



TO: City of Austin Parks and Recreation Board Members
FROM: Community Powered Workshop
DATE: July 28, 2021

RE: Central Williamson Creek Greenway Vision Plan May 25, 2021 PARB hearing questions and responses

The following written responses to questions from the Parks and Recreation Board at the May 25, 2021 meeting are provided to offer additional documentation and clarity. Additional questions regarding the [Central Williamson Creek Greenway Vision Plan](#) and process may be directed to Community Powered Workshop Executive Director, Nicole Joslin at nicole@cp-workshop.org.

To review the presentation again please follow this link to the [hearing recording](#); the presentation begins around minute marker 31:20 and ends around 43:12.

PARB Member Anna Di Carlo:

1. Request for additional information about the engagement process over the past year and how the previous community engagement was also incorporated into this plan.
 - a. This Vision Plan is the culmination of a multi-year process of community members sharing their [stories](#); [mapping](#) and providing over 130 comments on 43+ community-identified ideas; joining in on 3 socially distanced [pop-ups](#) along the creek, 5 virtual events and 6 virtual creek chats; casting 2,200 [votes](#) on community priorities and providing nearly 700 feedback [comments](#) on the draft alone, which were incorporated into the final version presented on May 25, 2021 to the Parks and Recreation Board. This community-led effort involved a collaboration model of a Community Working Group of eight neighbors and a City Working Group of department representatives from the Watershed Protection Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works, and more.
2. Request for confirmation of the total number of individuals who participated in any part of the engagement process.
 - a. The data provided reflects the verifiable number of individuals who were aware of the vision planning process and either chose to take further action or not. This data comes from analytics from the online platforms used throughout the vision planning process. We also acknowledge that there are many other means of increasing awareness about the vision planning process that may not be reflected in the data we are able to collect on individual engagement including: word of mouth between friends and neighbors; distribution of printed materials,

such as engagement toolkits, door hangers, letters, and yard signs; and social media and neighborhood listserv posts. All of these awareness strategies listed were also conducted throughout the vision planning process, but we are unable to verify the number of individuals this information reached and are not including them in the tally provided below. Hence, it is possible that the numbers shown here are lower than the real number of people that were reached.

Total confirmable individuals aware of the Central Williamson Creek Greenway Vision Plan	
Number	Description
2,126	unique visitors* to Central Williamson Creek Greenway website in 2020 (Jan 1 - Dec 31)
1,136	unique visitors* to Central Williamson Creek Greenway website in 2021 (Jan 1 - May 25)
651	unique users** on Social Pinpoint Interactive Map
999	unique users** on Social Pinpoint Creek Idea Cards and Vision Plan draft
133	participants in all virtual and socially-distanced events***
234	newsletter subscribers on Mailchimp*****
20	storytellers
28	observers on iNaturalist
5,327	TOTAL
<p>* Unique Visitors: according to the Squarespace analytics panel the total unique visitors is an estimate of the total number of visitors that reached the website. This is a distinct metric from the number of single browsing sessions by individual visitors or how many actual page requests the site received. For more information about Squarespace analytics please visit: https://support.squarespace.com/hc/en-us/articles/217999797-Traffic-Analytics</p> <p>** Unique Users: according to the Social Pinpoint engagement summary dashboard unique users are defined as the total number of unique people viewing your site (generally determined by using the same browser). This number is distinct from the individual comments a user may make on a page or the total number of visits users make to the project site over the span of its life. For more information about the Social Pinpoint engagement summary dashboard please visit: https://help.socialpinpoint.com/en/articles/5113530-stakeholder-engagement-summary-dashboa rd.</p> <p>*** A total of five virtual public events were held from July through December of 2020 over zoom to provide community members with an overview of the vision planning process so far and engage in specific activities to facilitate community feedback on specific elements of the vision</p>	

plan. Additionally, a total of nine Creek Chats were hosted both virtually and socially-distanced in person between September and December of 2020 to provide a less formal “office hours” type of discussion platform for community members to learn more about the vision planning process and discuss their perspectives with the project team and Community Working Group members. The total number of participants includes individual community members who participated either virtually or in person; any duplicates have been removed from this total. This total does not include staff from Community Powered Workshop, Asakura Robinson, or community working group members.

**** A total of 23 newsletters have been distributed as of June 17, 2021 to the Central Williamson Creek Greenway Vision Plan Mailchimp listserv. Subscription to the listserv is entirely voluntary and participants may choose to unsubscribe at any point. Subscribers can join the audience through the project website.

3. Request for clarification on the 100 year floodplain shown in the plan document - is this reflecting the current floodplain or the upcoming Atlas 14 changes?
 - a. Due to a new precipitation study from the National Weather Service known as Atlas-14, the floodplain maps of the entire city will be re-mapped within the next 3-5 years. The floodplains are shown in this document to reflect an estimation of this future update. It reflects these upcoming changes by showing “estimated” 25 year and 100 year flood events according to the City of Austin’s FloodPro “Fully Developed Floodplain” scenario.
4. What measures and precautions were taken into consideration as part of this plan to ensure no construction along this portion of Williamson Creek would have any adverse impact downstream to Williamson Creek and Onion Creek, specifically to the residents/homes downstream?
 - a. The project team worked with Watershed Protection Department staff to fully take into consideration the potential environmental impact and necessary safety precautions for each idea proposed within the greenway. This plan seeks to enhance and restore the creek’s natural ecology and waterway through low-impact interventions. It emphasizes natural trails, landscape restoration, invasive species management, and green infrastructure that will enhance the floodplain’s ability to absorb and infiltrate flood events. All other interventions were carefully considered and located appropriately to avoid alterations to the landscape that would increase downstream flooding. It should be noted that these locations are still conceptual and general. Future design phases will see a greater level of detailed design and consideration of siting these features to avoid flood impacts.
5. The plan references the Bergstrom Spur and appears to provide an opportunity for additional connectivity between East and West.
 - a. The City of Austin Urban Trail Network is actively working on a plan to develop the abandoned Bergstrom Spur Right-of-Way as an urban trail. The community and project team see this as an opportunity to provide greater connectivity from the Central Williamson Creek Greenway to other parts of South Austin.

PARB Member Sarah Faust:

6. Request clarification on the use of the term “greenway” as opposed to “greenbelt”.
 - a. To many stakeholders (especially city departments), the term "greenbelt" implies PARD ownership and management. Using a less restrictive term, like "greenway", spans the different depths of ownership and management (private, PARD, WPD, etc). In addition to ownership, in the industry the term “greenbelt” signifies a nature trail through a natural space with minimal improvements otherwise. The term “greenway”, in the industry, signifies consideration of additional improvements appropriate to a more urban or suburban space. The use of the term “greenway” in this context is intended to reflect the complex public ownership and management structure present in the area and the community’s desires for additional programming elements appropriate to the natural context and does not connote a differing degree of hard infrastructure improvement.
7. Were there opportunities for community members to express a desire for natural areas with less improvements and left natural? How was a desire to not fill in the space with things respected and voiced?
 - a. There were several formal and informal ways for community members to express desires of any kind including through the several social pinpoint platforms, at public meetings, and in less formal “Creek Chat” meetings held throughout the engagement process. All ideas proposed in the Vision Plan were originated by a community member and received support from others. Community members had the ability to “down vote” any idea they thought to be inappropriate for the area. Ideas that received little support were not included in the Vision Plan.
8. Request for confirmation of the total number of individuals who participated in any part of the engagement process
 - a. Please see previous response to PARB Member Di Carlo’s inquiry
9. How does the engagement effort for the Central Williamson Creek Vision Plan compare other engagement efforts?
 - a. From this team’s professional experience there is no standard rule of thumb threshold when it comes to engagement. When determining the appropriate goals for engagement on a specific project you must consider the community context, scale of the project and its potential impact, and the access and resource constraints that will be present in any project.

In the case of the Central Williamson Creek Greenway Vision Plan the team took each of these factors into consideration when determining the scale and scope of the engagement reach and relied on the natural networks provided through the Community Working Group model to validate these efforts along the way. Although the team recognizes there will always be ways to improve outreach and

engagement, the accomplishment of reaching at least 5,327 individuals through this engagement process is significant and has provided an abundance of meaningful community input and feedback reflected in the Vision Plan document provided for your consideration. As with most projects of this type, the team also recognizes that engagement will not and should not end with the adoption of the Vision Plan itself. Continued engagement will be necessary as each piece of the plan is considered for implementation or adaptation into the future.

10. Request to consider a revised and extended engagement process now that the pandemic is subsiding with the sentiment that virtual platforms exclude some populations from participating.

- a. Though the pandemic did put some constraints on our ability to meet in person, many of the engagement opportunities offered throughout the planning timeline were able to be conducted both online and “in person” either through small group conversations or the provision of printed take-home materials that community members could participate in and relay back to the team in whatever way was easiest for them (direct mail, phone call, email, in-person pick up). There will always be limitations on each engagement method used, whether virtual or in person, and it is this team’s belief that offering a variety of ways to engage is the best way to overcome these limitations to the greatest extent possible.

We believe this engagement process was thorough and diverse despite the limitations placed by the pandemic. Unfortunately, there are no resources available at this time to support continued engagement on the Vision Plan in its current form. As a community-led and community-funded process, resources have been scarce from the start of this process and have been used to the best of this team’s ability. Additional engagement on the Vision Plan will require new funding sources and support. However, the implementation and future adaptation of the elements in the Vision Plan will require additional engagement by the departments and community members leading them in the future. As such, community members will continue to see opportunities to engage in the realization of the Central Williamson Creek Greenway even after the Vision Planning process is completed.

PARB Member Laura Cottam Sajbel:

11. Wondering what's so upsetting about this plan? It sounds like some concerns are that engagement wasn't wide enough, but it appears to be the appropriate amount of engagement.

- a. The team agrees that there seems to be other factors at play in the concerns being expressed that are outside the control or purview of the Vision Plan itself. Mostly notably the frustrations expressed by community members appear to be primarily related to how the publicly owned land along Williamson Creek is currently managed. Complaints primarily relate to the homeless encampments,

increased amount of trash and debris in the creek, and mowing frequency and expanse of the area being mowed. As these concerns are related to the maintenance of the properties along the creek; they do not directly relate to the content of the plan itself, nor it is within the scope of the Vision Plan to regulate how each department conducts its maintenance obligations and duties. It has been this team's experience that the plan's inability to regulate these maintenance frustrations has led to disingenuous attempts at stifling its adoption all together through the spread of disinformation about the plan's content and distrust of the public process.

PARB Member Nancy Barnard:

12. There are several households in the area that have elected not to participate in the floodplain buyout process. How were these households engaged in the vision planning process?
 - a. The engagement process has been primarily focused on the geographies immediately adjacent to Williamson Creek between Menchaca and South Congress. This includes the households that are eligible for the voluntary floodplain buyout but have chosen so far not to participate. These residents were directly contacted multiple times through the distribution of door hangers - 3,000 total were distributed over three different weeks - and multiple yard signs were placed throughout the neighborhood by Community Working Group members to notify neighbors about the engagement process underway. All residents in the area were invited to participate in the multitude of engagement opportunities offered throughout the planning process.
13. If households choose not to participate in the floodplain buyout program how would that impact the Vision Plan?
 - a. The floodplain buyout process is entirely voluntary and ongoing. This means that the actual geography of the publicly owned land in this area may change in the future, leading to some uncertainty as to the extent of literal connectivity along the creek and its tributaries. The Vision Plan is taking this condition into account in two primary ways. First, the Plan identifies a "high water route" which provides connectivity relative to the creek regardless of future buyout participation. Second, the Plan also recognized that engagement and adaptation of the plan will continue as further definition of the conditions for implementation occurs in the future.

PARB Member Nina Rinaldi:

14. How is this plan incorporating people of all abilities to be able to have natural experiences in the outdoor places along the greenway?
 - a. Inclusivity has been very important throughout the planning process and we hope is reflected in the Vision Plan document itself. In addition to natural surface trails

the plan also calls out specific areas where bonded hardwood mulch trails may be preferred for increased accessibility. These bonded mulch trails are 100% impermeable but also provide ada access, which provides both the desired wilderness experience we have heard from the community as well as access for all abilities.

The team also struck a compromise on parking at the S 1st Street trailhead. The Vision Plan had originally allowed for eight parallel parking spaces in this area to allow for trail access to those who were unable to walk to a trailhead nearby. After hearing from the community that parking was not desirable in this area the parking was reduced to just three accessible spaces in order to still provide accessible parking to the greenway, but honor the communities desire for minimal parking.

The Plan also includes recommendations for seating and resting elements where appropriate. We heard a strong preference for limited seating along the trail so we limited those areas to trailheads, but within the greenway we made recommendations for rest stops so people with limited mobility and ability could have opportunities to pause along the trail.

15. Will there also be the ability to include ada accessible ramps into the greenway aside from where there are the parking spaces?

- a. Yes, the team believes that improved curb ramps at intersections along the high water route would be beneficial and has also recommended improved crossings at grade for greater accessibility.

16. Are there any bathrooms provided along the Greenway?

- a. Bathrooms were one idea that was proposed by community members early on, but as we heard more feedback it was clear that bathrooms were strongly not preferred for multiple reasons. Furthermore, the area where such an amenity could be provided is also severely limited as they cannot be located within the floodplain, leaving only one possible space for them to be placed. Due to the low community support for this type of amenity and siting difficulty, bathrooms are not included in the Vision Plan at this time.

Former PARB Member Kate Mason-Murphy:

17. When did you become aware of the planned displacement of 250 homes and existing affordable housing stock that would be triggered with the approval of this plan?

- a. This is disinformation and not in any way related to the factual content of the Vision Plan. The Vision Plan does not contain any content related to the planned displacement of existing households and approval of the Vision Plan will not trigger any such planned displacement.

18. What was the scope of the St. David's Foundation grant and who was it awarded to?
- The scope of the St. David's Foundation Parks with Purpose grant proposal was to bring residents together with professional landscape architects to develop a community-led plan for the connected green spaces between Manchaca Road and South Congress Avenue that reflects the desires and needs expressed by residents in this neighborhood. The grant applicant was The Nature Conservancy with support letters provided by Community Powered Workshop and the City of Austin Watershed Protection Department. The grant amount proposed was to cover 53% of the total cost of the planning process with the other 47% secured from a gift from the JPB Foundation to The Nature Conservancy to support partnership development with Community Powered Workshop.
19. What was the involvement of Amy Belaire, the scientist who was to be the liaison with the city?
- The initial role of Amy Belaire from The Nature Conservancy as a partner in this work included performing field assessments and mapping, acting as a liaison between the team and the City Working Group members (including highlighting the environmental aspects that are important to the missions of departments such as Watershed Protection, Parks and Recreation, and Sustainability), and helping to communicate the contribution this model may be able to make to urban resilience and climate change efforts across the state. Due to pandemic induced budget cuts at The Nature Conservancy's Texas chapter our local partner's position and program under which we were collaborating was eliminated in July 2020. By this time the field assessments and mapping had been completed and the City Working Group had been established. TNC worked with the team to transfer responsibilities of managing the City Working Group to Community Powered Workshop. TNC was also able to transfer any remaining funds associated with the project to Community Powered Workshop in order to ensure the work could continue to be supported.
20. Was there any consideration for not moving forward with the vision planning process due to impacts of the pandemic?
- PARB Member Mason-Murphy incorrectly stated that Amy Belaire left The Nature Conservancy in March. Community Powered Workshop has confirmed that Dr. Belaire had no such conversation with Kate Mason-Murphy. In fact, the pandemic-induced budget cuts at The Nature Conservancy occurred in July 2020, well after the vision planning process had begun.

Due to the nature of the funding supporting this project there was no option to postpone the work. The team could have either reallocated the funds to another purpose or continue the effort to fulfill the original goals of the project within the grant timeline. The team chose to honor our commitment to this community and continue this work despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

When The Nature Conservancy closed down its program, Community Powered Workshop met with TNC and representatives from the St. David's Foundation to facilitate the transfer of responsibilities related to the grant to Community Powered Workshop. As a long-term partner in this work the staff at Community Powered Workshop were recognized as completely capable of stewarding the project forward to meet the project objectives.

PARB Member Richard DePalma:

21. Will this segment of Williamson Creek ultimately connect to other segments of Williamson Creek in the future?
 - a. PARD as a department makes every effort to expand connectivity as outlined in PARD's Long Range Plan. The Council approved document clearly lays out recommendations to expand greenbelts and trail development along creeks, specifically calling out Williamson Creek including prioritizing acquisition for further connectivity to other greenbelts and larger parks such as District and Metropolitan parks.