



# Overview of the Colorado River Protections Ordinance

Planning Commission  
January 28, 2024





# 2-Minute Summary Video



[Youtube video link](#)





# The Colorado River



- **Crucial Resource**
- **Significant Erosion**
- **Water Quality Better Protected**
- **Needs careful management**
  - **Dynamic natural system**





# Council Resolution

Community members asked Council to strengthen Colorado River protections; Council thereafter included in their [June 2022 Council resolution](#):

**“... evaluate the effectiveness of existing Critical Water Quality Zone and Erosion Hazard Zone buffers on the Colorado River downstream of the Longhorn Dam and to propose protections that will provide adequate protections to the river that will ensure a healthy riparian corridor to stabilize the riverbank and protect property from erosion”**





# The Proposal

**One simple change to the Land Development Code:**

**Change Erosion Hazard Zone from 100 to 200 feet, downstream of Longhorn Dam**

**Later (separate process):**

**Improve drainage design rules to reduce extreme erosion**













# Current Protections along River/Creeks

1. 100-Year Floodplain
2. Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) buffer
3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer
4. Waterfront Overlay District (Red Bluff subdistrict)
5. Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)

Lady Bird Lake

Colorado River

- Each zone covers a different purpose, area, and restrictions
- Restrictions may differ in COA, ETJ\* and Travis County
- Both the current and proposed Erosion Hazard Zone are entirely overlapped by the Critical Water Quality Zone
- The erosion hazard zone works closely with the Critical Water Quality Zone and can fill in some gaps in regulation

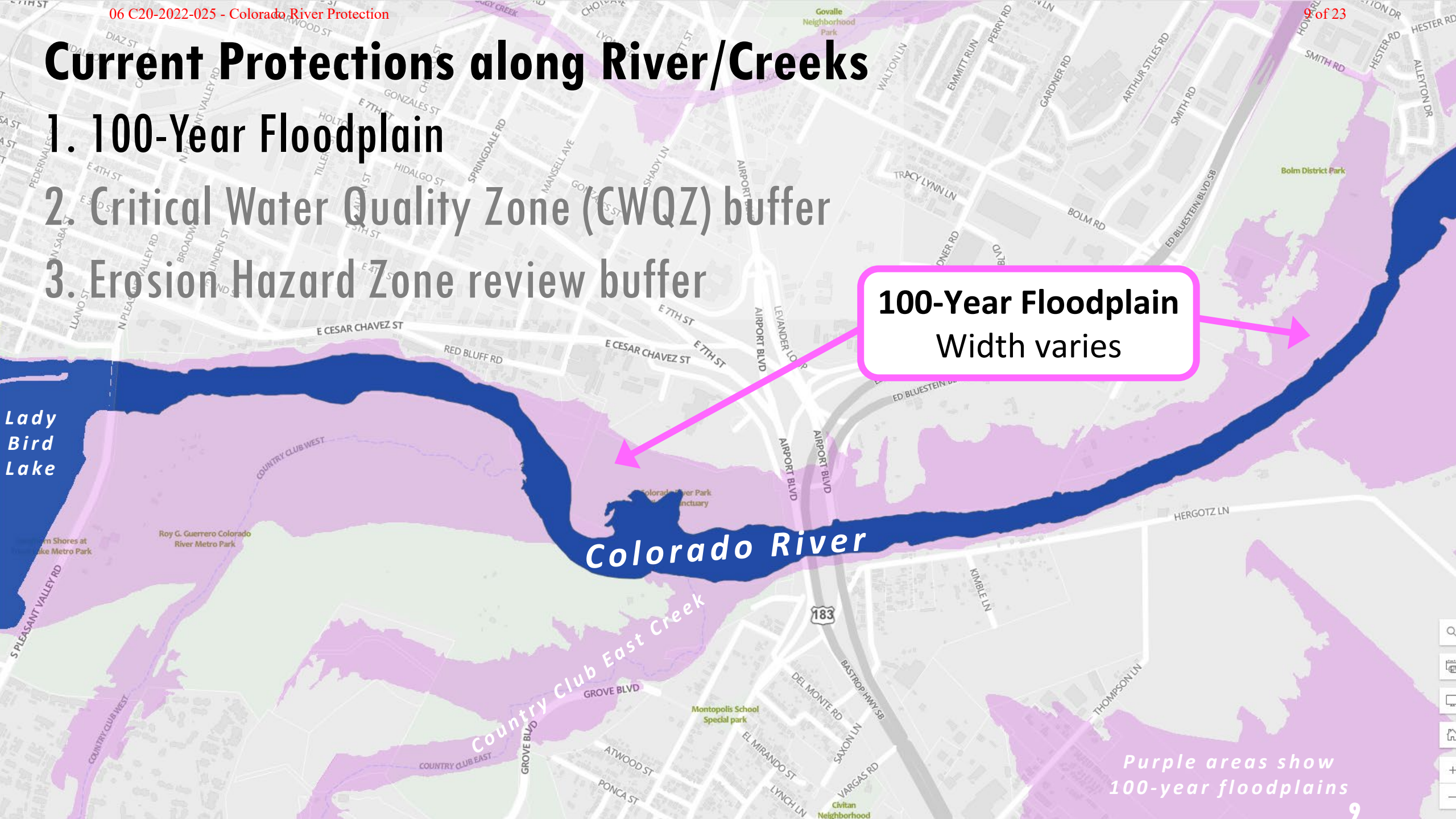
\* COA = City of Austin; ETJ = Extraterritorial jurisdiction



# Current Protections along River/Creeks

1. 100-Year Floodplain
2. Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) buffer
3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer

**100-Year Floodplain**  
Width varies



Purple areas show  
100-year floodplains



# Current Protections along River/Creeks

1. 100-Year Floodplain
2. Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) buffer
3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer

**Critical Water  
Quality Zone**  
200 to 400 ft wide

Lady  
Bird  
Lake

Colorado River

Country Club East Creek

Purple areas show  
100-year floodplains



# Current Protections along River/Creeks

1. 100-Year Floodplain
2. Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) buffer
3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer

**Critical Water  
Quality Zone  
Fixed 400 ft wide**

Lady  
Bird  
Lake

Colorado River

Club East Creek

183

**\*\*\* 400ft Fixed CWQZ NOT RECOMMENDED \*\*\***

**Existing buffers provide good protection, best fit the terrain, no additional impacts**



### 3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer

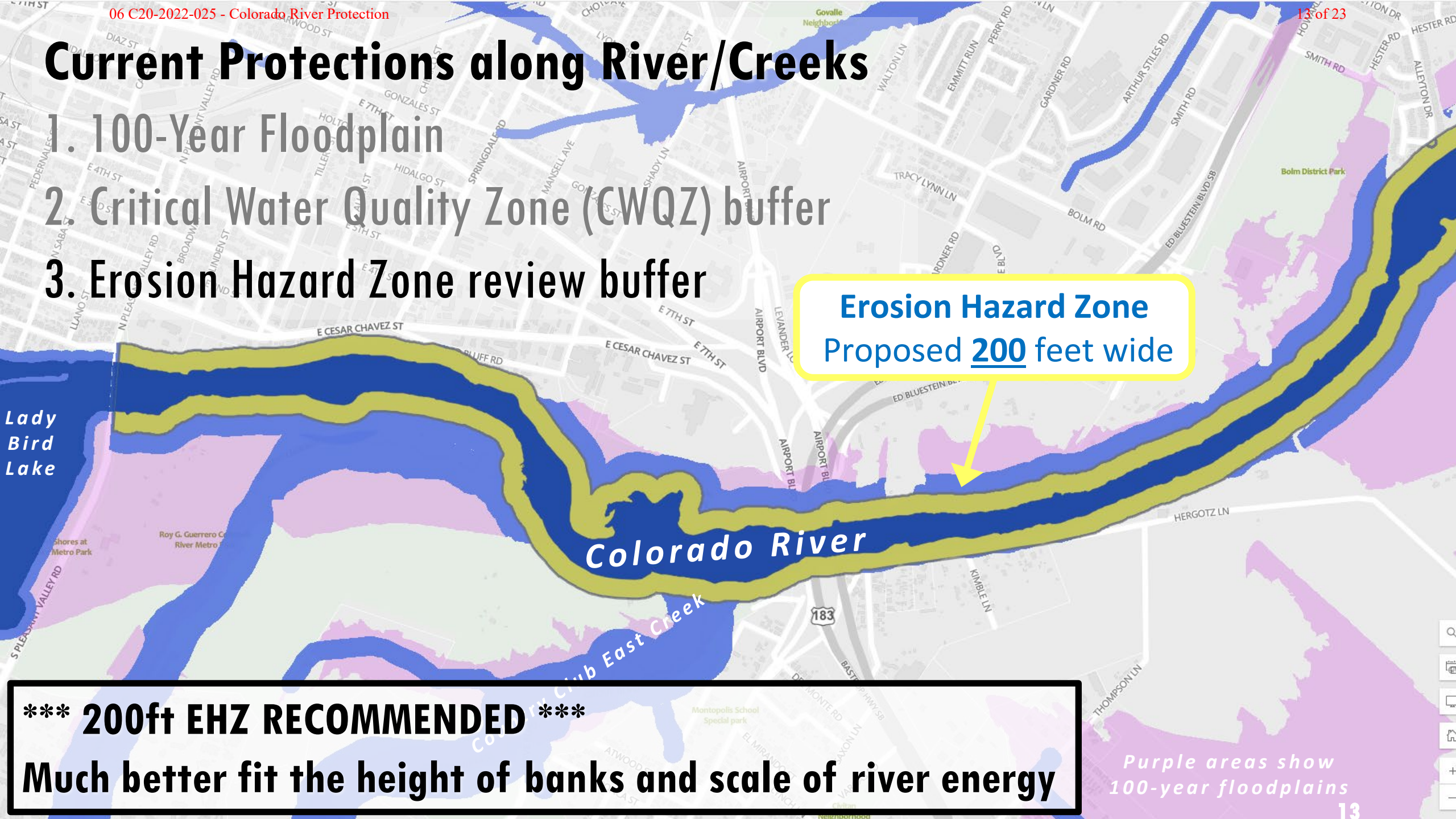
**Erosion Hazard Zone**  
Existing 100 feet wide



# Current Protections along River/Creeks

1. 100-Year Floodplain
2. Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ) buffer
3. Erosion Hazard Zone review buffer

Erosion Hazard Zone  
Proposed 200 feet wide



**\*\*\* 200ft EHZ RECOMMENDED \*\*\***  
**Much better fit the height of banks and scale of river energy**

Purple areas show  
100-year floodplains





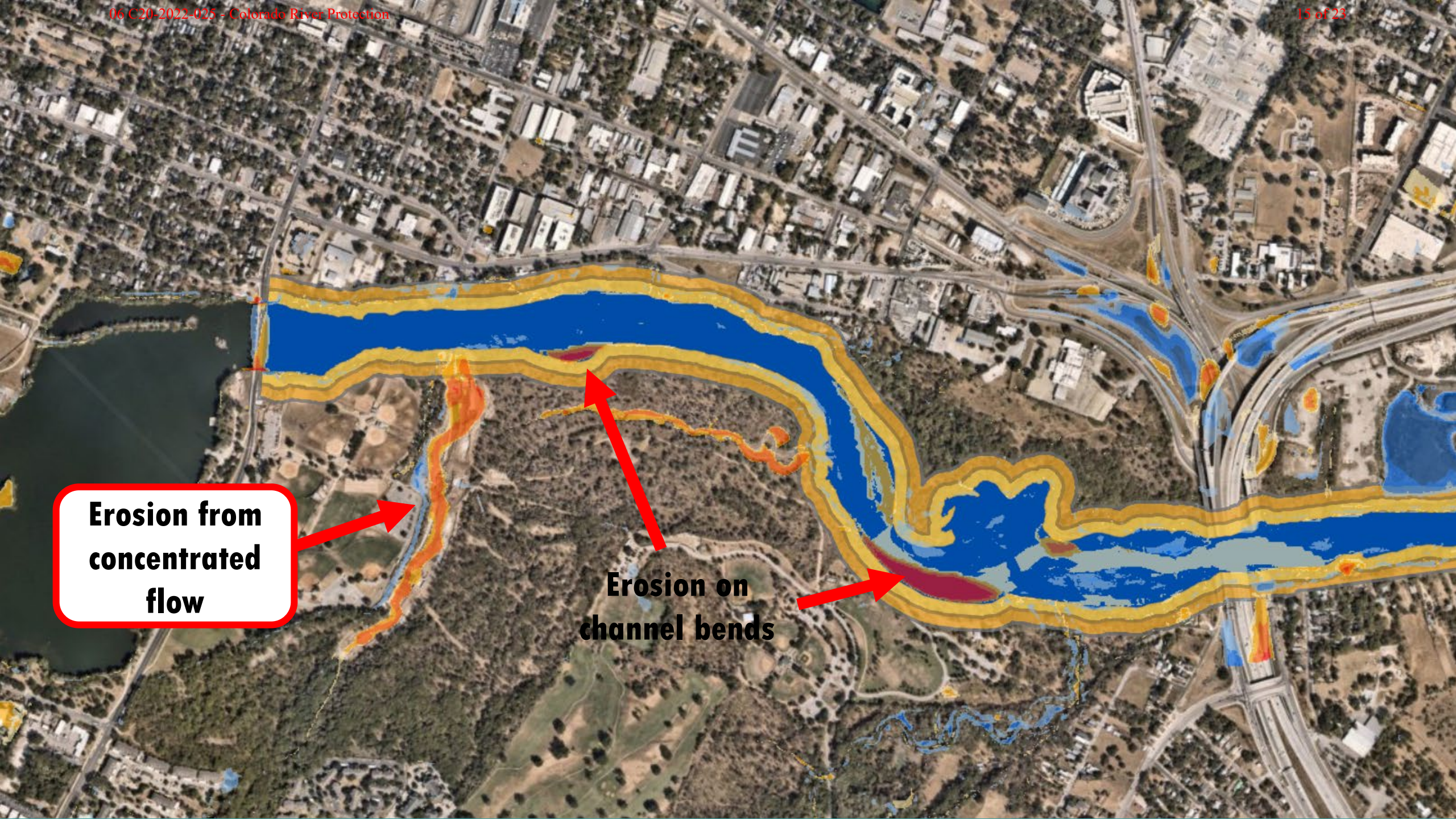
# Why are we proposing this?

- Highly erosive area
- Public safety
- Public expenditures to stabilize erosion sites
- Prevent public and private losses due to erosion
  - Tens of millions of dollars in damage and counting...
- The current erosion hazard zone geometry does not fit the large scale of the river

**SAND!**







**Erosion from  
concentrated  
flow**

**Erosion on  
channel bends**





WATERSHED  
PROTECTION

NearMap image from Jan. 5, 2023



Stranded tree, formerly  
on edge of bank

**Knollwood  
on the  
Colorado**





**Fallwell Lane: 2015 Halloween Flood  
Access to two critical facilities cut off—for the 2nd time**





**Home threatened after 20ft  
bank failure, May 2015**

**Hergotz  
Lane**





# Ordinance Proposal

- **Increases EHZ review buffer from 100ft to 200ft width**
- **Only applies to new buildings with “habitable space” and to infrastructure**
  - **Change affects EHZs citywide (not just along river)**
- **No change for hard-surfaced trails (100ft EHZ remains the same)**
- **Does not extend beyond parallel public roads**
- **Adds an administrative variance for greater cut and fill to support the provision of EHZ protective works**

\* EHZ = Erosion Hazard Zone





# Ordinance Proposal

- **Affects foundation design and cost for single-family building permit projects**
  - **Not applied to existing structures or new driveways, decks, etc.**
  - **Not applied to new single-family construction in the ETJ\***
  - **Stakeholder Feedback: Don't extend to 200ft for single-family lots (i.e., leave at 100ft)**
- **No/low impact on new subdivision or commercial projects (site plans)**
  - **The proposed 200ft EHZ is entirely within the existing Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ)**
  - **Possible impact on stormwater infrastructure in CWQZ**
  - **Subdivisions in ETJ also unaffected (EHZ remains 100ft)**
- **Potential impact on redeveloping commercial projects**




\* ETJ = Extraterritorial jurisdiction. In ETJ, single-family building permits regulated by County, not City of Austin

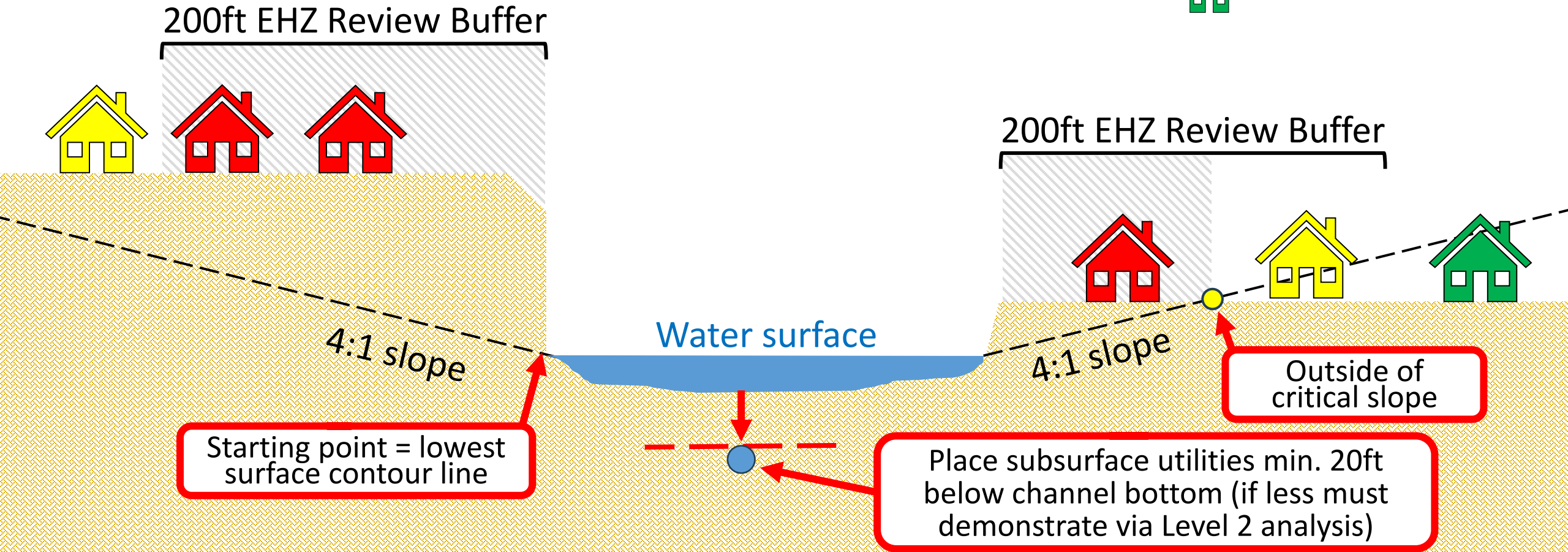




# Proposed EHZ Diagram



-  Protective works or Engineer Level II required
-  Protective works not required
-  Outside EHZ







# Schedule



**Develop staff draft ordinance, gather stakeholder input**

**Present ordinance to Commissions and Council**

<b>Oct. 16</b>	<b>Codes &amp; Ordinances Joint Committee</b>
<b>Nov. 6</b>	<b>Environmental Commission</b>
<b>Jan. 28</b>	<b>Planning Commission</b>
<b>Feb. 13</b>	<b>City Council</b>

**Develop and solicit stakeholder feedback on Criteria Changes**

**Mar/25 to Jun/25**

[Interactive map of Erosion Ordinance](#)



