Council set to approve incentive plan to help small, local businesses

by Sarah Navoy

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Austin City Council is expected to pass a new economic incentives program Thursday to attract and keep businesses here in the city.

A key part of the proposal is ensuring companies who receive tax dollars pay their employees a 'livable wage' and access to health coverage.

Council Member Ann Kitchen said the proposal is also unique because it focuses on smaller, local companies looking to grow businesses in Austin.

The program will also target businesses and corporations with a focus on creatives, arts and music, according to Kitchen.

"If we lose all of our arts and music organizations, we're not Austin," said Kitchen. "So, we want to invest in them."

Austin Interfaith Leader David Guarino said they've pushed council for the better part of a decade to make sure incentivized employees can make a livable wage of at least $15 an hour.

"You need to be able to make enough to pay for the housing, and hopefully eat at the same time," said Guarino.

He believes mandating a livable wage sets a good example for the rest of the community.

Kitchen said the city will still target large corporations likely to bring many jobs to Austin, but they're also excited to focus on a program that will help local, smaller companies too.

"Really (want to) help people stay and grow here in Austin," said Kitchen.