

Watershed Protection Strategic Plan

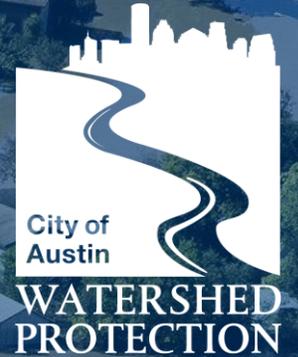
Environmental Commission
September 15, 2021

CITY OF AUSTIN

WATERSHED PROTECTION DEPARTMENT



Watershed Protection Department



MISSION

The Watershed Protection Department (WPD) protects lives, property, and the environment of our community by reducing the impact of flooding, erosion, and water pollution.



Watershed Protection Strategic Plan

GUIDING BLUEPRINT FOR DEPARTMENT

- Sets goals and objectives
- Establishes method to prioritize problems
- Creates a process for evaluating solutions

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Provides framework for evaluating future programs, projects, and regulations and measuring success of current portfolio

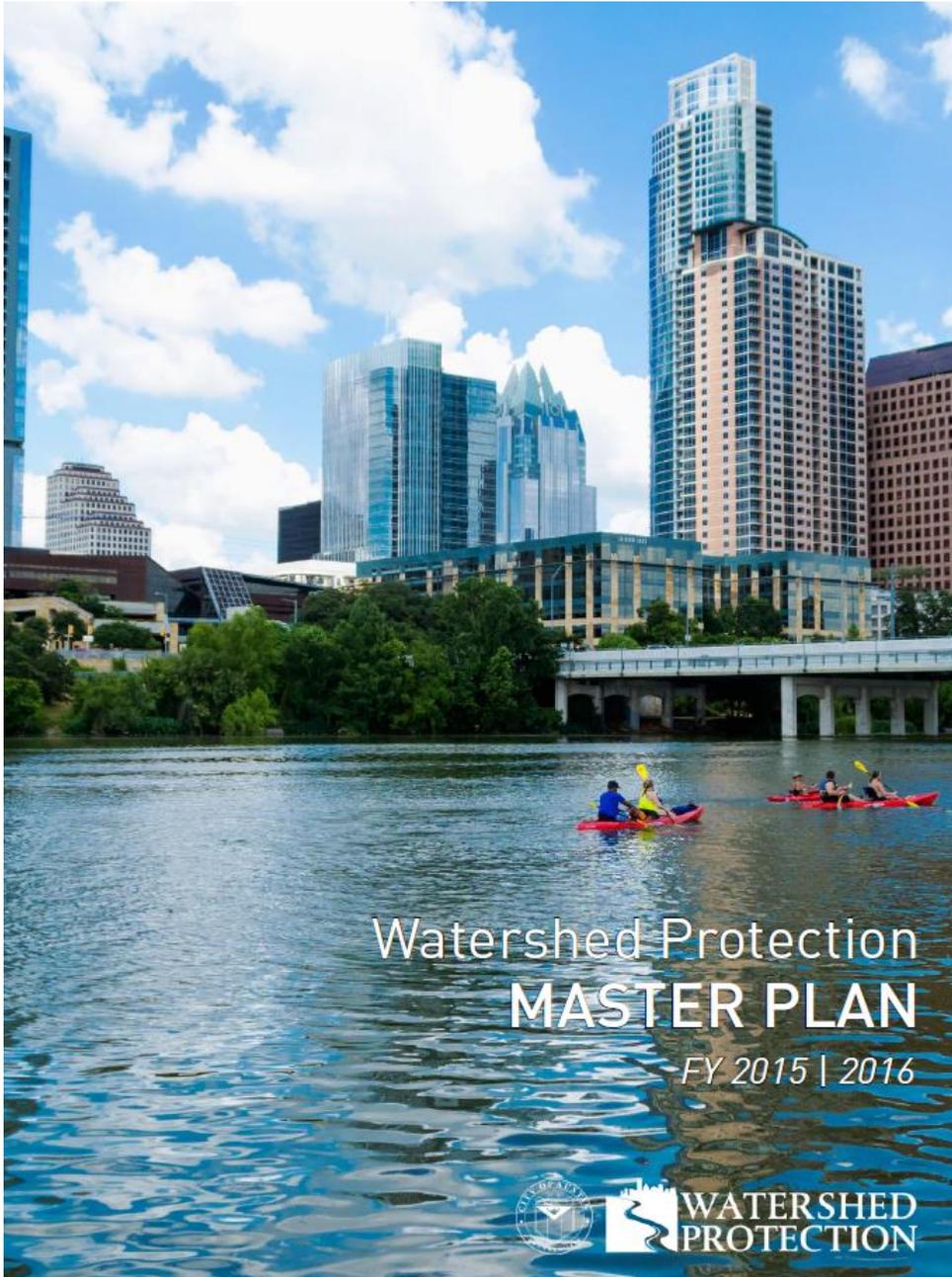
COMMUNICATION TOOL

Helps explain WPD's work and priorities to staff, City executives, policymakers, and Austin community



Plan History & Update

- *Watershed Protection Master Plan* adopted in 2001
 - Gathered public input via Citizen’s Advisory Group, phone survey, and public meetings
- [Last major update](#) completed in 2014
 - Updated data/methods used for prioritizing problems
 - No new updates to public input or goals/objectives
- It's time for an update to:
 - Learn about the community's values
 - Re-evaluate the plan's guiding principles
 - Update goals, objectives, & prioritization methods
 - Set targets and create systems to track progress
- Build on what we’ve heard
 - Watershed Protection Ordinance
 - Green Infrastructure Working Group
 - Flood Mitigation Task Force



Goals for Update

REFLECT COMMUNITY VALUES

- Reflect goals, priorities, knowledge, and experience of community, staff, and stakeholders

INCORPORATE EQUITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Advance racial equity in all department operations, resulting in equitable outcomes for all Austinites
- Incorporate climate adaptation to increase community's resilience to impacts of climate change
- Focus on groups most vulnerable to watershed impacts in terms of both exposure and ability to recover

ACCESSIBLE & INFORMATIVE

- Be accessible and informative to a broad audience, including staff, City executives, policymakers, and the Austin community



Engagement Approach

RESPECTFUL TO PARTICIPANTS

- Make it easy and enjoyable to contribute input
- Be transparent about how feedback is being used; respect participants by only seeking feedback when it will inform a decision
- Utilize the most appropriate strategies and tools for specific groups or topics
- Use an iterative process; check in about what we've heard

ADAPTIVE PROCESS

- Define success metrics for engagement, track performance, and commit to continuing engagement until we have met the metrics for success
- Adapt to potential limitations on engagement strategies due to COVID-19
- Coordinate and collaborate with other City departments on engagement efforts when possible

FOCUSED ON RELATIONSHIPS

- Build relationships and trust with entities, leaders, and individuals in historically under-served groups and groups impacted by negative watershed outcomes
- Create systems to gather input from historically under-served communities that can be used beyond this engagement process



Priority Stakeholders

Prioritize the following groups:

- **Under-served groups.** Residents who have been systematically marginalized from or denied a full opportunity to participate in past planning and decision-making processes and/or who are more likely to experience negative quality of life outcomes
- **Impacted groups.** Residents who have experienced or are at an increased risk of experiencing impacts of negative watershed outcomes (flooding, erosion, water pollution)
- **Organizations with relevant expertise.** Organizations that work on environmental, community health, or safety issues and who bring environmental and/or technical and policy expertise

And reach representative sample of the Austin community



Priority Stakeholders

Under-served groups (Priority Group 1):

- People of color
 - Hispanic/Latinx residents
 - Black/African American residents
 - Asian/Asian American residents
 - American Indian/Indigenous residents
 - Additional POC residents
- Low-income people
- Non-English-speakers
- Immigrants and refugees
- People with disabilities
- People lacking digital literacy and /or internet access
- People lacking access to transportation
- People experiencing homelessness
- LGBTQIA+ people
- Youth and seniors



Priority Stakeholders

Impacted groups (Priority Group 2):

- People who live in areas susceptible to negative watershed outcomes (creek flooding, local flooding, erosion, water pollution)
- People impacted by recent major flood events
- People who have accepted a floodplain buyout or who have been displaced by flooding
- People who live in poor housing conditions that are more susceptible to flood damage
- People with homes or businesses that are threatened by severe erosion
- People who swim, paddle, or fish in water bodies impacted by significant pollution or harmful algal blooms
- People who live in areas where WPD has recently carried out an infrastructure project
- Local businesses and organizations directly impacted by flooding, erosion, or water pollution



Priority Stakeholders

Organizations with relevant experience (Priority Group 3):

- Environmental advocacy groups
 - e.g., Austin Youth River Watch, Clean Water Action, Environment Texas, Hill Country Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER), TreeFolks, Save Barton Creek Association, Save Our Springs Alliance, Sierra Club, Shoal Creek Conservancy, Waterloo Greenway
- Professional organizations
 - e.g., American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), Environmental and Water Resources Institute (EWRI), American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA)
- Community health and public safety advocacy groups
 - e.g., Austin Parks Foundation, Bike Austin, Go Austin/*Vamos Austin* (GAVA), Keep Austin Beautiful, Red Cross, The Trail Foundation, Travis Austin Recovery Group, River City Youth Foundation
- Other government entities
 - e.g., Austin Independent School District (AISD), Barton Springs Edward Aquifer Conservation District (BSEACD), Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), Travis County, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)
- Faculty with relevant expertise at local universities



Engagement Strategies

PRIORITY STAKEHOLDERS

- Community Ambassadors (compensated)
- Focus groups (compensated)
- One-on-one meetings with community leaders
- Participate in community meetings and events

ALL STAKEHOLDERS

- Surveys
- In-person walk-and-talks
- Virtual open houses
- Online educational events
- Partnerships with Councilmembers
- Paid advertisements
- Website and communications
- Environmental Commission input
- Commissions and Council review



Community Engagement Phases

PHASE 1: Community Input

Objective: Gather community input and answer research questions using a broad range of strategies.

PHASE 2: Did We Get it Right?

Objective: Evaluate how effectively we translated what we heard from the community during Phase 1 into content. Gather input on community priorities for identified issues and strategies.

PHASE 3: Review the Draft Plan

Objective: Present the draft plan to the community, gather reactions to the content, and finalize the plan for adoption.



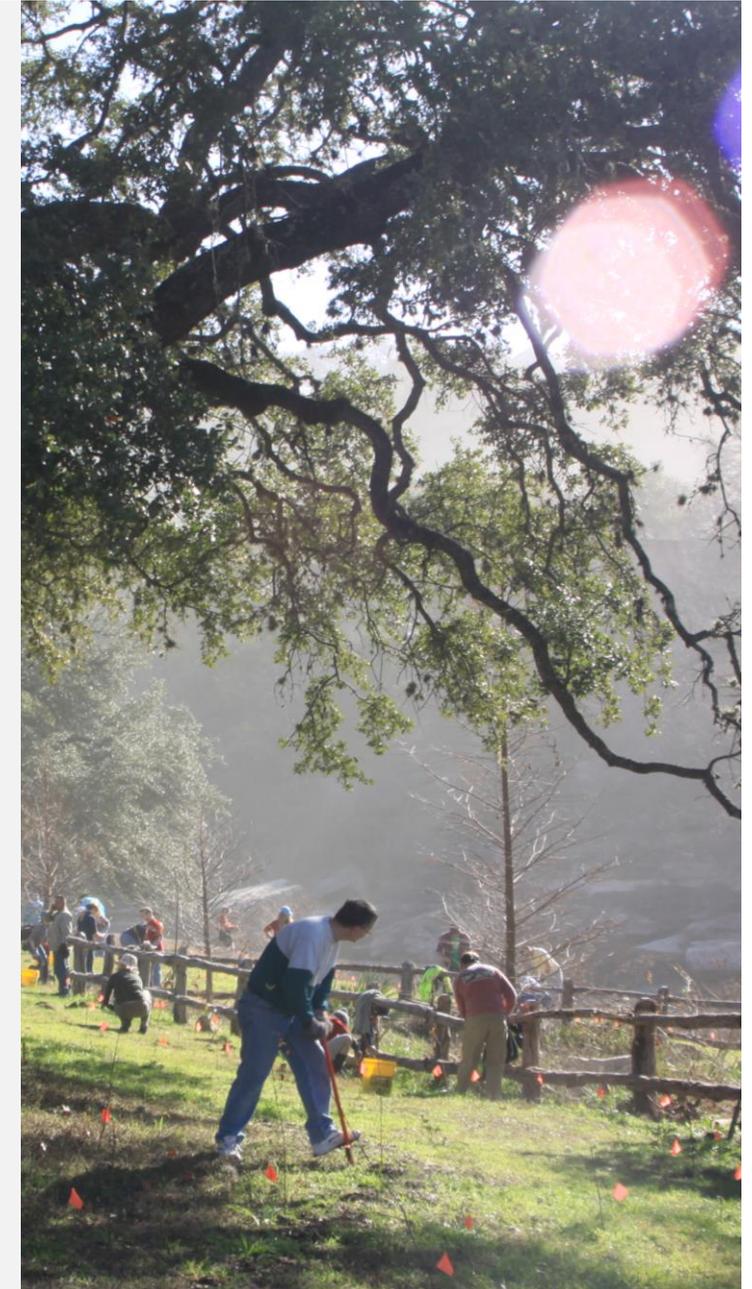
Internal Engagement

INCLUSIVE PROCESS

- Learn and draw from experience, expertise, and perspectives of all staff
- Make it easy and enjoyable to contribute input
- Utilize the most appropriate strategies and tools for specific groups or topics
- Provide training, support, and incentives for staff interested in volunteering at community engagement events
- Collaborate with other City staff on strategies to address community concerns and objectives that involve multiple departments

TRANSPARENT AND RESPECTFUL TO PARTICIPANTS

- Be transparent about how feedback is being used; respect participants by only seeking feedback when it will inform a decision
- Strive for consensus, but resolve conflicts and make decisions when consensus cannot be achieved
- Update staff about results of engagement, volunteer opportunities, and progress



Internal Engagement

TEAMS

- Engagement Strategy Team
 - Steering Committee
 - Technical Advisory Group
 - Field Operations Team
 - Planning Team
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- Interdepartmental Collaboration
 - Austin Water, PARD, Public Works, Austin Transportation, Austin Public Health, Office of Sustainability, Development Services, Housing and Planning, Equity Office, Resilience



Draft Timeline

Draft Project Timeline	2022												2023												2024											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Focused Outreach and Partnerships	█	█	█																																	
Community Engagement Phase 1			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█																								
Community Engagement Phase 2																	█	█	█	█																
Plan Development									█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█								
Community Engagement Phase 3																													█	█	█					
Plan Review and Adoption																													█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█



Keep in Touch

WEBSITE

<https://www.austintexas.gov/department/watershed-protection-strategic-plan>

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