





MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Robert Goode, P.E., Interim Assistant City Manager 

FROM: Jorge L. Morales, P.E., CFM, Director, Watershed Protection Department 

DATE: June 1, 2023

SUBJECT: Staff Response to Resolution No. 20230504-056 Flooding Emergency Response

On May 4, 2023, City of Austin (City) Council passed [Resolution No. 20230504-056](#) directing staff to identify financial resources to aid those affected by the April 20, 2023 flooding, recommend a citywide outreach strategy to ensure that all individuals affected by the flooding and storms are informed about available resources., and to evaluate the possibility of allocating funding from the City to support flood victims in addressing damage- and disaster-incurred expenses.

We are providing a status report for this Council direction as well as Council's request to return to Council with an accelerated action plan to assess and clean up creeks of vegetative debris to mitigate flood risk.

Status Updates:

(A) Identify short-term and long-term federal, state, county, and City financial resources and tools to aid those affected by the April 20, 2023, flooding as well as any others affected by recent flooding events and the January 2023 winter storm.

- Due to the nature of this particular storm and its localized rainfall, there was no federal, state or local declaration of disaster, which is the traditional way to access financial resources provided by governmental entities.
- Information on the City of Austin claims process has been shared with residents if a resident wishes to file a claim they may do so within the 45-day window set by City Charter. More information is below.
- On May 5, 2023 the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) in coordination with the Texas Department of Emergency Management (TDEM) and Development Services Department's Code Division (Code), went out and knocked on doors to provide information on opportunities for residents to apply for low interest loans through the Small Business Administration (SBA) Disaster Assistance Loans program. To be eligible under this program enough affected residents or businesses must apply for the aid to meet a threshold established by SBA. Therefore, six Code inspectors distributed information by placing on doors or in direct communication with residents on May 5th and 9th for a total of approximately 51 locations. Furthermore, on May 5th HSEM issued a press release and through various social media outlets, to inform residents affected by floods that this assistance was available

- Staff will continue to explore options for resources and keep both residents and Council informed.

(B) Recommend a citywide outreach strategy to ensure all those affected by the flooding and storms are made aware of the resources in multiple languages and receive help applying for aid.

- Immediately upon learning that there were flooded structures, HSEM staff coordinated with the Red Cross. Upon getting feedback from some of the residents that they did not feel proper services were provided, HSEM staff coordinated with the Austin Disaster Relief Network (ADRN) to go back out to the community. Staff from the Watershed Protection Department performed post storm reconnaissance the morning of April 21.
- Watershed Protection staff continue to communicate directly with all residents affected in the city and are ready to assist them with additional connections to all available City of Austin resources as well as those non-profit organizations in the area who may be able to assist. Watershed Protection staff are equipped to assist residents in multiple languages and can provide all the necessary language access resources.
- Watershed Protection staff continues to work with partners to engage our residents across Austin about the impacts of flooding and resources available both before and after a storm. Attached are some of the ways that we currently engage our community, and we will create additional strategies for making sure people are connected to the resources they need and continue to update the Council on progress.

(C) Evaluate the possibility of allocating funding from the City to support flood victims in addressing damage- and disaster-incurred expenses if no other sufficient resources are available.

- The City has not previously financially supplemented properties that were impacted by natural disasters, and this would set a precedent that is not sustainable. Austin, located in a region of Texas known as 'flash flood alley' due to its topography and proximity to the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 10,000 properties are at risk of flooding by creek floods or localized floods, of those properties, approximately 25% are not in mapped FEMA floodplain boundaries.
- From this specific incident, those affected by the flood could file a claim against the City of Austin via our claims process. We have informed those affected about this process. For the Council's information, a letter must be submitted within 45 days of the incident and include the following information: Date, time, and location of incident, description of what occurred, type of damage(s) or nature of injury, copies of invoices, receipts, and/or estimates, any additional documentation supporting the claim (i.e., photos, diagrams, statements, police report, etc.) and a full mailing address and daytime telephone number. That information can then be mailed, or emailed to: City of Austin Law Department Attn: Claims P.O. Box 1546 Austin, Texas 78767-1546 Phone: (512) 974-2268 lawclaims@austintexas.gov

Action Plan to assess and clean up creeks of vegetative debris to mitigate flood risk.

WPD in partnership with Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) and Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) will use existing internal resources along with contract resources to address debris in creeks over a 12-week period beginning June 19th, 2023, and expected to end by September 29th, 2023. Through the City of Austin's contract with American Youthworks, WPD can hire Texas Conservation Corps (TxCC) and Austin Civilian Conservation Corps (ACCC) crews to clear storm damage along easements and City-managed waterways throughout the city. This will include removal of down and damaged trees, branches, and other natural and fabricated debris. We estimate that 60 miles of creeks and channels will be cleared by October 1, 2023. High priority creeks have been identified based on winter storm impacts and asset management information. To accomplish this clearing program, staff will require

additional authorization on the American Youthworks Contract. An item will be brought forth for council consideration soon.

All expenses incurred as part of this clean up that are associated with the January Winter Ice Storm will be processed for reimbursement under the federal declared disaster.

Please contact me, Jorge Morales at Jorge.Morales@austintexas.gov if you have further questions.

CC: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager
Kimberly McNeeley, Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Richard McHale, Interim Director, Austin Resource Recovery Department
José Roig, Interim Director, Development Services Department
Ken Snipes, HSEM Special Assistant, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Attached: WPD Flood Safety Engagement

Flood Safety Awareness and Preparedness Community Outreach and Engagement Summary

Flood Safety Awareness Campaign

The goal of WPD's comprehensive Flood Safety Awareness Campaign is to communicate with the public about the dangers of flooding and steps that can be taken to protect lives and property. The campaign emphasizes that devastating floods can occur even during periods of drought, and that living in a floodplain can be a significant risk. It also encourages personal responsibility for one's own safety. This campaign occurs throughout the year and includes paid radio, digital, streaming and television advertisements in English and Spanish, including emergency advertisements when heavy rainfall is expected; an annual [Flood Safety Video Contest](#); Flood Safety Awareness Week; digital resources and tools through [ATXFloodSafety.com](#), along with numerous public outreach and engagement events throughout the year.

[ATXFloodSafety.com](#) is a website external from the City of Austin that houses links to multiple flood preparedness resources to help property owners understand their flood risk and prepare themselves and their families before a flood occurs. These links connect users with the following resources:

- Information about the National Weather Service's [Atlas 14](#) study to help residents understand their flood risk and changing floodplains.
- [ATXfloods.com](#) to show real-time road closures due to flooding. Residents are encouraged to visit this website *before* they get on the road. Information about this tool is also included in emergency advertising and in the advertising campaigns for flood safety. Note that when it is flooding or when flooding is imminent, we will direct people to the ATXfloods.com rather than ATXFloodsafety.com
- [FloodPro](#) to allow property owners to find where their property is located within a floodplain.
- [WarnCentralTexas.org](#) to allow residents to sign up for emergency alerts via text, email or phone.
- [FEMA flood insurance information](#) to help residents learn about flood insurance and why it's important.
- The LCRA's [Hydromet](#) to show near-real-time data on streamflow, river stage, rainfall totals, temperature and humidity.
- [Ready.gov](#) to help residents create a disaster preparedness plan.
- [Floodplain Development Information](#) page to provide information about floodplain regulations.
- WPD's [Flood Safety Information](#) page related to the Turn Around Don't Drown campaign.

Block Captain Program

HSEM and WPD is working with GAVA and the community to develop a system and training for block captains that are ready to assist neighbors during emergencies. This program will move the community toward building capacity to prepare, respond, and recover from emergencies. The Block Captain program will consist of a neighborhood emergency plan that includes communication, outline roles and responsibilities, and periodic practices to ensure success during emergencies.

Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Flood Risk Reduction Projects

WPD performs a variety of outreach and engagement activities for CIP projects that provide storm drain infrastructure improvements and reduce the risk of flooding for homes and buildings throughout Austin. Projects include detention pond improvements, upgraded storm drain pipe and new storm drain inlets.

Climate Navigator Training

The need to develop a training to bring awareness to emergency preparedness issues was identified through meetings with GAVA. The Climate Navigator training was developed with GAVA, HSEM and WPD to bring awareness to local hazards, resources, tools, and basic preparedness information. Some in-person trainings were delivered at the local library branch and then transitioned online (via Zoom) during the pandemic. Training has been provided in both English and Spanish. Forty Dove Springs residents have been trained to date.

Neighborhood Preparedness Guide

A neighborhood preparedness guide was developed by HSEM, WPD, GAVA, and the University of Texas. The guide focuses on local hazards and has information on preparedness for different types of emergencies, along with helpful tools and resources. The guide is available in English and Spanish. A hardcopy is distributed to communities throughout Austin during engagement events, and a digital version is available online.