

Creative Climate Cities Profile

AUSTIN



GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

810 sq. km



POPULATION

947,987



GDP

\$135,010
(PPP) million

CITY STRATEGY LINKS

The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan

Austin Community Climate Plan

Austin Strategic Direction 2023





Welcome to Austin



Culture Fact

Growing by 40% over the last decade, the region's creative sector contributes more than US\$ 4.35 billion in economic activity annually and represents nearly 49,000 permanent jobs¹.



Climate Fact

Climate change induced droughts, severe weather, and wildfires could cost the Texan economy billions of dollars each year². The carbon footprint for City of Austin operations has increased by 4% since 2013, but decreased overall by 72% since 2007³.

Introduction

Austin, the state capital of Texas, is the fastest growing large city in the United States⁴ and known for its liberal culture, eclectic country, blues and rock live-music scene, scenic parks and lakes, as well as rapidly accelerating cutting-edge technology. Austin is located at the intersection of four major ecological regions, with a highly variable climate combining characteristics of the desert, the tropics, and a wetter climate. Diverse ecologically and biologically, it is home to a variety of animals and plants, including wildflowers that blossom across the year.

Austin was recently designated as City of Media Arts within UNESCO's Creative Cities Network and in 2016, was ranked number one in Forbes' 'Cities of the Future' list⁵. The city's official slogan promotes Austin as 'The Live Music Capital of the World' with the SXSW Conference + Festivals – which include Film, Interactive and Music – solidifying the city's leadership position in the music and wider creative industries. Austin has long been home to authors and artists from America and beyond, and has fostered creative hubs, a strong theatre culture and hosting various film festivals each year, including the Austin Film Festival and the SXSW Film Festival.

Environmental Ambition

According to the National Climate Assessment's fourth **report** in 2018, the Southern Great Plains – which includes Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma – will be hit particularly hard by climate change, however Austin's Climate Program is leading efforts towards net-zero emissions by 2050. Austin has also achieved high acclaim being one of five cities to win the Bloomberg

¹UNESCO Creative Cities Network. <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/austin>

²The National Climate Assessment (NCA) assesses the science of climate change and variability and its impacts across the United States, now and throughout this century. <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/>

³City of Austin. http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/2014_Municipal_Inventory.pdf

⁴'America's Fastest Growing Cities 2016'. Forbes.

⁵ 'America's Cities of the Future'. Forbes.

American Cities Climate Challenge. It was awarded resources and technical support to help achieve its ambitious climate goals. Austin now has the opportunity to leverage its world-famous arts, culture and innovation to accelerate its shift to a sustainable and socially-equitable city.

Connecting Creative & Climate Action in Austin

1. Creative Programmes & Campaigns

Creative content and activities that engage audiences on themes of climate and the environment

- Austin's **Art in Public Places** program collaborates with local and national artists to celebrate Austin's identity and has featured many artists and artworks engaging with environmental themes, including:
 - **Cyclical Interplay**, by Andrew Bellatti Green and Adam Pyrek, is a kinetic sculpture inspired by the cyclical nature of our climate at different time scales. Every evening at dusk, the sculpture comes to life, spinning in a complex dance and resting in a position to reflect current climate conditions.
 - **The BELOW Project**, created by Jacob Villanueva and Jeff Clarke in 2014, was a temporary installation that used maps from the City of Austin translated into a vivid display of LEDs in the shape of the Boggy Creek Watershed. The work was intended to engage and bring awareness to the impact of local neighborhoods on ecosystems.
- The **Mueller SunFlowers** is a work of art with a purpose: returning electricity to the city's power grid. Artists Mags Harries and Lajos Heder merged the artistic elements of light, colour and shadow with the science of energy and sustainability to create SunFlowers.
- **Waller Creek Conservancy** is a non-profit whose mission is to create and maintain a chain of extraordinary urban parks around a restored Waller Creek, in partnership with the City of Austin. It engages its communities through outreach, education, cultural events, and the arts. In 2017 and 2018, Waller Creek Conservancy partnered with The Contemporary Austin to temporarily install Ai WeiWei's **Forever Bicycles**, commenting on transportation and social mobility.
- Fusebox is a non-profit arts organization in Austin which provides a series of performances, talks and events throughout the year and direct resources to artists. **Fusebox Festival 2019** included a variety of environmental programming:
 - **Estado Vegetal (Vegetative State)**, a play based on the revolutionary thinking of plant philosopher Michael Marder and plant neurobiologist Stefano Mancuso. It explored the ways in which new concepts such as plant intelligence, vegetative soul, or plant communication can transform our creative practice.
 - **Not Every Mountain** was a mellow meditation on change, permanence and our place in the natural world. It was a presentation of the life cycle of mountains and the processes by which they are born and eventually laid to rest, an invocation of tectonic force and geologic time.

2. Resources & Support

Investment, training and materials that support environmental knowledge and practical action

- The City of Austin's **Artist-in-Residency** programme, administered by the Cultural Arts Division and supported by the Office of Innovation, works to embed artists within City departments to help provide innovative solutions or new process improvements and engage communities in creative ways. It supports various City initiatives and efforts, including the Music and Creative Ecosystem Omnibus Resolution, Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, and the City's newly launched Equity Assessment Tool.
- Artist **Rehab Elsadek** was the first Artist-In-Residence with the City of Austin, working with the city's Watershed Department to highlight their work for citizens. She distilled and presented her research through a pop-up of photographs, text, and 2D artwork.
- **Austin Creative Reuse**'s mission is to foster conservation and reuse through creativity and education, building a community that chooses reuse as a first choice, consuming consciously and basing purchasing decisions on the whole lifecycle of the object. As well as collecting, distributing, and selling reusable materials donated from industry and individuals, the material hub also educates its communities on waste management and hosts a range of events and activities promoting conscious consumption, sustainability, and art.

3. Partnerships & Innovation

Diverse disciplines and communities sharing and co-developing ideas and resources that accelerate environmental action

- Austin's Art in Public Places team collaborates with a variety of city departments on a regular basis, including the Parks and Recreation Department on placement of public art; Austin Energy, to provide art for their **new "chiller" buildings**, working with local artist Beili Liu; and with Watershed Protection, regarding artworks inspired by flooding, climate change, and water.
- The **One Water Summit 2019**, to be hosted in Austin in September 2019, will include an arts and culture track throughout the Summit: 'One Water isn't just about breaking down the silos in the water sector—it's about re-conceptualizing water management in an inclusive and innovative way. Arts and culture can be essential tools to address water challenges'. The focus on arts and culture will draw from the report: '**Advancing One Water through Arts and Culture: A Blueprint for Action**' – a collaboration between US Water Alliance and ArtPlace America.
- **[Re]Verse Pitch** is an event series for Social Entrepreneurs encouraging principles of the circular economy. The [Re]Verse Pitch Competition helps turn valuable raw materials that are currently leaving local organisations as waste into the raw materials for new or expanding social enterprises. 2019 winners were '**Polymart**', by Anjali Sridharan, who repurposed polycarbonate plastic die-cut sheets into eyewear; and '**3D Printing from Trash**' by **re:3D**, repurposing polycarbonate plastic die-cut sheets into 3D printed furniture, art, and other items.

4. Policy & Strategy

Guiding policy and strategy frameworks that drive climate and environmental action, investment and accountability

- The City of Austin was the first municipality in Texas to make a commitment to include works of art in construction projects. By ordinance, 2% of eligible capital improvement project budgets are allocated to [commission or purchase art for that site](#).
- The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan recognises that Austin's cultural sector includes cross-discipline communities such as 'green art'. The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan identifies the opportunity of integrating culture with other key planning and community development efforts (p. 55), noting that urban and community planning around the world is increasingly integrating sustainability principles: 'Austin has the opportunity to build upon "green" arts and sustainability linkages noted above to play a leading role in integrating these frameworks in the U.S'.
- Based on the [Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan](#), the Austin City Council adopted a strategic direction on March 8, 2018, guiding the City of Austin for the next three to five years. [Austin Strategic Direction 2023](#) outlines a shared vision stating that together we strive to create a complete community where every Austinite has choices at every stage of life to experience and contribute to six priority Strategic Outcomes, including enjoying a sustainable environment and a healthy life, physically and mentally; and being enriched by Austin's unique civic, cultural, ethnic, and learning opportunities.

Spotlight

AUSTIN'S LIBRARIES

Austin's new **Central Library** is a Platinum LEED Certified building and has a rooftop garden with the largest solar installation in downtown Austin; it is part of the **Seaholm EcoDistrict**. The Central Library operates 30% more efficiently than the energy code requires, with energy savings equivalent to the needs of 130 households per year.

The **Austin Public Library** provides knowledge, technology, and inspiration to the Austin community. It includes 'Recycled Reads', a hub that receives all of the library's discarded books and materials – as well as donations from the public – which are then sold, recycled or repurposed with all proceeds supporting the library.

It also includes an **events** programme that engages citizens in local issues. Austin History Center (a division of the Austin Public Library system) produced '**Off the Rails: Austin's Commuter Future**' a gathering of transportation specialists, planners, influencers, citizens and stakeholders, each presenting their take on Austin's mobility challenges and possible solutions.

Highlights

1

Creative Programmes & Campaigns

Austin's Art in Public Places program has featured various artworks engaging with sustainability e.g. Cyclical Interplay, by Andrew Bellatti Green and Adam Pyrek, a kinetic sculpture inspired by the cyclical nature of our climate at different time scales.

2

Resources & Support

The City of Austin's Artist-in-Residency programme embeds artists within City departments to help provide innovative solutions. Artist Rehab Elsadek was the first Artist-In-Residence with the City of Austin, working with the City's Watershed Department.

3

Partnerships & Innovation

[Re]Verse Pitch is an event series for Social Entrepreneurs encouraging principles of the circular economy. The [Re]Verse Pitch Competition helps turn waste into the raw materials for new or expanding social enterprises.

4

Policy & Strategy

The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan recognises environmental sustainability: 'Austin has the opportunity to build upon "green" arts... to play a leading role in integrating these frameworks in the U.S'.



Where Next?

A number of opportunities have been identified:

1. **Share good practice**

Austin has identified the opportunity to build on its green arts community. Start by researching and compiling creative and cultural initiatives across the city which engage with environmental themes and practices, making them publicly available through an online resource. This will encourage new collaborations and good practice exchange and help build environmental knowledge, awareness and inspiration within the sector.

2. **Develop action plans**

The CreateAustin Cultural Master Plan promotes 'green arts' activities. Develop plans for supporting and scaling these initiatives, focussing on improving the environmental performance of Austin's arts and culture and unlocking opportunities for advocacy and civic engagement. This additionally presents opportunities for integrating social inclusion and tackling environmental injustice.

3. **Implement environmental monitoring**

Improve understanding of Austin's cultural sector's environmental impacts (e.g. energy, water, waste, carbon) by establishing environmental monitoring and reporting, potentially taking a networked approach e.g. a consortium of cultural sites committed to environmental improvement. This will build environmental literacy and evidenced-based understanding and planning. This could be reported through Austin's Cultural Funding Program and Art in Public Places Program.

4. **Invest in energy efficiency and impact reduction**

Work with Austin's Climate Program to develop the business case for investing in cultural buildings and events to reduce their environmental impacts. Support capital investment, energy efficiency projects and training for cultural institutions while ensuring that financial and environmental paybacks are accurately monitored and reported to make the case for continued investment.

5. **Provide practical support to artists**

Embed environmental sustainability in public art frameworks, not just in terms of encouraging creative programming but also practical guidelines relating to the environmental impact of materials, sourcing, construction and transportation. This could be delivered through Cultural Arts Division Education Programs (in conjunction with the Small Business Division and the Office of Sustainability).

With special thanks to:

Susan Lambe, Art In Public Places Program Manager;
and Laura Odegard, Cultural Innovation and
Collaboration Specialist



Julie's Bicycle
SUSTAINING CREATIVITY

—
BOP
Consulting