

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Flood Mitigation Task Force was created by the Austin City Council by Resolution 20150604-044 on June 4, 2015. Resolution 20150604-044 directed the Task Force to review existing flood mitigation and preparedness strategies, including buyouts and variances; project and operational financing; affordability; stakeholder collaboration; and citizen communication; and to then make recommendations for new strategies and policies. The resolution also directed the Task Force to pay specific attention to Upper and Lower Onion Creek, where flooding has been particularly severe and impactful to residents of the neighborhoods. City Council and the Mayor each appointed two individuals to the task Force.

Since that time, the 22 members of the Task Force have met regularly as a whole and in working groups. At the general meeting the Task Force was provided information by Watershed Protection Department staff regarding flood basics, flood problems and solutions, the buyout programs, variances, funding sources, drainage utility fee structure, CodeNext, standard and green infrastructure, and the structure and inner-workings of the operations and maintenance department. Information was also provided by staff as to the Watershed Protection Department Master Plan, the Onion Creek preliminary study, flood response resources and public care facilities and schools flood analysis.

Additionally, three working groups were formed to focus on different areas of the council resolution: Capital Improvement Projects, Operations & Maintenance, and Buyouts. Each group met more than a dozen times during the 9 months and after receiving more detailed information from staff and outside information, the group would consider and discuss what they had learned. Starting in February each group drafted a report which included recommendations and provided background on their particular scope of work (See Appendix for each working group report).

A Writers Group then convened to draft the reduce the recommendations into a consistent document, which was then reviewed, discussed and edited in detail by the entire Task Force, and finally approved by Task Force vote.

It should be that at each of the general meetings an opportunity was provided for citizen communication. The Task Force heard tragic and personal stories of loss and grief from people around the City who suffered flooding in their homes, often on more than one occasion. Some have lost their homes and have been a part of the Buyout program, which has often been a slow and intimidating process, leaving people feeling frustrated and angry. Some did not lose their homes and don't qualify for buyouts, but suffered flooding for a myriad of reasons, from overloaded storm drainage systems, to poorly maintained drainage systems, to increased impervious cover from development, and poor drainage designs from

decades past. These people are faced with continued threats to their lives and property from flooding and they are anguished.

During the 9 months that the Task Force has been working as a team, certain overarching as well as specific issues came to the fore as of particular interest. In general the Task Force recommends:

1. City Council should adopt a city-wide flood mitigation prioritization policy based on loss of life, general health and safety, and property damage. All subsequent city council policy and budget decisions should be made through this framework;
2. Funding large capital projects should be accomplished through general obligation bonds and available grants, not through the Drainage Utility Fee (DUF). The DUF should only be used for smaller capital improvement projects that are less critical and can be accomplished within a reasonable time frame. Further, only capital projects that are identified as mitigating life and safety issues should be funded initially. In other words, nuisance flooding (flooding that only impacts streets and yards) needs to be tolerated in light of the expansive and expensive list of capital projects already identified by the Watershed Protection Department;
3. The Watershed Protection Department's Operations and Maintenance budget should be funded to a sufficient level so as to provide necessary resources for maintenance, including regular clearing and cleaning of creeks and streams PLUS providing necessary personnel and resources during flood events that arise;
4. Complete Lower Onion Creek and Williamson Buyouts as soon as possible and consider targeted property buyouts in Upper Onion Creek;
5. Consider creating a Flood Control District through a partnership with Travis and Hays Counties and other local municipalities;
6. All redevelopment should have to design to reduce runoff leaving the site to "green field" conditions;
7. City Council should conduct a periodic (e.g. every 5 years) financial and organizational audit of the Watershed Protection Department to evaluate staffing resource allocations, program effectiveness, and the successful implementation of master plan goals and objectives.
8. Initiate Public Education & Outreach Program to ensure that Austin residents and visitors understand and avoid the effects of floods and the financial measures to undertake in advance of a flood event so as to quickly recover from any financial injury;
9. Work with state and county authorities to restrain development in 100 year floodplains until studies are complete and new statutes are enacted to mitigate flooding;
10. The City should not grant variances for development that may lead to future flooding or annex property that may already be a flood concern, and;

11. The City should only use buyouts when absolutely necessary as the buyout process is a very emotional event for both the property owner and the neighborhood and appears to generally affect persons already struggling with Austin's affordability issues, and;
12. Make permanent the Flood Mitigation Task Force for oversight of the above detailed recommendations.

The members of the Flood Mitigation Task Force all appreciate the opportunity to serve the City and tackle these complex issues. We all agree that flooding is a great and growing threat to our city residents and visitors health, safety and property, and we stand ready to continue to work with the City to ensure that our concerns and recommendations are fully understood and acted upon.