



A Strategic Plan to Protect Austin's Creeks and Communities

# Rain to River Project Update & Current Engagement Effort

Climate, Water, Environment, & Parks Committee  
August 27, 2025



# What is Rain to River?

## *A Strategic Plan to Protect Austin's Creeks and Communities*

### **GUIDING BLUEPRINT FOR DEPARTMENT**

- Establishes our mission, vision, and values
- Sets goals and objectives for the next ten years

### **DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK**

Provides a framework for evaluating and prioritizing potential solutions

### **COMMUNICATION TOOL**

Helps explain our work and priorities to staff, policymakers, and the community



# Why are we updating the plan?

- *Watershed Protection Master Plan* was originally adopted by City Council in 2001
- The previous planning effort did not prioritize gathering input from the full diversity of Austin's residents
- Revisions have been ad-hoc and focused on updates to technical information without public input
- The plan does not address major challenges like climate change, population growth, and inequities
- The plan does not sufficiently capture the knowledge and experience we have gained over the last 20 years
- The plan does not reflect the findings and recommendations of other City plans
- The plan does not set time-specific targets or objectives to demonstrate we are making measurable progress

Watershed Protection  
**MASTER PLAN**  
FY 2015 | 2016



**WATERSHED  
PROTECTION**

# Goals for Rain to River Update

## REFLECT COMMUNITY VALUES

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

## INCORPORATE EQUITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Advance 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 leadership, policymakers, and the Austin community



# Our 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
- Coordinate and collaborate with other organizations 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





# Reaching Priority Stakeholders

We are dedicating extra time and resources to reach groups that have been left out of previous planning efforts:

- **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 the full Austin community!



# Project Timeline

- ❖ **2022-2023:** Phase 1 of Community Engagement
- ❖ **Spring 2024:** Onboarding of Consultant Team
- ❖ **Fall 2024:** Launch of Community Activation Group
- ❖ **Summer 2025:** Phase 2 of Community Engagement
- ❖ **Winter 2025:** Share the Draft Plan
- ❖ **Spring 2026:** City Council Review and Adoption



# Phase 1 of Community Engagement

## Broad Engagement

- **RaintoRiverATX.com**
- **Community Vision Survey**
  - **Yard signs** at community spaces
  - **Social media and radio ads**
- **Statistically valid survey** to validate Community Vision Survey results

## Focused Engagement

- **Focus groups:** 5 with MEASURE, 11 with organizations like Austin Youth River Watch
- **Community Ambassadors** conducted 1:1 interviews
- **\$5K mini-grants to 6 partner organizations** who gathered additional input
- **Postcards to 90K+ addresses in flood risk areas** to promote Community Vision Survey
- **60+ community events** to promote Community Vision Survey
- 1:1s with community leaders to **build and strengthen relationships**
- Surveys with **Austin Homelessness Advisory Committee**





# Phase 1 of Community Engagement



The Rain to River Community Ambassador cohort



Del Valle Community Coalition and Watershed staff doing R2R outreach



Queertopia and Watershed staff assembling care packages for people experiencing homelessness



Community Ambassadors share findings with Watershed leaders



Juneteenth event at Rosewood Park



Focus Group with Foundation Communities residents



# Learn About What We Heard in Phase 1

- ❖ The Impacts of Flooding, Pollution, and Erosion on Austin Communities: Measure Focus Group Report and Timeline
- ❖ Amplifying Diverse Voices: Community Ambassador Report
- ❖ Listening in Collaboration: Partner Organization Report

[www.RainToRiverATX.com](http://www.RainToRiverATX.com)





# Community Activation Group

The Community Activation Group (CAG) helps shape the content of the plan and ensures that the diverse voices of our community are integral to the Rain to River planning process and Watershed Protection's work.



- 15 diverse community leaders with expertise in the environment, community health, and/or disaster preparedness and recovery
- Engaged one year: Fall 2024 – Fall 2025
- Facilitated by Measure
- Helping shape Rain to River plan via:
  - ✓ Synthesis of community feedback
  - ✓ Helping design & broadcast survey
  - ✓ Community asset mapping
  - ✓ Brainstorming goals and metrics



# R2R Community Priorities

## Priority #1: Equity & Inclusion

Ensure historically underserved communities have equitable access to resources and decision-making processes.

## Priority #2: Flood Mitigation & Emergency Preparedness

Protect lives and property by addressing flooding and erosion proactively.

## Priority #3: Climate Resilience & Sustainability

Integrate climate adaptation strategies to address drought, extreme heat, and habitat loss.





# R2R Community Priorities

## Priority #4: Natural Resource Protection & Restoration

Preserve, restore, and enhance Austin's creeks, lakes, and natural spaces.

## Priority #5: Trust & Collaboration

Build trust through transparency, active listening, and community-centered initiatives.

## Priority #6: Accessibility & Public Engagement

Ensure natural spaces are safe, inviting, and accessible for all residents.

## Priority #7: Sustainable Development & Growth

Balance urban growth with environmental health and sustainability.





# R2R Community Priorities

## Priority #8: Support for Unhoused & Vulnerable Populations

Provide resources and safety for unhoused individuals while addressing systemic issues.

## Priority #9: Education & Youth Engagement

Foster a culture of environmental stewardship and resilience among residents.

## Priority #10: Innovation & Leadership

Position Austin as a model city for environmental stewardship and progressive practices.





# Current Community Engagement Effort

- June 18 - September 15, 2025
- With limited resources, we are seeking input on how to prioritize Watershed's work
- Goal to reach all Austinites, with special efforts to hear from priority stakeholders
- Your Voice: Shaping Our Priorities Survey  
<http://RainToRiverATX.com>





An aerial photograph of a river with a kayaker in a red kayak. The water is a deep blue-green, and the surrounding forest is lush green. The kayaker is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image, leaving a small wake behind them. The text 'Thank You!' and the website 'www.RainToRiverATX.com' are overlaid on the upper half of the image.

# Thank You!

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