



For Release

October 13, 2025 Contact: Tanya Payne; tanya@austinunitedpac.com; 512-

Austin United PAC Turns In Petition to Force a Public Vote on the Multi-billion Dollar New Convention Center Project

(AUSTIN, Texas, October 13) — This morning at 10 a.m., volunteers with Austin United PAC submitted more than the 25,000 signatures of Austin voters to the Austin city clerk to determine the future of the controversial new \$5.6 billion convention center project. The signatures were gathered across the city by volunteers to ensure the 20,000 City of Austin voter signatures required to place the “Save Austin’s Soul” petition on the May 2026 ballot was met.

When certified by the clerk, the Austin City Council has only two choices under the Austin City Charter: either adopt the petitioned ordinance as is, without amendment, or place the petition ordinance on the next uniform election date ballot, which is May 2026. The petitioned citizen-initiative ordinance, if approved by the Council or the Austin voters, would:

- Suspend further demolition of the now mostly demolished existing convention center and halt construction on the new convention center project unless and until Austin voters approve the debt financing for the project or until a seven year “time out” period runs;
- Direct the Austin City Council to prioritize the use of “City hotel tax and other resources to substantially increase promotion and support for cultural and outdoor tourism that benefit both visitors and residents and located in all City Council districts.”

City Staff put in writing last January that the new convention center project would require an estimated \$5.6 billion in supporting revenues over the 30-year debt financing period. However, the Austin Convention Center Department staff has refused to provide the details on how this \$5.6 billion “all in” cost number was calculated. ACCD staff has also refused to provide a financial model providing the details on how they estimated the revenue streams required to cover these 30 year, “all in” expenses.

Meanwhile, ACCD staff has continued to state that the cost of construction is “only” \$1.3 to \$1.6 billion. This number excludes the undisclosed and estimated interest payments on debt financing, annual operating losses, and various contingencies. The value of the land is also excluded from the \$5.6 billion total.

After telling the City Council in May that these details would be disclosed “as soon as possible,” the ACCD staff stated in writing that the details would be kept secret until the second quarter of 2027 so as to protect the City’s “bargaining position” with the contractor.

The full text of the petition language is linked below.

“At a time when national democratic institutions are under attack, this grassroots effort signals that local democracy is very much alive and well,” said Austin United PAC Treasurer Tanya Payne. “Voters are outraged that we are spending so much on a new convention center, especially since the convention industry has dramatically changed post-COVID and the city is facing severe budget cuts.”

“We need to invest in local culture. That is what makes Austin worth living in and worth visiting,” said Pedro Carvalho, owner of the Far Out Lounge and member of the Austin Music Commission. “People are excited about what redirecting this funding could do for Austin’s future.”

With the city council’s rush to demolish the existing, 23-year old center, we now have a blank slate for considering better options for use of these six blocks of publicly-owned downtown land. U.T. Architecture Professor David Heymann has proposed a cultural arts district. “I think the convention center site – the largest buildable area the city controls downtown – would give Austin best value as a cultural arts district, with a purpose-built art museum, performing arts center, experimental theater, media-arts center, and other amenities,” Heymann wrote in an Austin American Statesman guest editorial.

The petition signatures were gathered at local venues including Barton Springs, the Vortex Theater, the Paramount Theater, the Soup Peddler, Chicano Park, and a wide variety of local shops and restaurants. Signers and volunteer petitioners span all across the political spectrum and from all over Austin.

“We call on the Austin City Council to adopt the petitioned ordinance as written, and to begin prioritizing funding for the people and places that actually bring visitors to all of Austin, not just one corner of downtown,” Payne added. --30--

About Austin United PAC

Austin United PAC is 100% funded by neighborhood, environmental and cultural leaders who are focused on good government and pragmatic solutions. For more information go to www.austinunitedpac.com or email info@austinunitedpac.com.

Petition ballot language: [Austin United Petition Ballot Language.pdf](#)