bastrop, shifting the geography of creativity across the metro.

Preserving Cultural Heritage

The metro's legacy arts institutions and historic venues are irreplaceable cultural assets, yet many face redevelopment pressure. Roundtable participants emphasized that the preservation of community identity must include safeguarding spaces where culture is created and shared. The closure of beloved East Austin venues has sparked public concern about whether the region's cultural soul can survive unchecked growth. At the same time, new cultural districts and festivals outside of Travis County demonstrate how intentional investment in heritage and creativity can drive both economic and social vitality.



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The Case for Creativity: Protecting Cultural Heritage in a Time of Growth (cont'd)

Why Protecting the Arts Matters

Texas Cultural Trust's 2025 State of the Arts Report underscores the economic and social case for arts investment. The arts contribute **\$8.9 billion annually** to Texas GDP, sustain **1 in 15 jobs statewide**, and measurably improve educational outcomes. Students engaged in the arts are **twice as likely to attend college**. Fostering creativity is not just about cultural identity; growing a strong arts ecosystem is a strategy to ensure **economic competitiveness, workforce attraction**, and **community well-being**. As residents increasingly value livability and authenticity, a thriving arts sector becomes a differentiator in **retaining talent and driving innovation**.

Growing the Arts Ecosystem

These tools can be deployed individually, but their greatest potential comes when used in combination:

- **Public Investment:** The City of Austin's Cultural Arts Division funds millions in annual grants through hotel occupancy taxes. Smaller cities—including Georgetown, Bastrop, San Marcos, and Lockhart—are expanding cultural arts districts, providing targeted grants, and hosting festivals that boost tourism while strengthening local economies. Expanding these models across counties could broaden geographic access to cultural opportunity.
- **Policy and Land Use Tools:** Leaders can enact creative space preservation ordinances, incentivize developers to include arts spaces in new projects, and establish cultural trust funds to secure affordable space for artists. Zoning overlays and tax abatements tied to cultural uses are already being tested in peer metros nationwide and could be adapted to Central Texas.
- **Workforce Development for the Arts:** With the film and creative tech sectors growing, partnerships with higher education institutions (such as Austin Community College, Texas State, and regional universities) can strengthen training pipelines in production, design, and creative entrepreneurship. These investments ensure that local residents and not just relocating companies' existing staff benefit from industry growth.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Developers, employers, and arts organizations can collaborate to create shared-use venues, artist live/work housing, and cultural facilities integrated into mixed-use developments. These partnerships extend limited public resources while embedding arts into the region's growth fabric.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Organizations like Opportunity Austin and AARO can formally integrate arts and culture into economic development planning. Positioning the arts as a driver of competitiveness alongside technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing ensures that creativity is recognized as essential infrastructure.
- **Philanthropy and Corporate Sponsorship:** Austin's business community has long championed the arts, but corporate giving can be more intentionally aligned with regional goals. Strategic leaders can build collaborative funds that support cultural equity, legacy preservation, and new creative districts across counties.

SECTION 5

EQUITY, HOUSING & ECONOMY

- 5.1 Socioeconomic Disparities Amid Growth: Data-Driven Equity Insights *(Kimberly Hopkins)*
- 5.2 Housing Affordability at a Crossroads *(Anahita Goudarzi)*
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Socioeconomic Disparities Amid Growth: Data-Driven Equity Insights

By Kimberly Hopkins, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

The Austin Metro is a region defined by rapid economic, cultural, and demographic growth. Yet beneath this momentum lies a widening gap in equity. The 2025 CREW Austin regional survey—though limited to 461 responses, mostly from Travis County—offers a revealing snapshot of the pressures facing our communities. It also highlights a broader issue: the metro conversation is often Austin-centric, shaped by better-resourced voices. This imbalance is more than a research limitation—it's a warning about whose experiences are prioritized and whose are overlooked.

To ensure equitable progress, we must focus on five key areas:

1. Urban-Centric Perspectives and Regional Blind Spots

With nearly two-thirds of survey respondents residing in Travis County, Austin's urban core continues to dominate regional discourse. However, this leaves surrounding counties—Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell—underrepresented. Each faces distinct challenges: Caldwell grapples with rural infrastructure gaps, Williamson with industrial expansion, Hays with school capacity strains, and Bastrop with nonprofit service shortfalls. Equity begins with inclusion. Regional strategies must reflect the full spectrum of lived experiences across all five counties, or risk reinforcing the very disparities we aim to address.

2. A Rooted Workforce Under Pressure

Survey data reveals a deeply rooted population: nearly half of respondents have lived in the region for over 20 years, and 87% are employed. These are not transient residents—they are families, homeowners, and long-term contributors to our economy and culture. Yet they increasingly feel the squeeze. Rising demand for both affordable units and larger family homes is paired with expectations for nearby schools, parks, and healthcare. Longtime residents provide continuity and social cohesion. If their needs go unmet, we risk eroding the very foundation of regional resilience.

3. Affordability: The Defining Crisis

The most urgent insight from the survey is the affordability crisis. Over 90% of respondents reported a rising cost of living, and nearly half doubt their income will keep pace. Cost of living and housing affordability were the top reasons cited for considering leaving the region. This is not just a housing issue—it's a threat to regional stability. Other high-growth metros like Denver and Phoenix have seen long-term residents displaced by cost pressures, with lasting impacts on schools, civic life, and workforce retention. Austin still has time to choose a different path. Expanding housing options, supporting wage growth, and reducing cost burdens are essential to ensuring that residents of all backgrounds can thrive..

Socioeconomic Disparities Amid Growth: Data-Driven Equity Insights (cont'd)

4. Workplace Flexibility and Commute Realities

Austin's workforce is adapting to new norms, with nearly 46% working remotely or in hybrid models. Flexibility and work-life balance ranked among the highest job priorities, while commute times were cited as barriers to employment and reasons for considering relocation. These findings call for smarter land use, expanded transit options, and workplace policies that support hybrid and remote work. For employees, flexibility is now a baseline expectation. For policymakers, transit investment is no longer optional—it's a prerequisite for economic competitiveness.

5. Environmental Stewardship and Public Trust

Environmental concerns are top of mind, with strong support for water conservation and green space expansion. Parks and open spaces were the most desired neighborhood features. Yet the survey also revealed a crisis of confidence in local governance: over half of respondents rated collaboration among leaders as ineffective. Without trust, even well-intentioned policies will falter. Rebuilding confidence requires transparency, accountability, and inclusive decision-making. Leaders can take tangible steps—publishing open dashboards, tying developments to community benefit agreements, and investing in green infrastructure that delivers visible benefits across neighborhoods.

Looking Forward

Austin's growth presents a powerful opportunity to build a more inclusive and resilient region. But this moment demands that we look beyond the city core and elevate underrepresented perspectives. If Travis County voices dominate, so too may Travis-centric solutions. By deliberately including voices from Caldwell's rural health needs to Bastrop's nonprofit ecosystem, we can design strategies that reflect the metro as a whole.

With data in hand and community voices guiding the way, we have the tools to turn challenges into solutions. Our task is not just to manage growth, but to ensure that prosperity is shared and progress is sustainable. If we succeed, the Austin Metro can become a model for how fast-growing regions nationwide address inequity—by listening more broadly, investing more wisely, and leading with urgency and humility.



Kimberly Hopkins is the National Client Solutions Director for CBRE's Valuation & Advisory Services, where she leads conference strategy, fosters cross-business collaboration,

and develops sector-focused marketing initiatives. With two decades of experience in commercial real estate, including 15 years as Executive Director of CREW Dallas, Kim is widely recognized as a connector of people and opportunities, known for her solution-focused approach, strategic leadership, and dedication to building an inclusive culture that strengthens both clients and the broader CRE community. She is also a trusted advisor to clients, leveraging her deep industry knowledge to align resources across asset classes and business lines. Her reputation as both a collaborator and advocate continues to influence and elevate the commercial real estate industry nationally.

Housing Affordability at a Crossroads

By Anahita Goudarzi, Ph.D., P.E., CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

Executive Insight: Housing affordability is the Austin Metro's most pressing and destabilizing challenge. Residents across all five counties express deep concern that wages cannot keep pace with rising costs, threatening not only household stability but also regional competitiveness. Leaders must see housing not as an isolated sector issue but as a regional, cross-sector priority requiring coordinated strategies that address both supply and equity.

Key Findings From The Research

Residents feel squeezed.

More than 91% of survey respondents reported their cost of living has risen in the past five years, and almost the same number expect further increases in the next five.

Confidence in income growth is low.

Over 40% of residents do not believe their income will keep up with future costs, underscoring the disconnect between wage growth and housing markets.

Housing is central to relocation decisions.

Among those considering leaving the Austin Metro, 61% cite cost of living and 40% cite housing affordability as key reasons.

Community identity is at risk.

Long-term residents, who make up nearly half of survey participants, are especially vulnerable to displacement. Their potential out-migration would not only shift population patterns but also erode the cultural and civic fabric of established neighborhoods.

Regional Context

Survey responses skew toward **Travis County** (64%), reflecting the sharpest affordability pressures in Austin's urban core. But growth dynamics reveal affordability challenges radiating outward:

- **Williamson County** is absorbing substantial population growth as families seek relatively lower costs, yet new development is accelerating land and housing prices.
- **Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell Counties** still offer affordability but lack the infrastructure and transit needed to support sustainable inflows, raising risks of uneven growth and service gaps.

External data reinforces these concerns. Reports from the Dallas Fed highlight that Central Texas housing costs now rank among the greatest threats to long-term competitiveness, while Opportunity Austin emphasizes workforce housing as critical to talent attraction and retention. Without intervention, affordability pressures will continue to destabilize both households and the regional economy.

Strategic Considerations

1. Expand Diverse Housing Supply

The metro cannot meet demand with single-family subdivisions and high-rise apartments alone. A more diverse housing ecosystem — including townhomes, duplexes, accessory dwelling units, and small-lot single-family — is needed to fill the “missing middle.” Policies that streamline zoning approvals, reduce permitting delays, and incentivize infill can expand supply faster. Leaders should also consider density bonuses tied directly to affordability requirements, ensuring that growth corridors balance volume with access.

Housing Affordability at a Crossroads (cont'd)

Strategic Considerations (cont'd)

2. Regional Public–Private Partnerships

No single jurisdiction or developer can solve the affordability crisis in isolation. Regional partnerships — involving cities, counties, employers, and developers — are essential to align resources and reduce duplication. For example, major employers could partner with municipalities to co-fund workforce housing near job hubs, reducing commute pressures while stabilizing recruitment. By pooling incentives across jurisdictions, leaders can also avoid the “race to the bottom” in which one county absorbs growth without sufficient planning or investment.

3. Protect Established Communities

Affordability strategies must go beyond new construction. Preservation is equally important, especially in neighborhoods where long-term residents risk displacement. Tools such as property tax relief for low-income homeowners, community land trusts, and rehabilitation programs for aging housing stock can help families remain rooted. At the same time, integrating affordability into land-use planning ensures that growth does not erase cultural anchors, historic districts, or long-standing small businesses that define community identity.

4. Innovate in Finance and Delivery

Traditional financing models and construction methods are insufficient for the pace of growth. Shared-equity homeownership, employer-assisted housing stipends, and lease-to-own models can help middle-income families who earn too much for subsidies but too little to afford current market prices. On the construction side, modular building and prefabricated components can lower costs and shorten timelines, particularly for multifamily projects. Leaders should explore public–private pilot programs that test these models regionally and scale those that succeed.

Strategic Considerations (cont'd)

5. Plan for Long-Term Resilience.

Housing affordability cannot be disentangled from transportation, infrastructure, and workforce planning. A resilient strategy requires synchronizing housing with transit expansion, school capacity, healthcare facilities, and utilities. Cross-county collaboration is particularly important: as growth spreads outward, suburban counties must plan ahead for the infrastructure demands that come with new housing. Regional coordination bodies can help ensure that affordability is not just addressed in the urban core but embedded across all five counties as a long-term competitiveness strategy.

The Challenge and Opportunity

Housing affordability is not just a housing issue. It is a crossroads at which our region chooses a path to our shared future. Will growth continue to push out long-standing residents and strain the workforce? Or can leaders create inclusive strategies that preserve affordability, sustain competitiveness, and strengthen community identity? The path chosen today will define the region’s trajectory for decades to come.



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diverse sectors, including transportation, industrial, commercial, solar, multifamily, and municipal projects throughout Texas. With over a decade of experience in geotechnical engineering and construction materials testing, she has been instrumental in advancing TxDOT and Data Center initiatives and delivering complex infrastructure solutions. Anahita holds a Ph.D. in Civil Engineering from Texas A&M University and M.S. in Civil Engineering from Sharif University of Technology, where her research focused on soil-reinforcement interaction, pile group response in liquefiable soils, high-speed rail geotechnics, and the clogging potential of tunnel boring machines.

Land Use Modernization for Attainable Housing (Beyond Affordability 101)

By Sunshine Kapus, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee

The Austin Metro is adding people faster than it is adding attainable housing. The result is rising rents, shrinking options, and a widening mismatch between what families need and what the market delivers. The issue is not only affordability. It is outdated zoning, lengthy permitting, and utility planning that fails to keep pace with demand.

Roundtable participants described these barriers in plain terms. Zoning codes prohibit “missing middle” housing types such as duplexes, townhomes, and small multifamily buildings. Permitting processes drag on for months, creating uncertainty for builders and delaying homes that communities desperately need. Utility planning lags behind approvals, leaving subdivisions waiting on capacity studies. The problem looks different in each county: in Travis, infill developers face unpredictable timelines; in Williamson and Hays, suburban projects stall on utility capacity; in Bastrop and Caldwell, local leaders want to grow but avoid repeating past mistakes of sprawl.

Residents feel the consequences. In CREW Austin’s survey, more than 90 percent reported rising costs of living, and six in ten cited cost of living as a reason they might consider leaving the region. Families are being squeezed between escalating prices and limited options. Without land use modernization, even well-funded projects will fail to meet the region’s demand for attainable homes.

National peers show what is possible. Minneapolis eliminated single-family-only zoning to allow small-scale infill across neighborhoods. California streamlined approvals for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), adding tens of thousands of new units. Portland advanced transit-oriented overlays that tied housing supply to mobility investments. Salt Lake City legalized missing middle housing citywide and modernized parking rules, while Charlotte cut permitting times for small-scale infill in half. These reforms do more than reduce cost. They expand choice and demonstrate that modernization can be politically viable and community-friendly.

The stakes for Austin are amplified by industrial growth. Samsung’s semiconductor plant in Taylor will bring thousands of jobs, but if rules block attainable housing near the site, workers will be pushed into long commutes. Tesla’s gigafactory in eastern Travis County and Dell’s headquarters in Round Rock highlight the same reality: employment hubs are expanding faster than nearby housing capacity. Aligning land use with industrial growth is not optional. It is essential for livability, competitiveness, and environmental responsibility.

Survey results also reveal a deeper challenge. More than half of respondents rated regional collaboration between governments, schools, developers, and community groups as ineffective, citing concerns that developers hold too much power and that public voices are ignored. Modernization must therefore be paired with transparency and clear community benefits. Without visible accountability, even good reforms will fail to win trust.

Land Use Modernization for Attainable Housing (Beyond Affordability 101) (cont'd)

Recommendations

1) Make good projects by-right. Austin's housing system is clogged with discretionary approvals that add years of delay. Establishing clear, by-right pathways for infill duplexes, townhomes, and mixed-use projects—particularly near transit and job centers—would give developers and communities certainty. Pairing by-right approval with design standards can ensure quality without sacrificing speed.

2) Legalize the “missing middle.” Most zoning maps still default to single-family-only districts. Legalizing housing types between single-family and large multifamily is essential for affordability and choice. This does not mean blanket upzoning. It means carefully allowing duplexes, fourplexes, and courtyard apartments in corridors and near employment hubs where infrastructure already exists.

3) Modernize parking rules. Parking requirements can make smaller projects financially unworkable. Reducing or removing minimums near transit and job hubs would unlock more sites for attainable housing. Salt Lake City's reforms show how pairing parking modernization with missing middle legalization makes small-scale multifamily viable.

4) Plan utilities alongside land use. Subdivision approvals are often stalled by after-the-fact water and sewer capacity studies. Coordinating land use and utility planning upfront—through a regional infrastructure pipeline—would cut years off delivery timelines and give certainty to both builders and residents.

5) Pilot transit-oriented development (TOD) overlays. The region needs demonstration projects that tie zoning reform to mobility investments. Piloting TOD overlays in high-growth corridors, such as between Austin and Pflugerville or along future Project Connect routes, would show communities how housing and transit can work together to improve quality of life.

Why It Matters Land use modernization is not about lowering standards. It is about aligning rules with today's needs. By updating codes, streamlining approvals, and coordinating across jurisdictions, the Austin Metro can deliver the attainable homes its residents deserve. Doing so ensures that job growth translates into livability, not just longer commutes and higher costs.

Growth is inevitable, but whether it produces livable communities depends on modernizing the rules that govern housing. Leaders have the opportunity to act now: to make good projects predictable, to allow a diversity of housing types, and to link approvals with utilities and transit. Done well, these reforms will deliver more attainable homes, reduce commute burdens, and rebuild public trust in growth. The question is not whether modernization is needed, but how quickly leaders are willing to move from outdated processes to rules that align with today's economy and tomorrow's residents.



Sunshine Kapus is a real estate developer and Realtor® with more than 30 years of experience in land acquisition, entitlements, and construction. As Founder and CEO of

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Public Finance & Delivery: How to Pay for the Essentials

By Sunshine Kapus, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee

The Austin Metro's rapid growth has made one truth unavoidable: our ability to thrive depends on how well we pay for the essentials. Roads, schools, water and sewer systems, parks, and transit all require sustained, predictable investment. Yet traditional tools are stretched, and public confidence in how dollars flow—and what they deliver—has eroded.

Roundtable discussions and resident feedback point to the same friction: the financing toolkit feels opaque. When MUDs, TIRZ/TIFs, P3s, value capture, and grant stacking are deployed without plain language, strong guardrails, and visible outcomes, skepticism grows. People see development, rising taxes and fees, and congestion—but not a clear line from dollars to benefits. In short, the technical work of structuring capital must be matched by the public work of explaining it and proving results.

The opportunity side is real. Federal programs such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act are still unlocking historic matching funds. Private partners are willing to co-invest when public governance is clear and regionally aligned. The missing ingredients are not exotic tools; they are clarity, coordination, and trust.

Industrial growth sharpens the stakes. Samsung's investment in Taylor, Tesla's footprint in eastern Travis County, and Dell's long-standing presence in Round Rock ripple across water, power, housing, and mobility. No single jurisdiction can fund and deliver that alone. Coordinated regional finance—pairing federal dollars with targeted value capture and transparent project selection—will determine whether infrastructure keeps pace with the economy.

Other metros offer practical lessons. Regional authorities that pool revenue for multi-county grant pursuits, station-area value capture tied to measurable community benefits, and public dashboards that track promises to delivery have helped peers win dollars and rebuild confidence. The common thread is not the tool; it is the discipline of showing people where money goes and what it buys.

Conclusion

Financing the essentials is not just a budgeting exercise; it is a covenant with the public. If we explain choices plainly, coordinate regionally, and report results without spin, we can deliver the infrastructure that growth demands and the confidence that keeps communities invested in the Austin Metro's future.

Recommendations for Leaders

1) Publish “sources and uses,” project by project.

Create a standard, public one-pager for every major infrastructure investment: the problem it solves, the total cost, sources of capital (local, federal, private), the uses (design, right-of-way, construction), delivery milestones, and the performance metrics leadership will report on quarterly. Pair this with a simple map that shows which neighborhoods benefit and when. This turns finance from an acronym soup into a visible plan—and gives residents a way to hold leaders accountable.

Public Finance & Delivery: How to Pay for the Essentials (cont'd)

Recommendations for Leaders (cont'd)

2) Stand up a regional capital clearinghouse. Form a small, cross-jurisdictional team to (a) coordinate federal grant applications, (b) align match dollars, and (c) sequence projects so construction markets and permitting capacity are not overwhelmed. The clearinghouse's job is to reduce duplication, increase win-rates, and keep a single pipeline view of water, mobility, schools, parks, and grid upgrades. Treat this as shared "pre-development" capacity for the region, not a new bureaucracy.

3) Make community benefits measurable – and enforce them. Condition incentives and value-capture districts on a short list of quantifiable benefits: new affordable units near jobs, gallons per day of secured water supply, megawatts added to grid reliability, ADA-compliant sidewalks delivered within a half-mile of stations, school capacity added within specified attendance zones. Bake those metrics into agreements, publish the baselines, and report progress every quarter. If targets slip, the public should see the corrective plan.

4) Pair growth projects with a visible affordability offset. The survey and roundtables repeatedly surfaced anxiety about cost of living and housing pressure. Link each major industrial or corridor investment with an "offset package" people can see: a tranche of workforce or mixed-income housing, a utility-assistance program tied to conservation outcomes, or fee-reductions for reinvestment in aging neighborhoods. When residents can trace a project to a tangible affordability benefit, support rises.

Recommendations for Leaders (cont'd)

5) Integrate schools into the regional capital story.

School bonds and recapture rules are a major part of how people experience taxes and "fairness." Include education in the same pipeline view as roads and utilities so families see how classroom seats, traffic safety around campuses, and growth-area schools will be delivered alongside new housing and job centers. Invite districts into the capital clearinghouse so timing and siting align.

6) Build trust with delivery discipline, not rhetoric.

Adopt a small set of on-time, on-budget practices across jurisdictions: stage-gate reviews, independent cost estimation at each gate, construction-market capacity checks, and public change-order reporting. People forgive complexity; they don't forgive surprises. Delivery discipline—shown in a simple scorecard—is the fastest way to restore confidence.



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Sunrise Development Group, she leads infill redevelopment and raw land projects in Central Texas, while continuing to serve clients in the Pacific Northwest. She is an active Realtor with Epique Realty in both WA and TX. Recognized for helping property owners maximize land value and build wealth through real estate, Sunshine has held senior leadership roles with Gamut360 Holdings, Sage Homes Northwest, and William Lyons Homes. Her work is complemented by deep civic engagement: she co-chairs the Greater Taylor Foundation Housing Impact Council and is active with CREW Austin, HomeAid Austin, and ProVisors Austin 5.

Government Capacity to Manage Growth

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Issue

Central Texas governments are being asked to manage one of the fastest-growing regions in the country without the staff, systems, or resources to keep pace. Roundtable participants across counties described permitting backlogs, planning bottlenecks, and staffing shortages as critical constraints. One Williamson County leader noted, “We’re approving subdivisions faster than we can review them.”

Residents echoed this frustration in the Austin Metro Resident Survey. More than half rated collaboration across governments, schools, and developers as “not very effective.” Many wrote in that local governments are “slow,” “unresponsive,” or “not keeping up with growth.” This lack of capacity is not just a bureaucratic inconvenience, it fuels housing delays, infrastructure strain, inequity, and public distrust.

Key Research Insights

Permitting and Planning Delays Drive Costs

Developers in Travis and Williamson Counties emphasized that permitting backlogs add months or years to projects, inflating housing costs. Residents see these delays as evidence that governments cannot deliver, while developers see them as added risk and expense.

Staffing Shortages Are Widespread

Smaller counties like Caldwell and Bastrop lack specialized staff — from engineers to GIS analysts — to evaluate projects or manage infrastructure investments. Even larger jurisdictions reported difficulty hiring and retaining planners, inspectors, and permitting staff in a competitive labor market.

Leadership Turnover Erodes Continuity

Frequent turnover among city managers, planning directors, and elected officials undermines long-term planning. Roundtable participants stressed that every leadership change resets priorities, creating inconsistency and slowing momentum on major projects.

Equity Impacts Are Uneven

Capacity shortfalls disproportionately harm underserved neighborhoods, where infrastructure upgrades and code enforcement are already under-resourced. Residents in these areas are often last to see improvements, reinforcing inequities and mistrust.

Trust Deficit Tied to Capacity

Survey results and roundtable discussions both pointed to a trust gap. Residents perceive that developers “hold the pen” because governments lack the time, staff, or leverage to proactively shape growth. Capacity is therefore not just an operational issue — it is a driver of legitimacy.

Government Capacity to Manage Growth (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

1. Build Regional Staff-Sharing Models

Establish interlocal agreements that allow counties and cities to pool specialized staff — such as engineers, GIS analysts, and planners. Shared services reduce duplication and provide smaller jurisdictions with access to needed expertise.

2. Strengthen Professional Pipelines

Partner with universities and community colleges to create local pipelines into planning, public administration, and engineering. Offer scholarships or internships tied to post-graduation public service commitments.

3. Modernize Permitting Systems

Invest in digital permitting platforms with transparent timelines and status tracking. Metro-wide, this could include a shared portal that simplifies navigation for developers and residents while increasing accountability.

4. Stabilize Leadership and Build Continuity

Support leadership development and succession planning programs for city managers, county staff, and elected officials. Regional leadership academies could foster consistency across jurisdictions and reduce the impact of turnover.



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educational, and community projects. A cultural strategist working at the intersection of design, research, and innovation, she leads boundary crossing initiatives to enrich our collective spirit and add meaning to our lives. She is recognized for tapping larger patterns, convening diverse voices, and mobilizing action for the greater good.

5. Link Growth Approvals to Capacity

Condition major development approvals on demonstrated government readiness — including staff-to-permit ratios, inspection capacity, and infrastructure maintenance funding. Growth must be tied to capacity, not just demand.

6. Integrate Capacity into Regional Planning

Incorporate staffing and governance capacity into comprehensive planning and regional strategies. Funding formulas should recognize that fast-growth areas require not just more infrastructure but more people to manage it.

7. Leverage Trusted Intermediaries

Universities, nonprofit organizations, and regional councils can serve as third-party facilitators, bridging gaps in expertise and credibility while local governments rebuild internal capacity.

Bottom Line

Infrastructure plans, housing targets, and regional strategies are only as strong as the governments tasked with carrying them out. Roundtables revealed the daily reality: permitting backlogs, staff shortages, and leadership turnover are slowing growth and fueling frustration. The resident survey confirmed the consequences: trust in governance is low, and people see local governments as reactive rather than proactive.

For strategic leaders, the message is clear: capacity is infrastructure. Without adequate staff, systems, and leadership stability, Central Texas cannot manage growth equitably or efficiently. By investing in pipelines, modernizing systems, and linking approvals to readiness, regional leaders can rebuild both operational effectiveness and public trust.

Land Value, Property Taxes, and Fair Growth

By Sunshine Kapus, Co-Chair of CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee

As the Austin Metro grows, land values and property taxes climb. This dynamic brings both benefits and risks. On one hand, higher valuations generate revenue that funds schools, roads, and utilities. On the other, steep tax bills strain households and small businesses whose incomes lag behind rising property values. The tension is most visible in East Austin, Pflugerville, Kyle, Bastrop, and Lockhart, where long-time residents and legacy businesses face difficult choices as costs outpace earnings.

Roundtable participants made it clear that trust is the central issue. Residents understand that taxes pay for infrastructure, but frustration grows when they do not see investments in their own neighborhoods. Business owners worry about losing their foothold on historic main streets. Local governments, heavily reliant on property taxes, are caught between the need to fund services and the imperative to protect community diversity.

Survey results underscore this anxiety. More than 90 percent of respondents reported rising costs of living, and 40 percent said they do not believe their income will keep pace. For many, property taxes symbolize this imbalance: bills climb, but visible reinvestment feels scarce. Unless leaders address both the mechanics of taxation and the perception of fairness, public confidence will continue to erode.

Industrial expansion adds urgency. Samsung's Taylor facility has boosted valuations in Williamson County, while Tesla's gigafactory has reshaped eastern Travis County. These investments bring jobs and revenue but also accelerate displacement risks for small businesses and homeowners near the new employment hubs. Without protections, growth-driven tax increases may hollow out the very communities that make the Austin Metro attractive to employers in the first place.

Lessons from Other Regions

Other metros have pioneered tools to balance growth with equity. Philadelphia's Longtime Owner Occupants Program caps property tax increases for low-income homeowners in gentrifying areas, helping them remain in their communities. Portland reinvests land value capture revenues directly into affordable housing near transit corridors. Minneapolis publishes transparency dashboards that map where tax dollars flow, building public trust in reinvestment. San Francisco has piloted legacy business stabilization programs that include tax relief for long-standing small businesses.

Texas' own school finance system—the “Robin Hood” plan—adds another layer of complexity. It redistributes property tax revenues from wealthy districts to poorer ones, sending dollars from fast-growing counties like Travis and Williamson to smaller districts in Caldwell and Bastrop. While the goal is fairness, residents in high-growth suburbs often feel they pay more but receive less locally, fueling mistrust. Transparency and local reinvestment strategies are essential to complement state redistribution.

Why It Matters

Property taxation is not just about revenue. It is about fairness, trust, and the ability to sustain diverse communities in the face of rapid growth. If households and small businesses are pushed out by tax burdens, Austin risks losing cultural anchors, local suppliers, and workforce stability. Leaders who can modernize property tax policy, protect legacy owners, and show clearly how revenues are reinvested will preserve community identity and strengthen long-term competitiveness.

Land Value, Property Taxes, and Fair Growth (cont'd)

Recommendations

1) Adopt circuit breakers tied to income. Cap property tax liability as a share of household income for low- and moderate-income families. This ensures that those least able to absorb steep increases are not forced out of their homes.

2) Protect legacy businesses. Establish a stabilization program that offers partial tax relief or abatements for long-standing small businesses in historic downtowns and main streets. These enterprises provide cultural identity and economic diversity but are often the first displaced when valuations rise.

3) Use land value capture strategically. When industrial or transit investments boost nearby land values, capture part of that windfall to reinvest in affordable housing, small business stabilization, and community amenities. This approach aligns growth with visible local benefits.

4) Expand homestead exemptions and phase-in reassessments. Broaden exemptions for owner-occupied homes and consider phased assessment increases in rapidly gentrifying areas. This cushions homeowners from sudden tax shocks while preserving a reliable revenue base for local governments.

5) Publish neighborhood-level transparency dashboards. Show residents where each dollar goes—by neighborhood and by project. Public dashboards and annual “tax receipts” build trust by demonstrating that higher bills translate into tangible benefits such as improved schools, sidewalks, or utilities.

Conclusion

As the Austin Metro continues to expand, property taxation will remain both a blessing and a burden. Growth-driven revenues are critical to sustain infrastructure, but unless paired with fairness measures, they will destabilize households, businesses, and communities. Leaders have the opportunity to act now: adopt circuit breakers, protect legacy businesses, capture land value for reinvestment, and show residents clearly how dollars are spent. By doing so, Austin can align fiscal health with community stability, ensuring that growth strengthens rather than displaces the diverse communities that define the region.



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From Fragile to Future-Ready: Nonprofit Resilience in the Austin Metro

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Role of Nonprofits in a Growing Region

Nonprofits are a backbone of the Austin Metro, delivering essential services in food, housing, education, health, and the arts. In 2022 alone, One Voice Central Texas member organizations provided food to more than 404,000 residents, offered housing support to 61,400 people, and delivered education and workforce training to 117,000 youth and adults. Together, nonprofits not only sustain community well-being but also anchor the regional economy: statewide, the sector employs more than 500,000 Texans—over 5% of the state's total workforce.

Yet, despite their impact, many nonprofits across the five-county region remain financially fragile. Our resident survey revealed that affordability pressures are the top reason people consider leaving the Austin Metro. This instability also affects nonprofit staff, who are often underpaid relative to the region's rising housing costs. As one Williamson County roundtable participant noted, "We are losing talented staff not because they don't love the mission, but because they can't afford to live here anymore."



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educational, and community projects. A cultural strategist working at the intersection of design, research, and innovation, she leads boundary crossing initiatives to enrich our collective spirit and add meaning to our lives. She is recognized for tapping larger patterns, convening diverse voices, and mobilizing action for the greater good.

The Issue: Fragile Finances and Rising Costs

According to Built for Texas, nonprofits statewide grew by 22% between 2015 and 2022, but revenues increased only 13%, creating widening gaps in sustainability. Nearly 75% of Texas nonprofits have budgets under \$50,000, and almost half were founded after 2010. This profile reflects Central Texas as well, where young and small nonprofits are proliferating—but without financial reserves or scale to weather economic shocks.

At the same time, larger institutions—arts centers, hospitals, and multi-county service agencies—struggle with escalating costs for labor, facilities, and technology. A 2024 Mission Capital survey of Central Texas nonprofits found consistent concerns around staff burnout, resource constraints, and the lack of shared administrative support. Leaders described this as "survival mode," with too many hours spent on back-office functions rather than delivering impact.

Community Dependence During Crises

Ironically, nonprofits are most heavily relied upon during downturns and disasters. Bastrop and Caldwell Counties have seen nonprofits step up in disaster recovery after floods and wildfires, providing food, housing, and trauma support long after initial relief agencies left. In Hays County, nonprofits filled gaps during the pandemic by scaling up food distribution and digital education supports almost overnight. Yet these organizations did so without additional infrastructure or long-term operating support, leaving them vulnerable when the next crisis arrives.

From Fragile to Future-Ready: Nonprofit Resilience in the Austin Metro (cont'd)

Opportunities for Strategic Action

Regional leaders—government, philanthropy, business, and developers—can act now to ensure nonprofits are not only surviving but prepared for the future:

- Shared-Service Models:** Pool HR, IT, and accounting across organizations, lowering costs and freeing staff for mission-driven work.
- Stabilization Funds:** Seed local “rainy day” funds through public–private partnerships to provide bridge financing during downturns.
- Pooled Fundraising:** Expand collective fundraising platforms (e.g., regional Giving Days) that bring visibility and dollars to small nonprofits.
- Multi-Year Funding:** Encourage foundations and corporate donors to shift from project-only grants to multi-year operating support, giving nonprofits predictability.
- Workforce Investments:** Support retention through housing stipends, childcare benefits, and leadership development for nonprofit staff.
- Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Leverage partnerships between arts and social service organizations—such as integrating arts-based therapy in senior centers or shelters—to amplify impact.

Why Resilience Matters

Nonprofits are not just safety nets—they are economic engines and cultural anchors. The Texas Cultural Trust notes the arts alone contribute nearly \$9 billion annually to Texas GDP. Social service nonprofits reduce long-term public costs by addressing hunger, housing, and health challenges before they escalate. For the Austin Metro, nonprofits help deliver what residents consistently identified in our survey as critical to quality of life: access to healthcare, childcare, housing stability, and community infrastructure.

As one Travis County roundtable participant put it, “If nonprofits falter, the very services that allow people to stay in this region—food, shelter, culture—falter too.”, nonprofits are most heavily relied upon during downturns and disasters. Bastrop and Caldwell Counties

Moving Forward

From Round Rock to Lockhart, nonprofits are already innovating—sharing office space, building collective appeals, and experimenting with creative partnerships. But the scale of regional growth requires a broader, coordinated approach.

The data is clear: nonprofits are a major economic force, a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of residents, and a cornerstone of the Austin Metro’s cultural and social identity. Yet they remain structurally fragile. By investing in resilience—through stabilization funds, shared services, and sustainable workforce supports—regional leaders can ensure that nonprofits move from fragile to future-ready, able to meet the challenges of growth with strength and stability.

SECTION 6

WORKFORCE & TALENT PIPELINES

- 6.1 Workforce & Talent Needs: A Regional Snapshot for Employers *(Nina Murrell)*
- 6.2 Education Infrastructure: Schools as Anchors of Regional Growth *(Nina Murrell)*
- 6.3 Workforce Partnerships: Building Skills-Based Pathways for the Future *(Nina Murrell)*
- 6.4 Childcare & Early Learning as Workforce Infrastructure *(Nina Murrell)*
- 6.5 Digital Infrastructure & Workforce: Building a Connected Region *(Nina Murrell)*

Workforce & Talent Needs: A Regional Snapshot for Employers

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Austin Metro is growing at a pace few regions in the United States can match. With population surges, new business investment, and the arrival of major employers across industries, the question of workforce and talent has emerged as one of the most critical issues facing regional leaders. CREW Austin's 2025 research—drawing from resident survey data, roundtable conversations, and supplemental analysis—offers a clear snapshot for employers as they prepare for the next decade of growth.

An Established Yet Strained Workforce

Survey findings reveal a workforce with deep regional roots. Nearly half of respondents have lived here for more than 20 years, and another 20 percent for a decade or more. This stability gives employers a pool of talent with local knowledge and strong community ties. Yet the same data underscores vulnerability: 92 percent of residents report that their cost of living has increased over the past five years, and most expect it to continue rising. As a result, long-time employees are weighing whether they can remain in the region. Employers risk losing seasoned staff not to competitors, but to affordability pressures. For industries such as healthcare, education, and construction—where institutional knowledge is vital—the implications are serious.

Flexibility as a Baseline Expectation

Work arrangements have permanently shifted. Almost half of workers report hybrid or remote roles, and work-life balance ranked as the top priority in job selection. Commute times, meanwhile, were identified as both a barrier to employment and a reason for potential out-migration. For employers, this means flexibility is no longer a perk to highlight in recruiting materials; it is a baseline expectation. Companies offering hybrid or remote models gain a competitive advantage in attracting talent across county lines, while those requiring rigid schedules or daily commutes risk shrinking their pool of qualified applicants.

Talent Retention and Training Gaps

Roundtable discussions revealed significant concerns about training pipelines. Employers consistently pointed to shortages in skilled trades, healthcare professionals, and educators. In fast-growing counties such as Williamson and Hays, rapid population growth is outpacing the supply of trained workers in public services and technical fields. Employers can help address these gaps by partnering with local community colleges, workforce development boards, and K–12 systems to align training with industry needs. Upskilling programs, apprenticeships, and tuition support are increasingly vital tools to retain mid-career employees who want to advance without leaving the region. National models—such as employer-funded coding bootcamps or hospital residency pipelines—offer replicable strategies that Central Texas employers could adapt.

Workforce & Talent Needs: A Regional Snapshot for Employers (cont'd)

Regional Disparities in Opportunity

The workforce picture looks different across the five-county region. Travis County continues to dominate in job concentration, but Williamson County is rapidly becoming a hub for tech and logistics. Hays County's population growth is straining education and healthcare systems, while Bastrop and Caldwell face unique challenges: limited public transit, fewer higher-wage jobs, and infrastructure that lags behind demand. Employers expanding into outlying counties must recognize these disparities. Investing in transportation solutions, workforce housing, and local training programs will be essential to leveling opportunity and accessing the full regional talent pool.

Strategic Takeaways for Employers

- **Invest in affordability solutions.** From housing partnerships to transportation stipends, employers can play a role in reducing cost-of-living pressures that threaten retention.
- **Double down on flexibility.** Hybrid, remote, and alternative scheduling are essential to remain competitive.
- **Build stronger pipelines.** Engage with schools, colleges, and workforce boards to align training with demand.
- **Expand regionally with nuance.** Tailor workforce strategies to county-specific challenges and opportunities.
- **Prioritize retention as much as recruitment.** Long-term employees carry institutional knowledge and community ties that are difficult to replace.
- **Share success stories.** Employers that innovate in retention and training can influence regional norms, helping Central Texas remain competitive on a national scale.

Final Note

The Austin Metro's workforce is both an anchor of stability and a driver of future competitiveness. Employers who address affordability, embrace flexibility, and invest in talent development will be positioned not only to weather growth pressures but to shape a more sustainable and inclusive regional economy.



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Education Infrastructure: Schools as Anchors of Regional Growth

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Issue

Schools in Central Texas are at the heart of community identity and competitiveness, yet the pace of growth has outstripped their capacity. Roundtable participants across Hays, Williamson, and Caldwell Counties highlighted school crowding as one of the most pressing quality-of-life challenges. “We’re building houses faster than we can pass bonds,” one leader observed.

Families echoed this urgency in the Austin Metro Resident Survey, where school quality ranked among the top factors in deciding whether to remain in the region. Respondents expressed frustration with overcrowded classrooms, long bus commutes, and inequities in program access between fast-growing suburban districts and under-resourced urban or rural schools. These are not just education issues. They are infrastructure issues that shape livability, equity, and workforce preparedness.

Bottom Line

Schools are not peripheral to growth — they are anchors of community identity, equity, and economic competitiveness. The roundtables made clear that subdivisions without classrooms erode livability, and the survey confirmed that families weigh school quality heavily in relocation decisions.

For strategic leaders, the task is to treat schools as essential infrastructure, not afterthoughts. By aligning education with workforce pipelines, investing equitably across districts, and designing schools as hubs for resilience and community wellbeing, Central Texas can ensure that growth strengthens rather than undermines the foundation of its future.

Research Insights

1. School Crowding and Infrastructure Gaps

Hays and Williamson County leaders underscored how subdivisions are approved and built years before bonds can be passed and facilities constructed. The result is overcrowded classrooms, temporary portables, and a reactive cycle of playing catch-up.

2. Uneven Resources Across Districts

Bastrop and Caldwell roundtables raised concerns about disparities in facilities and programs compared to larger ISDs in Travis and Williamson Counties. Survey respondents noted that these gaps reinforce inequities and make families consider relocation to areas with stronger schools.

3. Funding Constraints

Reliance on property taxes and the state’s “Robin Hood” recapture system leave fast-growth districts stretched thin. Bonds are difficult to pass quickly enough to match enrollment, and rural districts lack a strong tax base to upgrade aging facilities.

4. Education as Workforce Pipeline

Employers at the Metro-wide roundtable pointed to schools as the starting point for career pathways. They cited partnerships with Austin Community College and local ISDs as promising but underdeveloped. Without strong K–12 alignment, workforce pipelines into healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and skilled trades remain fragile.

5. Equity in Education

Roundtables emphasized that the quality of schools is one of the most visible dimensions of inequity across the metro. Survey respondents from lower-income neighborhoods consistently raised concerns about outdated facilities, lack of extracurricular opportunities, and limited support for bilingual students.

Education Infrastructure: Schools as Anchors of Regional Growth (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

1. Treat Schools as Core Infrastructure

Incorporate ISDs directly into land use, housing, and infrastructure planning. Growth approvals should account for school capacity just as they do for water or roads.

2. Align Education with Workforce Needs

Expand career and technical pathways in high schools, linked to employers in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, construction, and IT. Regional workforce boards, employers, and ISDs should co-create curricula aligned with job demand.

3. Innovate Funding Approaches

Explore regional bond coordination, developer contributions, and public-private partnerships to supplement traditional financing. State-level advocacy is also needed to modernize formulas that penalize fast-growing districts.

4. Prioritize Equity in School Investments

Direct resources to under-resourced campuses, ensuring facility quality, extracurricular offerings, and technology access match those in affluent areas. Build cultural competency into program design for bilingual and immigrant families.

5. Design Schools as Community Hubs

Co-locate health clinics, libraries, and after-school programs with schools to maximize community benefit. Schools can double as resilience hubs during disasters, providing shelter, power, and safe gathering spaces.

6. Invest in Teacher and Staff Pipelines

Partner with universities and alternative certification programs to expand teacher recruitment and retention, especially in high-demand subject areas and bilingual education. Staff capacity is as critical as facilities in ensuring education quality.

7. Plan for Climate Resilience

Design new schools with flood protection, energy efficiency, and extreme heat mitigation in mind. As climate impacts intensify, schools must be reliable, safe spaces for students and community members alike..



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Workforce Partnerships: Building Skills-Based Pathways for the Future

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

As the Austin Metro continues to grow, leaders across sectors face an urgent question: how do we prepare both today's students and tomorrow's workers for jobs that are rapidly evolving? The answer lies in building **education and workforce pipelines** that are coordinated, flexible, and skills-based. Just as transportation and utilities are considered essential infrastructure, so too are the systems that connect learning to work.

Roundtable participants across the region flagged workforce alignment as one of the most critical issues shaping our future. Employers reported difficulty finding qualified workers, while educators noted students often lack clear pathways from training to careers. Meanwhile, mid-career professionals face barriers to reskilling as industries automate or restructure. These challenges are solvable—but only through partnerships that bridge employers, K–12 schools, higher education, community colleges, and workforce boards.

Skills-Based Pathways, Not Just Degrees

The future of work is increasingly **skills-based**, with employers shifting hiring practices to emphasize demonstrated competencies over four-year degrees alone. This opens new doors for underrepresented workers and creates opportunities for career changers. Programs at Austin Community College (ACC), such as its **Career & Technical Continuing Education** offerings, provide fast, stackable credentials in fields like IT, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. Similarly, the **Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) Skills Development Fund** enables customized training designed in collaboration with employers. These models demonstrate how skills-focused training can prepare workers more quickly for high-demand roles.

Partnerships that Deliver

Partnerships across the region show the power of alignment. The **Austin Infrastructure Academy**, launched by ACC and Workforce Solutions Capital Area, provides training for infrastructure-sector jobs through a cross-sector approach. Workforce Solutions also co-locates counselors on ACC campuses, enabling students to access both training and funding in one place—leading to completion rates nearly twice as high as average. These examples demonstrate that when institutions collaborate, workers succeed.

Flexible Pathways for Diverse Learners

Traditional degree pipelines are too slow or inaccessible for many workers. Dual-credit programs that allow high school students to earn technical certifications before graduation offer early career access. For adults, short-term and stackable credentials, often funded through **Individual Training Accounts** and the state's **Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)**, provide flexible options. Apprenticeships and Adult Education & Literacy (AEL) programs further support workers seeking to pivot careers midstream.

Supporting Equity and Access

Equitable access is critical to sustaining growth. Many families in Caldwell, Bastrop, and rural counties lack nearby training options or struggle with childcare and transportation barriers. Recent state investments, including a **\$100M allocation to reduce childcare subsidy waitlists**, represent essential infrastructure for enabling parents to participate in the workforce. Leaders should expand similar supports—ensuring every resident has a fair shot at the training and careers that fuel regional prosperity.

Workforce Partnerships: Building Skills-Based Pathways for the Future (cont'd)

Employers as Co-Designers

Employers must be more than end-users of talent—they must co-design pipelines. Healthcare systems are working with ACC and regional colleges to expand nursing and behavioral health programs, directly addressing shortages in critical fields. Technology firms in Austin are partnering with community colleges to build cybersecurity and coding bootcamp pathways, ensuring curricula align with real job requirements.

A Call to Action

Strategic leaders across sectors have a role to play. Employers can co-invest and share expertise, educators can align curriculum with evolving industries, workforce boards can coordinate and braid funding, and governments can expand access supports. Together, these partnerships will create a **skills-based talent pipeline that is resilient, inclusive, and future-ready**.

Communities that invest in workforce pipelines as infrastructure will secure long-term competitiveness and equity. By treating workforce partnerships as essential to growth, the Austin Metro can prepare residents for the jobs of today and tomorrow—building a region where opportunity flows as reliably as water or power.



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Childcare & Early Learning as Workforce Infrastructure

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Issue

In the Austin Metro, childcare is not a side issue—it is workforce infrastructure. When families cannot find affordable, reliable care with hours that match work schedules, employers lose productivity and talent; schools, clinics, and service providers see staffing strain; and households face hard choices. Roundtable conversations and resident input echoed this reality: participants cited long waitlists, high prices, and misaligned hours as everyday barriers. They also flagged coordination gaps across public agencies, schools, employers, and providers—limiting progress on cross-cutting solutions. And while responses skewed toward Travis County, the need spans Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell, underscoring the case for regional action.

Why This Matters

- **Labor force participation & productivity:** Unreliable care leads to missed shifts, reduced hours, or exits from employment, which drags output and increases hiring costs.
- **Equity & retention:** Affordable, high-quality early learning keeps parents—especially mothers—in the workforce and reduces turnover.
- **Talent attraction:** Regions that make care accessible and predictable are more competitive for skilled workers.
- **Child development:** High-quality early learning strengthens school readiness and long-term economic mobility.

What Leaders Can Do Now

1) Employer childcare consortia.

Essentially: Shared Buying Power. Form partnerships by district, corridor, or business park to co-purchase seats at high-quality centers. Shared demand lowers per-employer costs and guarantees slots for shift workers and new hires. Pair with a regional availability dashboard so HR teams can see near-real-time openings.

2) Shared-services hubs for providers.

Support alliances that centralize back-office functions (billing, HR, curriculum, procurement) so small centers can extend hours and focus on quality. Stabilizing provider operations expands capacity without sacrificing standards.

3) On-site / near-site care .

This can be single employer or multi-tenant. Hospitals, campuses, industrial parks, and downtown districts can host near-site centers managed by accredited operators. Align hours with shift patterns, offer tiered pricing, and use master-service agreements so multiple tenants can participate.

4) Extended and non-standard hours.

Health care, logistics, hospitality, and public safety rely on early, late, and rotating shifts. Use performance-based contracts with providers to pilot extended hours matched to local shift data; evaluate with metrics on absenteeism, overtime, and turnover.

5) Subsidy navigation + “last-mile” supports.

Help eligible employees access child care scholarships administered through Workforce Solutions. Embed navigators in HR, co-locate them at major worksites, and offer small “gap grants” to bridge copays or timing lags so families can start care immediately.

Childcare & Early Learning as Workforce Infrastructure (cont'd)

What Leaders Can Do Now (cont'd)

6) Seamless early learning pathways.

Partner with ISDs, Head Start, and community-based providers to align pre-K schedules with working-parent needs. Coordinate before-/after-school programs and transportation so families can rely on a single, coherent day of care and learning.

7) Finance and policy levers.

- **Targeted incentives:** Use zoning bonuses, parking reductions, and economic-development agreements to encourage childcare space in mixed-use and employment centers.
- **Capital stack for centers:** Blend philanthropy, CDFI loans, employer pre-purchases, and municipal grants to add classrooms where waitlists are longest.
- **Quality + workforce:** Support wage ladders, coaching, and credentialing so educators can stay and advance—core to maintaining quality while expanding supply.

Bottom Line

Treat childcare and early learning as core infrastructure for talent, productivity, and inclusion. By organizing demand, de-risking supply, and helping families navigate scholarships, regional leaders can turn an everyday pain point into a competitive advantage for Central Texas.

A Regional Playbook

- **Map demand vs. seats.** Publish a five-county capacity map (by age band, hours, and quality rating) overlaid with major employment clusters and commute corridors.
- **Launch two corridor pilots.** Stand up employer consortia in the North Austin/Domain-Q2 area and along the I-35 Hays corridor, each tied to a near-site center and extended hours.
- **Stand up navigation.** Co-locate scholarship navigators at large employers and Workforce Solutions sites; track time-to-enrollment and retention impacts.
- **Remove friction.** Standardize model leases, master-service agreements, and data-sharing templates so employers and operators can replicate quickly.
- **Measure outcomes.** Monitor absenteeism, turnover, open-position time-to-fill, scholarship uptake, and employee retention 12 months after enrollment.



Nina Murrell, RA, LEED AP is the Founding Principal Architect of MODA | Murrell Office for Development and Architecture, a firm specializing in commercial,

cultural, educational, and community projects. She serves on the CREW Austin Board as Founding Chair of Research and is a member of the CREW Network Global Industry Research Committee. She also serves as Capital Projects Advisor and Board Member for the Flower Hill Center, an urban homestead museum in Austin. A cultural strategist working at the intersection of design, research, and innovation, she leads boundary crossing initiatives to enrich our collective spirit and add meaning to our lives. She is recognized for tapping larger patterns, convening diverse voices, and mobilizing action for the greater good.

Digital Infrastructure & Workforce: Building a Connected Region

By Nina Murrell, CREW Austin Board Member, Founding Chair of CREW Austin Research Initiatives

The Issue

In today's economy, digital infrastructure is as essential as roads and water. Yet in Central Texas, broadband access, digital literacy, and remote work opportunities remain uneven. Roundtable participants in Caldwell and Bastrop Counties were frank: "Our small businesses can't compete if we don't have reliable broadband." Survey respondents echoed the concern more personally: "If I can't work from home, I'm stuck in traffic like everyone else."

For many residents, digital connectivity is no longer optional—it is a determinant of livability and opportunity. Families want assurance that their children can learn online, workers want flexibility to avoid congestion, and employers want confidence that the region can support high-tech industries. Without robust digital infrastructure, growth risks amplifying inequities and weakening workforce competitiveness.

Research Insights

Broadband Deserts Persist

Caldwell and Bastrop leaders described neighborhoods where broadband is unavailable or prohibitively expensive. Rural areas are most affected, but pockets of urban Austin also face limited speed and reliability. For small businesses, this means reduced market reach; for households, it means exclusion from remote work and online learning.

Remote and Hybrid Work as a Quality-of-Life Factor

In the resident survey, many respondents ranked the ability to work from home as a critical factor in whether they would remain in the Austin Metro. Remote work is viewed not just as a convenience but as a solution to congestion, one of the most frequently cited frustrations.

Research Insights (cont'd)

Digital Skills Gaps Limit Workforce Potential

Employers at the Williamson and Metro-wide roundtables reported challenges filling roles that require baseline digital skills. Advanced manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare increasingly rely on digital competencies, but mid-career workers often lack affordable reskilling opportunities.

Equity in Access and Outcomes

Survey feedback underscored how digital inequities mirror broader disparities. Low-income families and immigrant communities often face slower service at higher cost, leaving children behind in online education and adults locked out of remote work. Roundtable participants linked this directly to workforce participation and long-term regional competitiveness.

Looking Ahead to Technology Integration

Leaders noted that the Austin Metro's tech reputation will be tested by how well it prepares for emerging shifts—from artificial intelligence and automation to smart infrastructure and virtual public services. These opportunities depend on both connectivity and digital literacy.

Digital Infrastructure & Workforce: Building a Connected Region (cont'd)

Actionable Strategies for Leaders

1. Treat Broadband as Core Infrastructure

Incorporate broadband deployment into all growth planning alongside roads, water, and utilities. Condition major development approvals on digital connectivity that meets or exceeds regional standards.

2. Leverage State and Federal Funding

Coordinate multi-county applications for infrastructure grants such as the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. Regional collaboration can maximize dollars and reduce duplication.

3. Prioritize Equity in Deployment

Target investments to underserved neighborhoods and rural areas where survey data show the greatest connectivity gaps. Structure public-private agreements to ensure affordable service options, not just premium packages.

4. Invest in Digital Skills Training

Expand partnerships between ISDs, community colleges, and employers to offer digital literacy, coding, and technical certifications. Subsidize reskilling for mid-career workers transitioning into high-demand industries.

Bottom Line

Digital connectivity is workforce connectivity. Without broadband and digital skills, residents cannot access training, businesses cannot operate efficiently, and the region cannot sustain its reputation as a tech hub. The roundtables made clear that broadband deserts are holding back rural economies, while the survey showed residents view remote work and digital access as quality-of-life essentials.

For strategic leaders, the path forward is clear: treat digital infrastructure as a foundational system, invest in equitable access, and link connectivity directly to workforce development. By doing so, Central Texas can ensure that growth yields not just more jobs — but better opportunities for every resident, in every county.

5. Support Remote Work Hubs

Convert vacant retail or office spaces into shared digital work centers equipped with high-speed internet, meeting facilities, and childcare access. These hubs can serve rural residents, entrepreneurs, and small businesses that lack reliable home service.

6. Integrate Digital Access into Workforce Programs

Require digital literacy components in workforce development initiatives. Ensure that online job portals, training programs, and benefit applications are accessible and user-friendly across devices.

7. Plan for Future-Ready Infrastructure

Build out charging, data, and connectivity infrastructure that anticipates AI adoption, smart logistics, and autonomous vehicles. Position the Austin Metro not only to meet today's needs but also to lead in next-generation digital competitiveness.



Nina Murrell, RA, LEED AP is the Founding Principal Architect of MODA | Murrell Office for Development and Architecture, a firm specializing in commercial, cultural, educational, and community projects. She serves on the CREW Austin Board as Founding Chair of Research and is a member of the CREW Network Global Industry Research Committee. She also serves as Capital Projects Advisor and Board Member for the Flower Hill Center, an urban homestead museum in Austin. A cultural strategist working at the intersection of design, research, and innovation, she leads boundary crossing initiatives to enrich our collective spirit and add meaning to our lives. She is recognized for tapping larger patterns, convening diverse voices, and mobilizing action for the greater good.

SECTION 7

GOVERNANCE & REGIONAL STRATEGY

- 7.1 Governance & Trust: Rebuilding Confidence in Regional Collaboration (*Greg Smith*)
- 7.2 Aligning Strategies, Building Collaboration: A Cohesive Future for Central Texas (*Tom Walsh*)

Governance & Trust:

Rebuilding Confidence in Regional Collaboration

By Greg Smith, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

Framing the Issue

In one of the most telling insights from the Austin Metro Resident Survey, **a majority of respondents (53.6%) rated collaboration between local government, schools, developers, and community groups as “not very effective” or “not effective at all.”** Roundtable conversations echoed the sentiment: residents perceive developers as holding outsized influence, governments as unresponsive, and leaders as struggling to work together for the common good.

From my experience advising municipalities, school districts, and private developers, I know how quickly projects stall when trust breaks down. Technical solutions alone — a new housing plan, a road expansion, or a school bond — cannot succeed if the public doesn't believe in the process that produced them. In a region growing as rapidly as Austin, **collaboration is no longer a “soft skill.” It's infrastructure.**

What the Data Suggests

- **Collaboration Gap:** Residents consistently pointed to poor alignment across institutions as a top barrier to solving challenges.
- **Perceived Imbalance of Power:** Many voiced concern that developers “hold the pen” while community voices are sidelined.
- **Leadership Concern:** 37.5% of residents identified the ability of politicians and leaders to work together as a top issue shaping the region's future.

Taken together, the data show a clear trust deficit. And unlike affordability or transit, which are visible challenges, governance confidence is harder to measure — yet just as critical.

Why It Matters for Development

For those of us who work daily between public agencies and private capital, low trust manifests in several ways:

- **Delays and Cost Overruns:** When public skepticism rises, projects face prolonged approvals, litigation risk, or political intervention.
- **Erosion of Long-Term Vision:** Plans crafted without broad buy-in often fail at the ballot box or collapse under leadership turnover.
- **Missed Opportunities for Alignment:** Schools, cities, and employers often pursue parallel solutions rather than leveraging shared investments.

In short, the cost of mistrust is inefficiency. And in a high-growth market like Austin, inefficiency is unaffordable.

Governance & Trust: Rebuilding Confidence in Regional Collaboration (cont'd)

Strategic Recommendations

To rebuild governance confidence, leaders and practitioners must treat collaboration as a discipline — one that requires structure, transparency, and accountability:

- 1. Institutionalize Cross-Sector Tables**
Create standing mechanisms (regional councils, interlocal agreements, joint task forces) where cities, counties, school districts, and employers commit to shared priorities — not ad hoc, but baked into governance.
- 2. Balance Transparency with Expertise**
Publish clear decision-making frameworks and criteria. Residents need to see that projects are evaluated beyond politics or developer lobbying — with visible weighting for equity, sustainability, and fiscal responsibility.
- 3. Invest in Trusted Intermediaries**
Independent advisors — whether regional nonprofits, universities, or third-party program managers — can bridge credibility gaps by facilitating data-driven, transparent processes.
- 4. Pilot Collaborative Wins**
Start small with highly visible projects (joint-use facilities, regional parks, transit corridors) that demonstrate the tangible benefits of cooperation. Success builds momentum.
- 5. Hold Leaders Accountable**
Incorporate measurable collaboration goals into bond programs, comprehensive plans, and even city manager evaluations. When collaboration is tracked, it improves.

Closing Thought

Austin's affordability, workforce, and infrastructure challenges are solvable — but not if each sector works in silos. Residents are calling for a higher standard of collaboration. **The task before us is not just to design better projects, but to design better partnerships.** As development consultants, we see every day that the projects with the greatest community benefit — and the fewest delays — are those where trust was built from the start.



Greg Smith is the President of Windsor Group Advisory & Management, a project and development management firm specializing in public-private partnerships, civic infrastructure, and mission-driven real estate, as well as workplace and complex commercial development. With over 20 years of experience spanning the full project lifecycle, he leads initiatives for municipalities, nonprofits, and private sector clients across Texas. His portfolio includes faith-based redevelopments, public facilities, innovative commercial spaces, and tenant improvement projects. Greg is an active member of CREW Austin and was recognized as an ENR Top 40 Under 40 in the region.

Aligning Strategies, Building Collaboration: A Cohesive Future for Central Texas

By Tom Walsh, CREW Austin Research & Governance Committee Member

Collaboration as the Cornerstone

The Austin Metro is no longer a collection of independent counties and cities. With growth crossing jurisdictional boundaries daily, leaders are realizing that the future demands regional strategy alignment and cross-sector collaboration. CREW Austin's *Leaps & Bounds 2025* research made it clear: siloed planning is no longer sufficient. To build a thriving, resilient future, public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders must coordinate their efforts and share resources.

Why Collaboration Matters for Central Texas

Central Texas is experiencing accelerated growth that strains infrastructure, housing, water, healthcare, and workforce systems. Without alignment, jurisdictions risk duplicating investments, missing opportunities, and leaving critical gaps unaddressed.

Benefits of Strategic Collaboration

Strategic collaboration is essential to:

1 - Maximize Resources.

Shared data platforms, regional compacts, and cross-county partnerships ensure public dollars are spent more effectively.

2 - Improve Public Services.

Residents experience the region as one community, not as isolated counties. Coordinated transit, housing, and emergency planning enhance quality of life.

3 - Strengthen Economic Competitiveness.

Regional councils and cross-sector initiatives attract business and investment by demonstrating stability, efficiency, and foresight.

4 - Respond to Growth Pressures.

From drought resilience to mobility challenges, shared problems require shared solutions. A regional lens prevents reactive, piecemeal responses.

Aligning Strategies, Building Collaboration: A Cohesive Future for Central Texas (cont'd)

County and Metro Priorities for Collaboration

CREW Austin participants across Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, and Caldwell counties consistently identified collaboration as a top priority:

- **Travis County:** Advocated for a formal regional growth compact to guide decision-making and align county-level plans.
- **Williamson County:** Promoted regional economic councils to coordinate development strategies and strengthen collective competitiveness.
- **Hays & Bastrop Counties:** Emphasized regular cross-sector convenings to align resources and address nonprofit capacity gaps.
- **Caldwell County:** Encouraged inter-city collaboration on transit and economic diversification.
- **Metrowide Leaders:** Supported shared data dashboards and transparent decision-making to reduce duplication and ensure accountability.

One Region, One Future

Austin Metro's future will be determined not by individual counties and cities acting alone, but by a collective commitment to work together as one region.

The Path Forward:

Leading Through Collaboration

Central Texas has an opportunity to lead the nation in collaborative growth management. By embracing regional strategy alignment and strategic collaboration, the Austin Metro can:

- Build shared resilience through coordinated infrastructure and emergency preparedness.
- Enhance equity by ensuring that all communities benefit from growth.
- Drive economic vitality by positioning the region as a unified, competitive hub.
- Foster community trust through transparent, inclusive decision-making.



Tom Walsh is a Business Development Leader at DLR Group, an integrated design firm, where he specializes in growing the firm's Justice + Civic practice across Texas. With a focus on public safety, courts, detention, and civic facilities, Tom works closely with stakeholders and industry partners to help communities translate growth into long-term, sustainable facility solutions. Drawing on DLR Group's integrated design expertise and national subject matter expertise, Tom is dedicated to building trusted relationships and aligning stakeholders around data-driven planning, operational efficiency, and long-term maintainability. He is actively helping local governments prepare for upcoming bond programs, capital improvement plans, and aggressive project timelines.

APPENDICES

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

INTRODUCTION

CROSSWALK MATRIX: FROM BRIEFS TO IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

APPENDIX A: PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION PLAYBOOKS

- A1. Resilience Districts
- A2. Housing Entitlement Lab
- A3. Employer–Childcare Compacts
- A4. Digital Access Accelerator
- A5. Main Street Vitality Accelerator

APPENDIX B: SYSTEMIC IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

From Programs to System:
Five-County Workforce Advancement
Partnership Model

APPENDIX C: EMERGING TOPICS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

CREW AUSTIN CAPSTONE RESEARCH TEAM

CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS AND SPONSORS

ABOUT CREW AUSTIN AND CREW NETWORK GLOBAL RESEARCH

Appendices Introduction: From Insights to Action and Foresight

The Capstone Report provides a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities facing the Austin Metro, organized across seven sections of briefs. Yet leaders at the roundtables and residents in the survey emphasized that reports alone are not enough. They asked for tools, models, and forward-looking agendas that could help translate insights into immediate action, guide systemic collaboration, and shape the next generation of research.

This Appendices section responds to that call. It offers three complementary layers of value for regional strategic leaders, community partners, CREW Austin members in commercial real estate, and future CREW Austin research leaders.

How to Use This Section

Together, these three appendices transform the Capstone from a snapshot of current insights into a toolkit and roadmap:

- Leaders can adopt quick-start playbooks or begin testing systemic models.
- Community partners can see where their priorities align and identify opportunities for collaboration.
- CREW Austin members can recognize where commercial real estate intersects with workforce, infrastructure, and resilience.
- Future research leaders can see what's been tried, what's envisioned, and where fresh study is needed.

By moving from insights to action and foresight, the Appendices ensure that the Capstone Report not only informs but also catalyzes change — equipping Central Texas to manage growth with resilience, equity, and shared vision.

Appendix A: Regional Action Plans *Implementation Playbooks*

Twelve one-page playbooks provide ready-to-run pilot models that counties, cities, employers, and nonprofits can adopt today. Each playbook connects back to priorities identified in the briefs — such as resilience, workforce pipelines, housing, and Main Street vitality — and gives practical guidance on how to launch, fund, and evaluate early-stage projects. These are designed for quick-start action in the next 90 days to 2 years.

Appendix B: From Programs to System *Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model*

This appendix introduces a systems-level design framework for aligning workforce, education, and employer strategies across the region. Moving beyond individual programs, it proposes shared entry points, standardized templates, and common metrics to strengthen pathways from early education to high-demand careers. This model reflects the cross-sector urgency expressed in the roundtables and illustrates what regional-scale solutions might look like over the next 2–5 years.

Appendix C: For Future Research *Emerging Topics*

The Capstone also surfaced questions that cannot be answered fully today but will shape the region's trajectory in the decade ahead: climate migration, artificial intelligence, regional governance models, the health–housing nexus, and school finance equity. This appendix outlines priority areas for 2026 research and beyond, giving future CREW Austin research leaders a clear starting point for the next cycle. These topics extend the horizon to 5–10 years, ensuring the region stays ahead of emerging challenges.

From Briefs to Implementation Strategies

This matrix shows how the prioritized Implementation Playbooks, the Workforce Advancement Partnership Model, and the Emerging Topics connect back to the seven Capstone Report sections. It helps leaders, CREW members, and future research chairs quickly see alignment between immediate action, systemic models, and forward-looking research.

Appendix Item	Type	Relevant Capstone Sections
Resilience Districts	Implementation Playbook	Infrastructure Under Strain; Health & Wellbeing
Housing Entitlement Lab	Implementation Playbook	Equity, Housing & Economy; Governance & Regional Strategy
Employer–Childcare Compacts	Implementation Playbook	Workforce & Talent Pipelines; Equity, Housing & Economy
Digital Access Accelerator	Implementation Playbook	Infrastructure Under Strain; Workforce & Talent Pipelines
Main Street Vitality Accelerator	Implementation Playbook	Culture, Heritage & Community Identity; Equity, Housing & Economy
Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model	Systemic Framework	Workforce & Talent Pipelines; Equity, Housing & Economy
Climate Migration Scenarios	Emerging Topic	Regional Growth & Outlook; Infrastructure Under Strain; Equity, Housing & Economy
AI and Workforce Impacts	Emerging Topic	Workforce & Talent Pipelines; Equity, Housing & Economy
Regional Governance Innovations	Emerging Topic	Governance & Regional Strategy
Health–Housing Nexus	Emerging Topic	Health & Wellbeing; Equity, Housing & Economy
Education Finance & Equity	Emerging Topic	Workforce & Talent Pipelines; Equity, Housing & Economy

A1. Resilience Districts

The Issue

Central Texas is experiencing compounding risks from extreme heat, flooding, grid strain, and water insecurity. Roundtable participants in Bastrop, Hays, and Travis Counties voiced concerns about neighborhood vulnerability, while Caldwell and Williamson leaders flagged water reliability and rural infrastructure stress. Survey respondents asked whether their families were safe in the face of heat waves, power outages, floods, and drought. Current resilience planning is fragmented and reactive. Communities need a model for localized, cross-sector resilience districts that integrate energy, water, land, and health systems while connecting to regional-scale strategies.

Key Insights

- Residents ranked health, safety, and livability among their top concerns in the survey.
- Leaders emphasized that resilience must be designed at both the neighborhood and regional scales, addressing inequities in exposure to climate risks.
- Survey write-ins highlighted grid reliability, water security, and flood safety as daily worries, not just future risks.
- Smaller counties noted they lack resources to secure water supply and maintain infrastructure at the pace of growth.

Pilot Opportunity

Resilience Districts are designated zones where local governments, utilities, developers, and community partners collaborate to deliver bundled resilience strategies:

- **Energy:** distributed energy and backup power for critical facilities.
- **Water:** supply conservation, reuse systems, and reliability planning alongside stormwater infrastructure to reduce flooding.
- **Heat:** heat-mitigation design (tree canopy, reflective surfaces, shaded corridors, cooling centers).
- **Health & Safety:** clinics, schools, or community centers that double as resilience hubs.

Pilots could start at the city or county level, focused on fast-growth corridors or vulnerable neighborhoods, but connect into regional water and energy strategies. This ensures that local resilience efforts scale into a broader network for metro-wide preparedness.

Partners to Involve

- Cities and counties (planning, utilities, emergency management).
- Water utilities and regional authorities (e.g., LCRA, TWDB).
- Major employers and developers (infrastructure investment).
- ISDs and healthcare providers (schools and clinics as hubs).
- Nonprofits focused on equity and community resilience.
- **CREW Members:** developers, architects, engineers, and lenders who can integrate resilience design into projects.

A1. Resilience Districts

Funding Pathways

- Federal resilience funds (FEMA BRIC, DOE grid resilience programs, EPA water resilience grants).
- State revolving funds and TWDB programs for water infrastructure.
- Local bonds for flood control, conservation, or resilience facilities.
- Public–private partnerships with utilities and developers.
- Philanthropic support for equity-focused resilience in vulnerable neighborhoods.

Next Steps (First 12 Months)

1. Convene county/city leaders, utilities, and water authorities to identify two pilot districts.
2. Map vulnerabilities and assets (critical facilities, floodplains, aquifers, underserved neighborhoods).
3. Secure seed funding from FEMA, DOE, or TWDB grants.
4. Launch design charrettes with developers, CREW members, and community leaders.
5. Pilot projects (e.g., microgrid installation at a school, stormwater retrofits, water reuse systems, shaded public corridors).
6. Evaluate outcomes and create a toolkit for replication in other counties.

Notes:

Connection to Capstone

- Supports Section 2: Infrastructure Under Strain and Section 3: Health, Safety & Wellbeing.
- Responds directly to survey data on public health, water security, livability, and trust in preparedness.
- Provides a tangible way to act on resilience concerns highlighted in the Climate Readiness, Water Sustainability, Health Infrastructure, and Green Space briefs.
- Could be tracked in CREW's 2026 research cycle as a case study of resilience innovation in growth corridors.

Notes:

A2. Housing Entitlement Lab

The Issue

Housing affordability is at a crossroads in the Austin Metro. Roundtable participants in Travis, Williamson, and Caldwell Counties underscored how permitting delays and outdated entitlement processes are adding significant costs and time to new housing delivery. Developers described a cycle where demand outpaces approvals, driving up prices. Residents, meanwhile, voiced in the survey that affordable options are disappearing, and many worry their children will not be able to stay in the region.

Key Insights

- Survey findings: Housing affordability was ranked as a top challenge by residents, often cited as a reason they might leave the region.
- Roundtable findings: Leaders emphasized that permitting bottlenecks add months or years to projects, inflating costs and discouraging smaller-scale or affordable developments.
- Equity concerns: Lower-income households are hit hardest, as delays in affordable housing production amplify displacement pressures.

Pilot Opportunity

The Housing Entitlement Lab is a regional pilot program where local governments, developers, and research partners work together to streamline housing approvals and test innovative entitlement approaches.

Components include:

- Fast-track review for affordable housing and mixed-income projects.
- Shared template agreements and permitting checklists across jurisdictions.
- Legal and policy pilots, such as adaptive reuse ordinances or pre-approved housing typologies.

Pilots could be launched in 1–2 counties with high growth pressure, then scaled across the metro.

Partners to Involve

- Cities and counties (planning, permitting, legal teams).
- Developers, housing authorities, and nonprofit housing providers.
- Universities and legal clinics to document process innovation.
- Employers concerned about workforce housing near job sites.
- **CREW Members:** developers, architects, attorneys, and lenders engaged in housing production.

Funding Pathways

- Local government budgets redirected from permitting fees.
- State innovation grants for housing pilot programs.
- Philanthropic or foundation support for equity-focused housing solutions.
- Employer contributions in exchange for workforce housing proximity.

Next Steps (First 12 Months)

1. Identify one county and one city willing to pilot a Housing Entitlement Lab.
2. Convene developers, planners, and attorneys to identify top 3 bottlenecks.
3. Develop template agreements and pre-approved housing designs.
4. Launch fast-track review for select projects and track outcomes.
5. Evaluate cost/time savings and equity impacts.
6. Publish toolkit for replication across the metro.

Connection to Capstone

- Directly addresses Section 5: Equity, Housing & Economy.
- Responds to survey concern that housing affordability is the top threat to livability.
- Complements the Government Capacity to Manage Growth brief by targeting operational reforms.

A2. Housing Entitlement Lab

Notes:

Notes:

A3. Employer–Childcare Compacts

The Issue

Childcare emerged in both the roundtables and resident survey as one of the greatest barriers to workforce participation in Central Texas. Families described the lack of affordable, high-quality childcare as a deciding factor in whether they could stay in the region. Employers noted that workforce shortages are directly tied to caregiving gaps, while providers face financial strain that limits expansion.

Key Insights

- Survey findings: Families ranked childcare and early learning among the most pressing affordability concerns.
- Roundtable findings: Employers emphasized the difficulty of attracting and retaining workers without reliable childcare options.
- Equity concerns: Women and lower-income households are disproportionately affected, widening gaps in workforce participation.

Pilot Opportunity

Employer–Childcare Compacts are agreements in which employers, childcare providers, and local governments partner to expand affordable access. Compacts can include:

- On-site or near-site childcare supported by employers.
- Employer subsidies or vouchers for employees' childcare costs.
- Shared investment in facilities with nonprofit or community providers.

Pilots could be launched by large employers or consortiums of mid-sized businesses, beginning in fast-growth employment corridors where access is most limited.

Partners to Involve

- Employers (major corporations and mid-sized firms).
- Childcare providers and early learning centers.
- Cities and counties (incentives, permitting support).
- Nonprofits and family advocacy groups.
- **CREW Members:** developers, architects, and lenders who can design, finance, or repurpose spaces for childcare facilities.

Funding Pathways

- Employer contributions and payroll-based subsidies.
- Local and state incentives for childcare facility expansion.
- Federal childcare block grants and workforce participation programs.
- Philanthropy and foundation support for equity-focused childcare pilots.

Next Steps (First 12 Months)

1. Identify employers interested in piloting compacts.
2. Convene employers, providers, and local officials to design agreements.
3. Secure facilities or sites for on-site or near-site childcare.
4. Launch pilot compacts and evaluate cost savings and workforce outcomes.
5. Document results and develop a replication toolkit.

Connection to Capstone

- Supports Section 5: Equity, Housing & Economy and Section 6: Workforce & Talent Pipelines.
- Responds to survey data identifying childcare as a major affordability and workforce issue.
- Complements briefs on workforce pipelines and equity.

A3. Employer–Childcare Compacts

Notes:

Notes:

A4. Digital Access Accelerator

The Issue

The COVID-19 pandemic made clear that digital connectivity is essential for economic participation, education, and access to services. Roundtable participants highlighted digital access as both a congestion solution and an equity issue. Survey respondents confirmed that remote work opportunities and reliable internet are key to staying in the region, yet gaps in broadband access persist.

Key Insights

- Survey findings: Remote work and digital access were identified as top quality-of-life factors.
- Roundtable findings: Employers noted that digital infrastructure is critical for workforce competitiveness and congestion relief.
- Equity concerns: Rural counties and low-income households are disproportionately disconnected.

Pilot Opportunity

The Digital Access Accelerator is a regional pilot to expand broadband, digital literacy, and remote work hubs. Components include:

- Public–private partnerships to close last-mile broadband gaps.
- Community-based digital literacy programs.
- Development of neighborhood-scale remote work hubs in underserved areas.

Pilots can begin in rural counties or urban neighborhoods with documented gaps, with partnerships between employers, ISPs, and local governments.

Partners to Involve

- Internet service providers and technology firms.
- Cities and counties (infrastructure investment, permitting).
- Employers seeking to expand remote work options.
- Schools and libraries (anchors for digital literacy programs).
- **CREW Members:** developers and designers who can retrofit or build remote work hubs.

Funding Pathways

- Federal broadband expansion funds (BEAD, FCC programs).
- State-level broadband initiatives.
- Employer and ISP co-investment.
- Philanthropy for digital literacy and equity initiatives.

Next Steps (First 12 Months)

1. Identify priority counties or neighborhoods with documented gaps.
2. Convene ISPs, local officials, and employers to design pilot partnerships.
3. Launch broadband expansion and digital literacy initiatives.
4. Establish 1–2 neighborhood-scale remote work hubs.
5. Track participation, cost savings, and workforce impacts.
6. Develop a metro-wide scaling strategy.

Connection to Capstone

- Supports Section 2: Infrastructure Under Strain and Section 6: Workforce & Talent Pipelines.
- Responds directly to survey data on digital access, remote work, and congestion relief.
- Complements briefs on workforce competitiveness and infrastructure resilience.

A4. Digital Access Accelerator

Notes:

Notes:

A5. Main Street Vitality Accelerator

The Issue

As the Austin Metro grows, many small towns and urban neighborhoods are grappling with how to preserve their Main Streets as cultural and economic anchors. Roundtable participants in Bastrop, Caldwell, and Williamson Counties highlighted the fragility of small businesses and the importance of vibrant Main Streets to community identity. Survey respondents echoed this by ranking culture, green space, and local amenities as top contributors to quality of life. Without strategic investment, Main Streets risk decline under growth pressures, rising rents, and shifting demographics.

Key Insights

- Survey findings: Residents tied livability to cultural vitality, walkable amenities, and thriving local businesses.
- Roundtable findings: Leaders stressed the importance of small business resilience and downtown revitalization as key to economic health.
- Equity concerns: Displacement of long-standing businesses and loss of cultural identity were cited as risks if growth is unmanaged.

Pilot Opportunity

The Main Street Vitality Accelerator is a pilot program to strengthen small business ecosystems and cultural identity through targeted revitalization efforts. It can include:

- Technical assistance and micro-grants for small businesses.
- Activation of vacant storefronts with cultural or community uses.
- Placemaking strategies such as streetscape improvements, wayfinding, and public art.
- Partnerships with developers to balance growth with preservation of local character.

Pilots could begin in one county seat or historic district, creating a replicable model for other communities across the Metro.

Partners to Involve

- City and county governments (planning, economic development).
- Local chambers of commerce, Main Street programs.
- Small business associations, cultural organizations.
- Developers and property owners.
- **CREW Members:** developers, designers, and finance professionals engaged in downtown and mixed-use projects.

Funding Pathways

- State and federal Main Street revitalization programs.
- Local economic development funds and downtown improvement districts.
- Philanthropy and cultural grants for placemaking and arts activation.
- Private investment in redevelopment projects.
- Employer sponsorship of public realm improvements.

Next Steps (First 12 Months)

1. Identify one community willing to pilot the Main Street Vitality Accelerator.
2. Conduct a baseline assessment of business mix, vacancy, and cultural assets.
3. Convene local leaders, small business owners, and developers to co-design the program.
4. Launch micro-grants, technical assistance, and placemaking initiatives.
5. Track outcomes such as business retention, activation of vacant spaces, and community engagement.
6. Document results; develop a toolkit for replication.

Connection to Capstone

- Responds to survey themes of livability, cultural vitality, and community identity.
- Complements briefs on cultural preservation, creativity, and equity.

A5. Main Street Vitality Accelerator

Notes:

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From Programs to System: Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model

Executive Intent

Central Texas already has strong parts—university labs, community-college programs, P-TECH/early college, apprenticeship and internship channels, and active workforce boards. What we lack is a simple, shared operating system that makes it fast for employers to partner, easy for students and candidates to access paid experiences, and predictable for program hosts to execute. This appendix proposes an overlay system—lightweight, modular, and adoptable in phases—that stitches together what exists and scales what works.

System Description

What It Is:

A coordinating layer with shared intake, templates, and metrics that any education or employer partner can use. It serves as a “front door” and clear playbook to connect with the right campus, program, or board in days—not months.

What It Is Not:

A new layer of bureaucracy, a replacement for existing programs, or a one-size-fits-all curriculum. Individual programs retain their identity; the system simply reduces friction and accelerates results.

Why Now

- **Survey findings:** Residents worry about affordability, workforce competitiveness, and economic opportunity.
- **Roundtable insights:** Leaders called for breaking down silos across counties, education, and employers.
- **Regional growth:** With 1M more residents expected in the next decade, fragmented efforts won’t meet demand.

Bottom Line

We don’t need to build new programs—we need to connect the ones we have. This overlay system provides the front door, the rules of the road, and the feedback loops to move talent and innovation faster, fairly, and at scale across Central Texas.

Target Outcomes

- **Employers:** Lower time-to-engage, predictable contracts/IP, and a dependable pipeline (co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, upskilling).
- **Students & candidates:** Paid work-based learning linked to portable, stackable credentials; supports that reduce attrition (transport, childcare, tools).
- **Program hosts (ISDs, colleges, universities, nonprofits):** Clear demand signals, a common legal kit, stable funding flows, shared metrics for impact.
- **Region:** Higher conversion-to-job, stronger small/medium employer participation, and more equitable access across all five counties.

Governance and Roles

- **Steering Council (meets quarterly):** Workforce boards (Capital & Rural Capital), ACC, Texas State, UT Austin, at least two ISDs per county, employer coalition (large + SME), and a community representative. Approves SLAs, templates, and metrics.
- **Operating Committee (monthly):** Concierge lead, legal/template lead, data lead, and sector leads (health, manufacturing, utilities, tech, public). Solves bottlenecks, tracks progress.
- **Host Site Leads:** Named contact at each teaching site responsible for safety, supervision, and evaluation.

From Programs to System: Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model

Core Components

1. Single Front Door + Concierge

- A five-county web intake, backed by a small concierge team.
- SLA: route employer problem statements or placement requests to the right institution(s) within 3–5 business days.
- Visible queue status; quarterly satisfaction reporting.

2. Standardized Partnership Kit (published, pre-negotiated templates)

- MOUs for co-ops/internships/apprenticeships (paid placements required).
- Sponsored Research Agreement options with a plain-English IP menu (A/B/C choices for foreground IP; background IP retained by originator).
- Data Use/NDA and safety/supervision checklists for host sites.
- Model procurement paths for public education partners to shorten cycles.

3. Named “Teaching Sites” Network

- 6–10 initial sites designated across sectors: hospital/clinic unit, fab or advanced manufacturing line, utility (water/energy), data center cluster, municipal/public sector.
- Each site adopts common onboarding, supervision ratios, safety standards, and evaluation rubrics; sites are open to multiple institutions.

4. Funding & Participation Supports

- Braided funding: workforce (WIOA/board), state skills grants, employer cost-share, philanthropy/CDFIs, municipal tools (e.g., targeted 380/381 as appropriate).
- SME on-ramp: wage subsidies for first-time small/medium employers (e.g., first 1–2 placements).
- Backbone supports: transit passes, childcare navigation, micro-grants for PPE/tools, emergency aid.

5. Shared Micro-Credentials & Pathways

- A regional catalogue of industry-recognized, stackable credentials aligned to teaching-site roles (e.g., semiconductor tech, entry clinical, utility operations, cybersecurity).
- Credit crosswalks between ISDs ↔ ACC/Texas State ↔ UT (where applicable).

6. Common Metrics & Public Dashboard

- Placements started/completed; conversion-to-job; median starting wage; employer repeat participation; time-to-contract; participation by county and demographics; credential attainment.
- Quarterly publication; annual external review.

From Programs to System: Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model

12-Month Implementation Roadmap

Sprint 1: 0–90 days — Stand-up & signal

- Launch front door beta + concierge (soft opening to early employer champions).
- Publish v1 legal kit (MOUs, IP menu, data/NDA, safety lists).
- Select 6–10 teaching sites and complete readiness checklists.
- Set paid-placement goal (e.g., +1,000) with SME subsidy pool.

Sprint 2: Months 4–8 — Run & learn

- Begin rolling cohorts; track SLA compliance and time-to-contract.
- Publish regional micro-credential catalogue + crosswalks.
- Add backbone supports (transit passes, PPE/tools micro-grants, childcare navigation).

Sprint 3: Months 9–12 — Scale & lock

- Expand to additional sites/sectors based on demand signals.
- First public dashboard and annual review; update templates.
- Codify multi-year funding braid; lock SME subsidy design.

Challenges and How to Address Them

- **Trust across counties and boards → Mitigation:** Rotate conveners, use neutral facilitators, and showcase early wins.
- **SME capacity → Mitigation:** Concierge provides onboarding support, HR templates, and coaching.
- **Slow credential alignment → Mitigation:** Start with “low-hanging” programs already aligned to demonstrate early wins.
- **Equity gaps → Mitigation:** Partner with community-based organizations for targeted recruitment and outreach.

Practical Adoption Guidance

- **Start where friction is highest:** contracting/IP and site safety. Pre-approve templates with institutional counsels and host-site EHS teams.
- **Pick “no-regrets” sectors first:** health, semiconductors/advanced manufacturing, utilities, public sector—where paid placements convert to jobs quickly.
- **Guarantee paid placements:** unpaid experiences amplify inequity and attrition.
- **Make SMEs the hero:** concierge support + wage subsidies + small-batch cohorts (2–5 placements) help smaller firms plug in.
- **Publish the queue:** transparency on requests, routing times, and completions builds trust.

Risk & Mitigations

- **Legal lag / IP disputes:** Use the IP menu and pre-signed riders; escalate via a small legal working group with 5-day turnaround.
- **Uneven access outside Travis County:** Reserve placement quotas and travel/childcare stipends by county; rotate teaching-site cohorts across geographies.
- **SME capacity:** Offer placement “bundles” (shared supervision) and concierge onboarding checklists; subsidize first placements.
- **Data fragmentation:** Require minimal, common data fields at intake; automate dashboard feeds from existing systems wherever possible.

From Programs to System: Five-County Workforce Advancement Partnership Model

Enhancements Supporting Adoption

To strengthen adoption and usability, the following improvements have been incorporated:

- **Trust-building and governance culture:** Success depends on trust. The partnership will rotate county hosts, use neutral conveners, and highlight early wins to build confidence.
- **SME capacity:** Concierge staff will provide not only navigation but also hands-on support for SMEs — onboarding guidance, HR templates, and coaching for supervisors.
- **Education partner alignment:** Credential crosswalks will begin with areas of existing alignment, to deliver quick wins before expanding to more complex agreements.
- **Equity and community access:** Equity goals include targeted outreach to rural residents, non-traditional learners, and historically underrepresented groups.
- **CREW Member role:** CREW Austin members can contribute by offering site development expertise, financial/legal templates, and advocacy as employer champions.
- **Regional brand:** This model can be branded as the “Central Texas Talent Front Door” — a recognizable identity for employers and job-seekers alike.

Connection to Capstone

- **Workforce & Talent Needs:** Addresses survey findings that highlight shortages in healthcare, education, and skilled trades by creating a shared front door for employer and education engagement.
- **Housing Affordability & Stability:** Supports essential workers’ retention in the region by streamlining career pathways tied to local housing realities.
- **Equity & Inclusivity:** Advances Capstone goals of broadening access to opportunity through targeted outreach to rural residents, non-traditional learners, and historically underrepresented groups.
- **Strategic Collaboration:** Embeds the cross-sector collaboration theme from roundtables, aligning employers, schools, and regional leaders in one coordinated system.
- **Governance & Trust:** Reinforces Capstone findings that capacity and clear processes are essential for building public trust in institutions.
- **Regional Brand & Competitiveness:** Contributes to the Capstone vision of a resilient, future-ready Austin Metro by creating a recognizable identity (“Central Texas Talent Front Door”) that signals alignment and coordination to employers.

Notes:

Emerging Topics for Future Research

The Issue

Central Texas is growing at an extraordinary pace, and the challenges of today are only part of the story. Roundtables and resident survey findings underscored that some of the most pressing forces shaping our future lie just over the horizon. If leaders want to build resilient and equitable communities, research must not only address today's pain points but also anticipate tomorrow's emerging issues.

This brief highlights five research frontiers that merit deeper attention in the coming years: climate migration, artificial intelligence and workforce impacts, governance innovation, the health–housing nexus, and education finance and equity. Together, these themes represent risks and opportunities that could dramatically influence the region's trajectory over the next decade.

Why This Matters

Emerging issues can feel distant, but they are already shaping decisions for employers, families, and communities. By naming these frontiers now, CREW Austin signals that research is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing commitment to foresight and relevance.

Addressing these topics in the next 5-10 years would build on the Capstone's foundation and ensure that leaders across sectors are not only prepared for today's challenges but also equipped to navigate the forces that will define Central Texas in the next decade.

Key Insights from Roundtables and Survey Data

- 1. Climate Migration Scenarios:** Leaders and residents alike raised questions such as “Where will people go when heat and drought worsen?” and “Will Central Texas become a refuge — or will it face outmigration due to strain?” The resident survey showed high concern with water reliability, heat resilience, and livability.
- 2. Artificial Intelligence and Workforce Impacts:** Employers and educators acknowledged both promise and disruption from AI adoption. Residents voiced concerns about job displacement, while roundtables identified the need to update training systems faster.
- 3. Regional Governance Innovations:** Participants at the Metro-wide roundtable stressed that fragmented governance weakens the region's ability to respond to growth. Residents highlighted mistrust in government as a barrier to long-term planning.
- 4. Health–Housing Nexus:** Residents worried about affordability and livability often paired those concerns with health — asking if safe, stable housing exists near jobs and healthcare. Roundtables echoed the need for integrated planning that links housing affordability, location, and community health.
- 5. Education Finance and Equity:** Equity surfaced as a cross-cutting theme in every county. Participants emphasized disparities in school funding and access to career pathways. Residents tied school quality directly to quality of life and opportunity.

Emerging Topics for Future Research

Priority Research Questions for 2025-2030

1. **Climate Migration Scenarios:** What population shifts could result from climate impacts, and how should Central Texas plan for both inflow and outflow?
2. **AI and Workforce Impacts:** Which sectors are most vulnerable to automation, and how can regional training systems adapt in real time?
3. **Regional Governance Innovations:** What models of cross-jurisdiction collaboration (e.g., regional councils, joint powers authorities) could strengthen planning and trust?
4. **Health–Housing Nexus:** How do housing affordability, stability, and location interact with community health outcomes, and what interventions have the greatest return?
5. **Education Finance and Equity:** How do current funding structures drive inequity across ISDs, and what reforms or partnerships could create fairer access to opportunity?

Notes:

Actionable Takeaways

1. **Anticipate, don't just react.** Incorporate scenario planning for climate and migration into infrastructure and land use decisions today.
2. **Modernize training systems.** Create “rapid response” credential updates with employers and educators to keep up with AI-driven changes.
3. **Pilot governance innovations.** Test collaborative models at a county or corridor level to build trust and demonstrate what works.
4. **Integrate housing and health planning.** Encourage partnerships between public health agencies, housing authorities, and developers.
5. **Advance equity in education finance.** Explore regional or philanthropic interventions to balance disparities while pursuing long-term structural reforms.

Notes:

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About CREW Network

Founded in 1989, CREW Network is a global organization with more than 86 affiliate chapters and 15,000 members worldwide. Our mission is to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in commercial real estate through business networking, industry research, leadership development, and career outreach initiatives.

CREW Network is recognized as the leading producer of research that delivers actionable data on gender, diversity, and inclusivity within the commercial real estate industry. Our research sets the standard for understanding and advancing equity across the sector.

With a culture rooted in inclusion and belonging, CREW Network inspires engagement, breaks down barriers, and accelerates growth and collaboration across our chapters, members, and partners. We are an organization for women and all professionals who work alongside women in the industry. We believe that diverse voices strengthen business connections, drive innovation, and build a more resilient, vibrant future for commercial real estate.

Learn more at crewnetwork.org.

About CREW Austin

Founded in 2002 as an affiliate of CREW Network, CREW Austin is a premier organization for commercial real estate professionals across Central Texas. Today, our more than 175 members represent all disciplines that shape commercial real estate and drive growth and development across our region and beyond.

Through initiatives like the Research & Governance Committee, CREW Austin generates original research, fosters strategic cross-sector collaboration, and provides actionable insights that drive innovation. We give voice to Austin Metro communities and help regional leaders and decision-makers shape the future of Central Texas.

Learn more at austin.crewnetwork.org.

“**CREW Austin empowers leaders to shape a more innovative, resilient, and inclusive Central Texas.**”



To everyone who contributed time, insight, and leadership—**thank you**. This research reflects your voices, your vision, and your commitment to a thriving, resilient Austin Metro. Your involvement is helping shape the region's future in real and lasting ways.

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Miller Imaging & Digital Solutions contribution created the committee budget and covered print materials, supplies, survey / data analysis tools, and regional outreach campaigns. A heartfelt thank you to Miller IDS, without whose support this research would not have been possible!

