

Rain to River

A STRATEGIC PLAN TO PROTECT AUSTIN'S CREEKS AND COMMUNITIES

City of Austin | Austin Watershed Protection

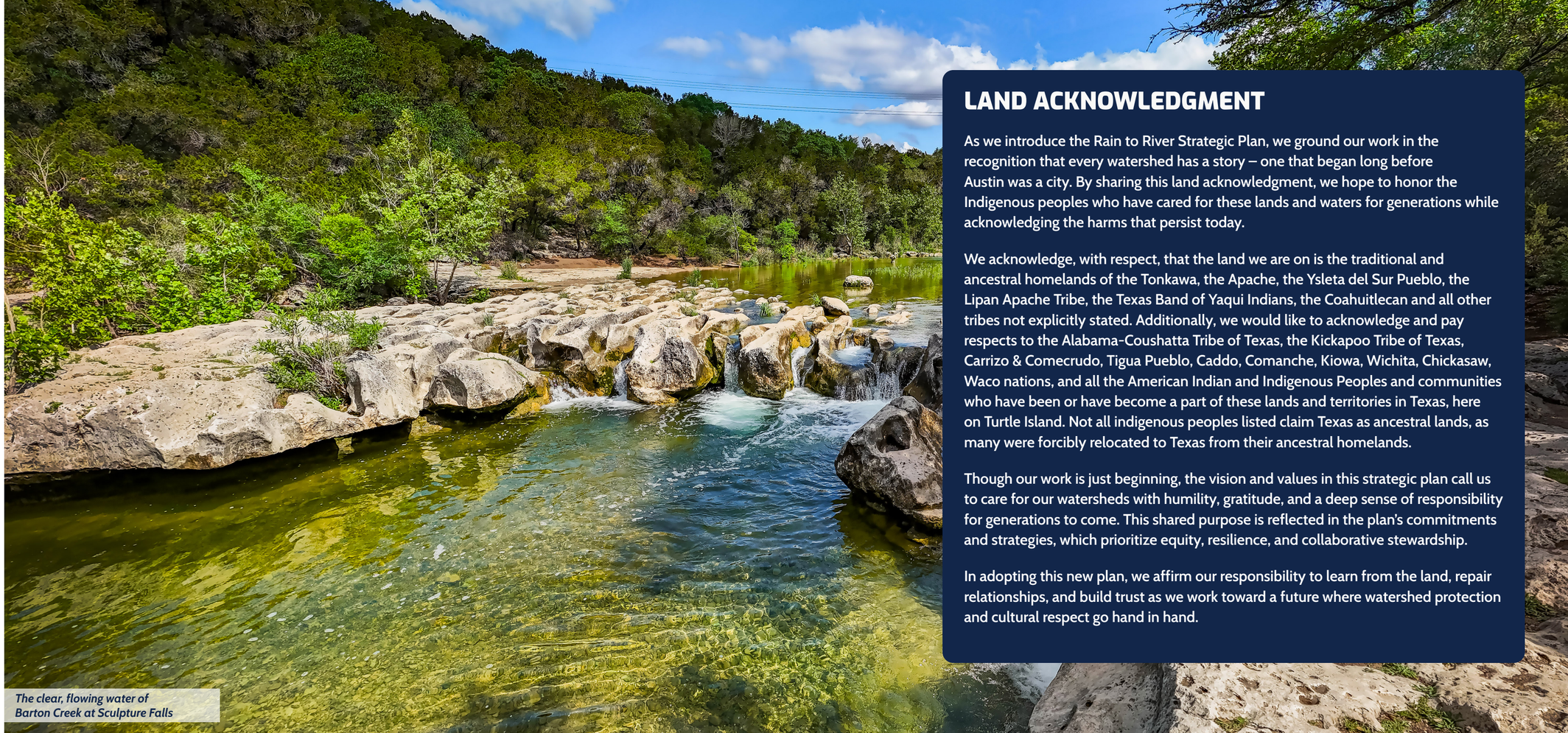
FINAL DRAFT 2026

Austin
Watershed Protection

Rain to River

A Strategic Plan to Protect Austin's Creeks & Communities

Austin
Watershed Protection



The clear, flowing water of Barton Creek at Sculpture Falls

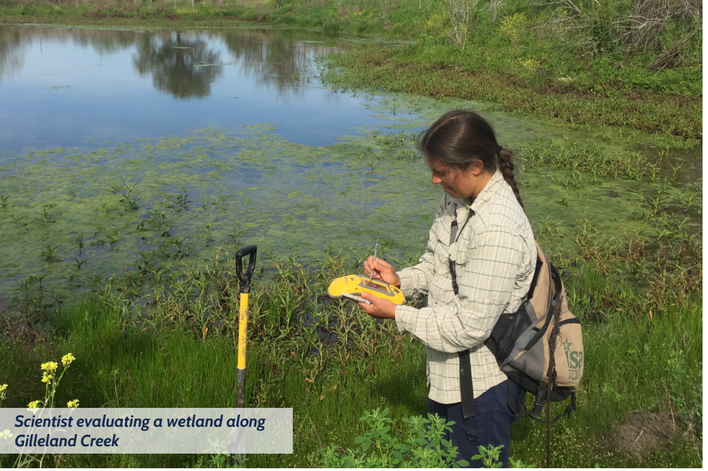
LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As we introduce the Rain to River Strategic Plan, we ground our work in the recognition that every watershed has a story – one that began long before Austin was a city. By sharing this land acknowledgment, we hope to honor the Indigenous peoples who have cared for these lands and waters for generations while acknowledging the harms that persist today.

We acknowledge, with respect, that the land we are on is the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Tonkawa, the Apache, the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, the Lipan Apache Tribe, the Texas Band of Yaqui Indians, the Coahuitlecan and all other tribes not explicitly stated. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge and pay respects to the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, the Kickapoo Tribe of Texas, Carrizo & Comecrudo, Tigua Pueblo, Caddo, Comanche, Kiowa, Wichita, Chickasaw, Waco nations, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island. Not all indigenous peoples listed claim Texas as ancestral lands, as many were forcibly relocated to Texas from their ancestral homelands.

Though our work is just beginning, the vision and values in this strategic plan call us to care for our watersheds with humility, gratitude, and a deep sense of responsibility for generations to come. This shared purpose is reflected in the plan's commitments and strategies, which prioritize equity, resilience, and collaborative stewardship.

In adopting this new plan, we affirm our responsibility to learn from the land, repair relationships, and build trust as we work toward a future where watershed protection and cultural respect go hand in hand.



Scientist evaluating a wetland along Gilleland Creek



Crew repairing a tributary of Tannehill Branch Creek



Youth educator exploring a cave in the Edwards Aquifer



Engineer assessing erosion on a tributary of Walnut Creek

WELCOME LETTER



I'm pleased to introduce Rain to River, the updated strategic plan for Austin Watershed Protection. This plan represents more than a set of strategies – it reflects a shift in how we approach our work, our partnerships, and our long-term responsibilities to the people and environment of Austin.

Our mission remains unchanged. As the City's drainage utility, we maintain and enhance critical infrastructure – creeks, lakes, aquifers, floodplains, storm drains, culverts, and more – to reduce the impacts of flooding, erosion, and water pollution. What has evolved is how we define success and who we include in that conversation.

Rain to River builds on the foundation of our previous plan, which emphasized transparency and data-driven decision-making. We continue that commitment while expanding our focus to include community voices, lived experience, and shared stewardship as essential components of resilient infrastructure.

For the first time, we have articulated a department vision and values. These guideposts help define our commitments and strategies for the next decade while laying the groundwork for the next century and beyond. We are addressing today's most urgent needs while investing in a future that is equitable, sustainable, and community-centered.

This plan also acknowledges the harm our systems have caused in the past. We are committed to equity not as a one-time initiative, but as an ongoing practice rooted in accountability, humility, and trust. By publishing community priorities and leading with engagement, we aim to embed community expertise into our daily work.

Rain to River marks a transition, from reacting to problems to creating lasting solutions. It is a call to action for all of us to work together toward outcomes that protect and uplift every part of Austin, now and for generations to come.

Jorge L. Morales, P.E., CFM

Director
Austin Watershed Protection

PLAN SUMMARY

Rain to River Framework

Rain to River is the strategic plan that will guide the work of Austin Watershed Protection for the next decade. These are the major elements of the plan that connect community aspirations with our department purpose and values, defining the commitments and strategies that will shape our work in the years ahead.

COMMUNITY VISION

What residents want for the future of their waterways and neighborhoods

We envision an Austin where our creeks, rivers, and natural spaces are healthy, vibrant, and accessible to everyone. This future rests on trust that the City and its communities can plan together, act together, and be accountable together.

In this vision, watershed protection is not a technical exercise but a social contract. Planning is proactive, solutions are co-created, and the voices of historically marginalized populations are central to every decision. Waterways and green spaces are not divided by zip code or history but united as shared public goods, spaces of connection, learning, and care.

The future imagined by the community is one where community knowledge guides environmental governance, where every flood mitigation project also strengthens social resilience, and where the City's investment in natural systems is inseparable from its investment in people.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The needs and recommendations that residents identified as most important

1. Equity & Inclusion
2. Flood Mitigation & Emergency Preparedness
3. Climate Resilience & Sustainability
4. Natural Resource Protection & Restoration
5. Accessibility & Public Engagement
6. Trust & Collaboration
7. Sustainable Development & Growth
8. Support for Unhoused & Vulnerable Populations
9. Education & Youth Engagement
10. Innovation & Leadership

DEPARTMENT MISSION

Why we exist as a department and what drives our work

To protect the lives, property, and environment of our community by reducing the impact of flooding, erosion, and water pollution.

DEPARTMENT VISION

Our shared purpose and how we work together to achieve the community vision

We aspire to an equitable, resilient Austin for current and future generations, where our natural and built environments work in harmony to ensure our community feels safe when it rains and our waterways are healthy.

DEPARTMENT VALUES

The principles that shape how we do our work and show up for the community

We are STEWARDS

SERVICE – Show up
TEAMWORK – Paddle together
EQUITY – Lift all boats
WISDOM – Reflect and listen
ACCOUNTABILITY – Anchor trust
RESILIENCE – Ride the waves
DEDICATION – Dive in
SUSTAINABILITY – Shape tomorrow

DEPARTMENT GOALS

The desired outcomes we aim to achieve to advance our mission

FLOOD RISK REDUCTION

Safeguard lives and reduce the impact of flooding to the Austin community.

EROSION MITIGATION

Create a safe and stable stream system that protects the community from erosion and encourages the use and enjoyment of Austin's creeks and lakes.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Protect and improve the health of Austin's creeks, rivers, lakes, and springs to provide clean and flowing water for all.

MAINTAINING INFRASTRUCTURE

Protect and enhance the condition and function of the City's drainage infrastructure, including creeks, drainage channels, storm drain pipes, tunnels, and stormwater ponds.

COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIES

The themes that ground our approach and the actions that guide our future direction

CENTER COMMUNITY

1.1. Create a Dedicated Community Liaison Role
1.2. Create and Sustain a Community Advisory Group for Implementation
1.3. Cultivate a Strong, Inclusive Workforce
1.4. Create a Shared Framework for Equity
1.5. Collaborate with Partners to Protect Vulnerable Populations
1.6. Enhance Community Education and Preparedness
1.7. Enhance Readiness for Emergencies
1.8. Improve Response and Recovery After Major Storms

INNOVATE TOGETHER

2.1. Create a Holistic Watershed Health and Safety Framework
2.2. Create Clear and Meaningful Watershed Targets
2.3. Enhance Data and Modeling Capabilities
2.4. Deliver Clear, Actionable Data to the Public
2.5. Implement a Proactive Approach to Infrastructure
2.6. Promote Opportunities for Shared Stewardship
2.7. Collaborate with Partners on Shared Priorities
2.8. Collaborate to Promote Responsible Development

GOVERN RESPONSIBLY

3.1. Define Clear and Achievable Levels of Service
3.2. Center Asset Management in Decision-Making
3.3. Implement an Equitable Decision-Making Approach
3.4. Understand and Address Past Environmental Harms
3.5. Create a Portfolio Management Structure
3.6. Report Our Performance and Progress
3.7. Cultivate a Balanced and Proactive Work Culture
3.8. Maintain and Share Knowledge

How to Use the Plan

The Rain to River Strategic Plan is designed for a wide range of audiences. Internally, it serves staff at all levels within Austin Watershed Protection, guiding our work and decisions. For city leaders and departments, it provides a shared framework to coordinate efforts and shape policy. Nonprofits and other partners can use the plan to align grant opportunities and collaborative projects. And for all Austinites, from every neighborhood and walk of life, the plan is a transparent document that explains our priorities, invites participation, and allows the community to hold us accountable. Each section has been strengthened and validated through extensive engagement with residents, community leaders, partner organizations, and staff.

INTRODUCTION:
Discover how this plan is different and how it came together.

UNDERSTAND:
Learn about our mission, values, and the work we do.

ENVISION:
Explore the vision and community priorities that guide us.

ENACT:
Dive into our commitments and strategies for the next decade.



These elements are not included in the Rain to River Strategic Plan but will guide and document our work going forward.

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING
The internal roadmap that turns strategy into action by outlining work plans, milestones, timelines, and responsibilities.

TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION
The detailed explanations of the methods, data, and frameworks behind our work, published as they are developed to support transparency and understanding.

PROGRESS REPORTING
The ongoing updates that show how we're advancing the plan, tracking what's working, where we're adapting, and how our efforts stay aligned with the community vision and priorities.



Community volunteers planting trees along Bull Creek



Kayakers floating down Barton Creek

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01 INTRODUCTION

Overview of Process

This section sets the context and guiding principles for the plan. It explains why the plan is being updated, highlighting our accomplishments and lessons learned. The section describes a deliberate shift from a purely technical approach to one that values lived experience and community knowledge alongside science and engineering. It outlines the multi-year planning process, including the roles of staff and community, emphasizing how community input grounded and informed the plan from the start. Finally, this section establishes the plan's purpose to shape how we do our work for the next decade.

Kickoff meeting with the Community Activation Group

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FROM RAIN TO RIVER: WORKING WITH WATER'S PROMISE AND PERIL

At Austin Watershed Protection, our work begins with a drop of rain and follows its journey across the land, into our streets and neighborhoods, and through the creeks that shape Austin's people, places, and ecosystems. Water brings life, offering spaces to swim, fish, and connect with nature, nourishing our neighborhoods and local wildlife. Rain can also bring devastation, flooding streets and homes, endangering lives, and creating stress, uncertainty, and lasting harm. Every storm carries this duality (promise and peril, vitality and risk) and our work is grounded in navigating both sides of that reality.

For decades, decisions about how to protect and manage Austin's creeks, floodplains, and stormwater infrastructure were guided primarily by technical assessments, environmental monitoring, engineering models, and permitting requirements. While essential, these tools often overlooked the equally vital human systems that define watershed health: the social, historical, and cultural contexts of the communities that live alongside these waters and the realities they face every day.

The Rain to River Strategic Plan marks a deliberate shift. We cannot do this work with technical expertise alone; we need the wisdom of those who experience flooding, erosion, and water pollution firsthand. By treating lived experience and community knowledge as data, we combine technical expertise with the insights of residents and community leaders to create strategies that are both practical and responsive to community needs.

The Rain to River Strategic Plan charts a forward-looking path for the next decade. It responds to Austin's changing climate, rapid growth, and the pressing need for equity, setting goals and strategies to ensure our watersheds—and the people who rely on them—are protected, resilient, and healthy.



Paddling a canoe at Clean Creek Camp

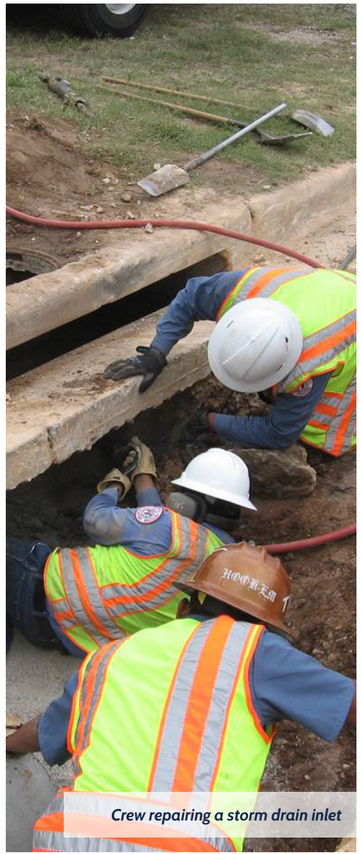
WHY WE'RE UPDATING THE PLAN

When we last updated our strategic plan in 2016, Austin faced many of the same challenges we see today. In the years since, those challenges have grown in scale, urgency, and complexity. Since 2016, our city has experienced severe floods, extreme heat, winter storms, and prolonged drought. These events had devastating impacts, with some Austinites losing their homes and others losing their lives. Population growth has accelerated development, increasing the pressure on our natural systems and aging infrastructure. At the same time, our community's understanding of environmental justice and climate vulnerability has evolved, bringing a sharper focus on who benefits from public investment and who bears the greatest risks.

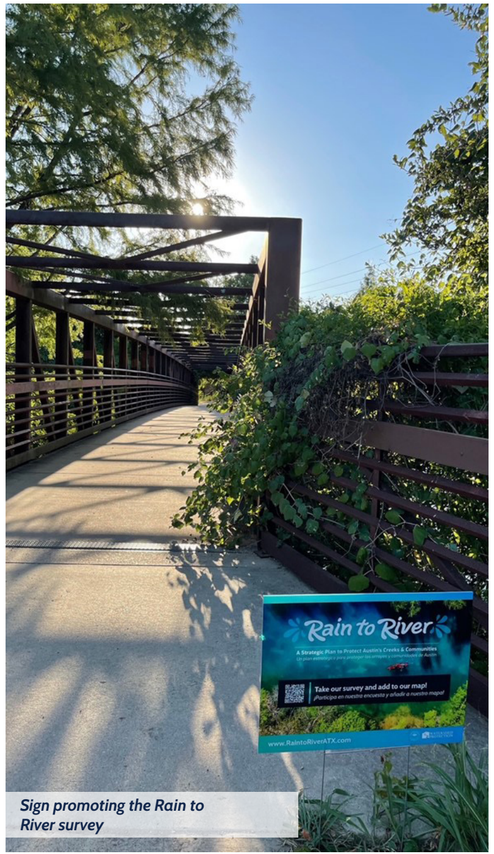
Our previous plan helped us make significant progress, including:

- Constructing hundreds of projects across the city to reduce flood risk, stabilize eroding creeks, and enhance water quality.
- Implementing new programs like asset management, equity coordination, green workforce development, and homelessness response.
- Strengthening regulations to protect homes from flooding and promote green stormwater infrastructure.
- Expanding our community engagement, education, and partnerships.
- Advancing watershed research to better understand how our waterways and ecosystems function.
- Responding to emergencies and severe storms to support community safety and recovery.
- Inspecting, maintaining, and repairing critical drainage infrastructure.
- Building new data and models to guide our work and priorities.
- Permanently preserving thousands of acres of green space.

But the pace of change requires us to do more and to do it differently. We also understand that the way we work is just as important as what we deliver. A truly equitable and sustainable future depends on meaningful collaboration with City departments, partner agencies, nonprofits, and most importantly Austin residents themselves. That understanding guided how we approached every phase of this planning effort.



Crew repairing a storm drain inlet



Sign promoting the Rain to River survey

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE PLAN

The Rain to River planning process began with a simple commitment: to plan differently. Our objective was not only to write a plan but to understand ourselves as an organization, strengthen our internal systems, and build genuine partnerships with the communities we serve. We wanted to move beyond just technical fixes and toward a holistic approach that balances infrastructure with equity, science with lived experience, and immediate needs with long-term vision. To do this, we outlined a set of clear guiding principles that shaped every step of our process.

First, we sought to better understand our role within the broader city landscape. Watershed protection touches nearly every aspect of city life (planning, housing, parks, health, and infrastructure) and we wanted to clarify how our work connects with others across Austin's government and community network.

Second, we committed to engaging the community in meaningful and ongoing ways. We recognize that those most affected by flooding, erosion, and water quality issues hold essential knowledge about their neighborhoods. By listening to those voices, partnering with these communities, compensating people for their time, and building long-term relationships we ensured the plan reflects real experiences, not assumptions.

Third, we worked to strengthen inclusion and transparency within our own organization. We opened new spaces for staff across all levels to share perspectives, identify challenges, and shape future direction. The conversations that resulted helped us identify our core values, refine our priorities, and align around a shared vision.

Finally, we aimed to balance aspiration with practicality—creating a plan that is both visionary and grounded in the day-to-day realities of our work. Every strategy was designed to be achievable, measurable, and adaptable to Austin's evolving climate and community needs.

We defined six guiding principles to shape our process and the final plan.

1. ***Center the Needs of Vulnerable Populations***
   Understand and support the groups most at risk, both in terms of exposure to hazards and ability to recover from disasters.

2. ***Engage the Community Through Clear & Open Communication***
   Transparent communication strengthens trust and builds shared understanding with the community.

3. ***Align Our Aspirations with Community Priorities***
   Community values and lived experiences directly shape our strategies and decisions.

4. ***Strengthen Partnerships for Greater Impact***
   Collaboration across departments and partners drives more coordinated, resilient outcomes.

5. ***Empower Our Leaders to Advocate for Our Mission***
   Leaders and policymakers are equipped to champion our mission, support staff, and guide strategic action.

6. ***Create a Dynamic & Inclusive Framework***
   An adaptive framework for planning and implementation ensures continuous learning, accountability, and responsiveness to change.



Community Activation Group meeting with department leadership

HOW WE CREATED THE PLAN

The process of creating the Rain to River Strategic Plan is as important as the plan itself. We began by turning inward, getting to know ourselves (our sphere of influence, skillsets, and mission) as a department. Through surveys, workshops, and facilitated discussions, staff across every branch reflected on what watershed protection means to them, the values that guide their work, and the challenges that shape their decisions. This internal engagement helped us define a shared purpose and identify where we could grow stronger together. Our Steering Committee, composed of senior leaders and key staff, guided the overall process. They were responsible for aligning strategic priorities, ensuring accountability, and connecting the many threads of technical and community insight into a coherent direction. Supporting them were two vital advisory bodies: the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and the Community Activation Group (CAG).



Staff tabling at an African American Youth Harvest Foundation event


A community ambassador conducting interviews


Indigenous Cultures Institute surveying residents in Montopolis


Reception honoring our partner organizations and community ambassadors

- The TAG brought together technical experts from across the department to test ideas, ensuring our strategies were practical, data-driven, and grounded in sound science.
- The CAG brought together 22 diverse community leaders with expertise in environmental stewardship, community health, and disaster preparedness. This compensated group co-created the community vision and ensured that our strategies reflect the lived experiences and values of residents.

Beyond the Steering Committee, TAG, and CAG, we launched a robust and inclusive community engagement process in 2022 that spanned multiple years. We identified stakeholder groups that have been historically underrepresented in our past planning efforts and worked to engage with them more directly during the Rain to River process, particularly people of color, low income residents and those disproportionately affected by flooding, erosion, and degraded waterways. We partnered with local organizations, community ambassadors, and advocacy groups to reach residents across every watershed. Engagement took many forms—surveys, interviews, focus groups, neighborhood meetings, and community events—and was an ongoing dialogue about how water, equity, and resilience intersect in the daily lives of Austinites. The team also recognized that many community organizations have long led work in public health and environmental protection, and approached engagement as an opportunity to learn from their experience. Through this work, we heard concerns about flood risk awareness, environmental justice, support for vulnerable populations, and the need for clearer communication and stronger collaboration between our department and the community.

Key Community Engagement Components

Community Vision Surveys

Our initial survey asked people to share their vision, values, and experiences. We conducted an additional survey later in the process to help us prioritize our department's work for the upcoming decade. The surveys were the primary way to provide input on the plan and were broadly marketed to all Austin-area residents through social media, newsletters, advertising, postcards, and tabling at community events.

Community Ambassador Program

We recruited ten residents to serve as compensated community ambassadors, who interviewed people in their own communities and gathered information about their experiences with watershed problems, interactions with waterways and nature, and ideas to make things better. The interviews centered on historically underrepresented voices, including Black, Indigenous, people of color, low-income, LGBTQIA+, unhoused, and disabled communities.

Community Organization Partnerships

We joined forces with six organizations, each partner receiving a $5,000 mini-grant to gather input from the population they serve about their priorities and experiences. Organizations engaged community members via interviews, door-knocking, surveys, focus groups, and conversations at in-person events.

Focus Groups & Interviews

We conducted 17 compensated focus groups and two interviews in collaboration with local organizations that serve a variety of communities, including youth of color, people with disabilities, residents of flood-impacted neighborhoods, low-income renters, immigrants, and refugees. Five of these focus groups were organized and facilitated by MEASURE.

Timeline of Engagement

Community Activation Group

October 2024 to October 2025

The CAG helped shape priorities, challenge assumptions, and provide community expertise.



Phase 1 Community Engagement

April 2022 to September 2023

During Phase 1, we learned about vision, values, and experiences of the community.

Phase 2 Community Engagement

June to September 2025

During Phase 2, we asked the community to help us prioritize our work for the upcoming decade.

Snapshot of Engagement

Thousands of Austinites were reached during the four-year long engagement process. Through surveys, events, focus groups and interviews, promotional materials and ambassador outreach, we captured the unique and diverse voices of the Austin community to inform the Rain to River Strategic Plan. This spread illustrates a snapshot of our community engagement efforts.

Phases 1 & 2
6,700+
Individual Participants Reached

Phases 1 & 2
9
Languages Translated for Engagement

Phase 1
93,000+
Postcards Mailed

Phases 1 & 2
200+
Focus Group Participants

Phases 1 & 2
5,000+
Survey Responses

Phase 1
300
Partner Organization Participants

Phase 1 & 2
1,000+
Engagement Event Participants

Phase 1
100+
Community Ambassador Interviews

Phases 1 & 2
100+
In-person events hosted across 23 zip codes and 10 Council Districts in ATX



Staff engaging with community members at Del Valle Day

Multiple standalone reports summarize the community input for the Rain to River Plan and can be found at www.raintoriveratx.com:

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

A SHARED COMMITMENT & LOOK AHEAD

In addition to supporting our daily work and decisions, the commitments and strategies from Rain to River will also help guide city planning at multiple scales—informing the annual budget, the capital improvement program plan, the citywide strategic plan, and the comprehensive plan as well as the long-range plans for other departments and agencies.

Looking ahead, we want to ensure Rain to River can be responsive to community needs and operational realities. While the vision and values serve as a strong foundation, our strategies will need to adapt and evolve over time. We will work with staff, leadership, and the community to track our progress and develop an annual implementation plan to advance these commitments and strategies. Every five years, we will evaluate our success, identify challenges, engage with the community, and update our strategic plan accordingly.

As Austin continues to grow, protecting our watersheds and our communities will remain both a challenge and a source of strength. It requires balancing the needs of a dynamic urban environment with the integrity of the natural systems that sustain it. It also requires deep collaboration, not just within the City, but among residents, businesses, scientists, and community organizations who share the responsibility of caring for our shared environment.



Crew removing trash and debris from Lady Bird Lake

We recognize that this work will not happen overnight. Building resilience is a long-term endeavor, requiring persistence, creativity, and trust. But through Rain to River, we have a collective framework for moving forward, one that acknowledges the lessons of the past, meets the realities of the present, and looks ahead with optimism and purpose.



Children learning about the Barton Springs Salamander

02 UNDERSTAND

Austin's Rain to River Story

This section introduces the foundation of our work by defining what watershed protection means in this community and the mission and values that guide us. It outlines the projects, programs, and regulations that make up our core functions, the challenges that shape our decisions, and the partnerships that support our efforts across the city. Together, these elements show who we are as a department and the work we will continue to do. This plan builds on that foundation by setting a clear direction and helping us strengthen and adapt our efforts over time so they reflect community priorities and support long term resilience.

Paddling boats on Lady Bird Lake

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WATERSHED PROTECTION IN AUSTIN



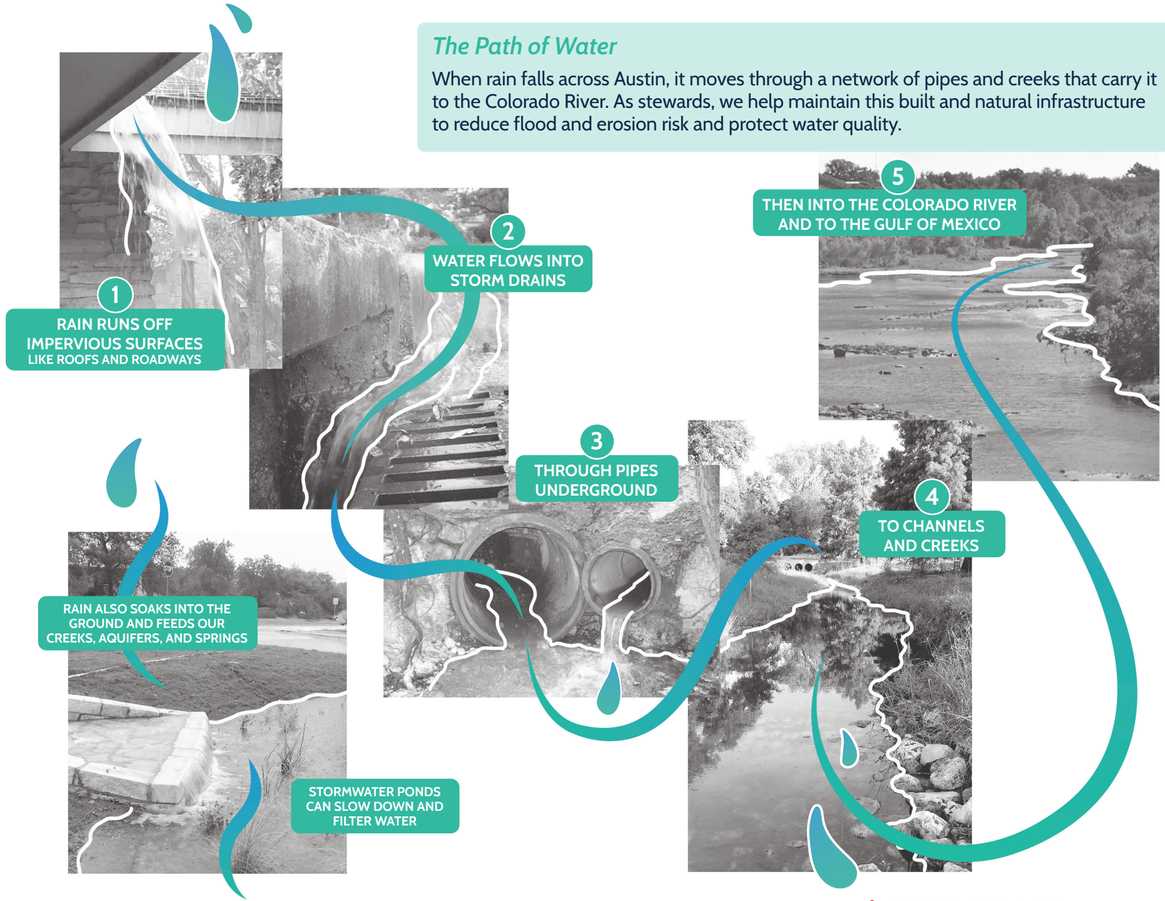
Students learning about habitat and ecology at Earth Camp

In Austin, our relationship with water runs deep, stretching back thousands of years. Long before the city was founded, indigenous communities stewarded these creeks, rivers, and springs, relying on them for sustenance, ceremony, and connection. Today, we swim in Barton Springs, hike McKinney Falls, paddle Lady Bird Lake, and fish at Lake Walter E. Long, continuing a tradition of finding joy and renewal in these waters. These places provide our residents a vital oasis in the city, offering spaces to play, explore, and find peace.

But these waters don't exist in isolation—they depend on healthy watersheds. Each time rain falls on Austin, it runs off of our rooftops and streets, funnels into curb inlets and storm drains, flows into channels and creeks, and eventually feeds into the Colorado River. A watershed is the land that shapes this journey, guiding water downhill to a specific creek or river. In Austin, the watersheds for places like Walnut Creek, Shoal Creek, and Onion Creek are all part of the larger Colorado River watershed. The protection of our watersheds is critical to the health of our waterways and the safety of our community.

The Path of Water

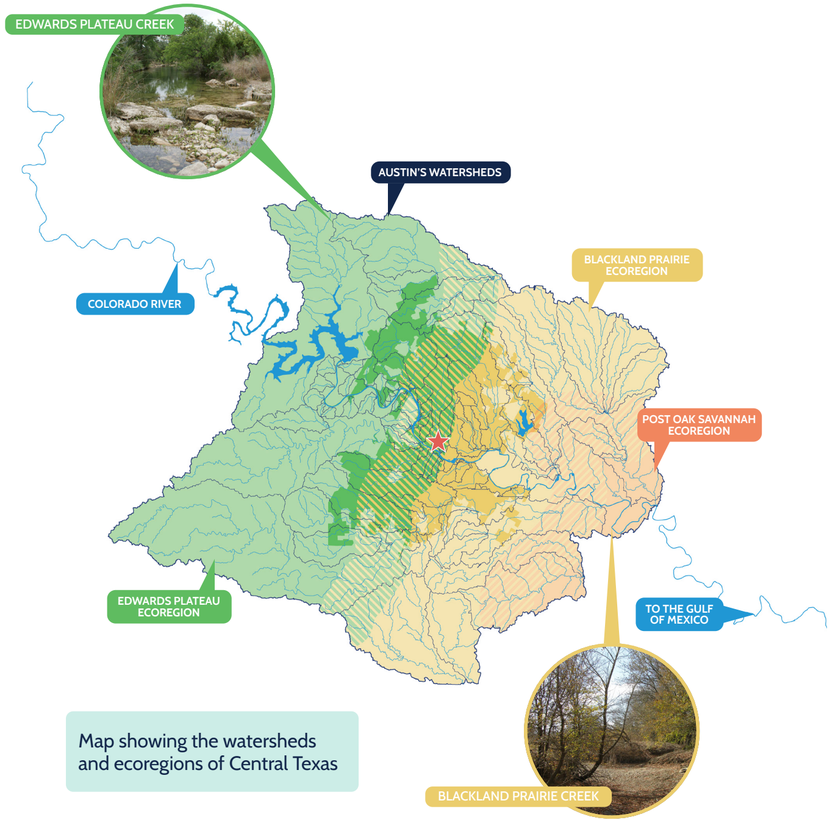
When rain falls across Austin, it moves through a network of pipes and creeks that carry it to the Colorado River. As stewards, we help maintain this built and natural infrastructure to reduce flood and erosion risk and protect water quality.



Austin's unique geography adds complexity to this work and impacts the types of watershed problems we find across Austin. Rugged terrain and intense downpours make the city especially prone to severe flooding. To the west, the steep canyons and thin, rocky soils of the Edwards Plateau make resources like Lake Austin and the Edwards Aquifer more vulnerable to water pollution. In the east, the deep clay soils and rolling hills of the Blackland Prairie create wider floodplains and increased erosion risk. These challenges, combined with rapid growth, drove Austin to strengthen watershed protections over time.

Austin's watershed protection efforts grew out of rising public concern in the 1970s and 1980s as rapid development and major floods exposed how vulnerable the city's creeks and neighborhoods were. The city began adopting regulations to limit floodplain development and protect water quality. The 1981 Memorial Day Flood, which killed 13 people, grimly underscored the danger of Austin's location in "Flash Flood Alley" and led to the creation of a dedicated drainage fee to fund stormwater management. In 1996, the city created a new department, uniting flood, erosion, and water quality programs under one mission.

Today, Austin is recognized nationally as a leader in watershed protection, but the work is ongoing. By repairing past harm and planning for future challenges, we strive to protect Austin's watersheds and keep our creeks, rivers, and lakes healthy for generations to come.

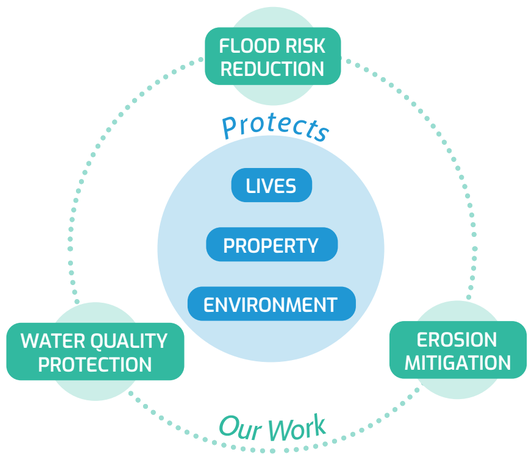


Map showing the watersheds and ecoregions of Central Texas

OUR MISSION

To meet the growing and complex needs of the city, Austin Watershed Protection has a clear and enduring purpose:

To protect the lives, property, and environment of our community by reducing the impact of flooding, erosion, and water pollution.





Slaughter Creek overtopping Old San Antonio Road

Flooding, erosion, and water quality are deeply connected. Heavy rainfall sends fast-moving water into our creeks, eroding banks and carrying pollutants downstream. The loss of healthy trees and plants along creeks can degrade water quality, but also increase erosion risk and reduce the land's natural ability to absorb and slow down floodwaters. That's why our solutions use a holistic approach—treating flooding, erosion, and water quality as interconnected challenges rather than isolated problems.

Protecting lives, property, and the environment is about building a stronger community. Protecting lives includes safety during major disasters as well as quality of life shaped by access to healthy green spaces and thriving neighborhoods. Property includes our homes and businesses as well as the roads, parks, and infrastructure that connect us. And the environment means the natural systems such as creeks, soils, and trees that keep our city healthy, resilient, and livable.

OUR VALUES | STEWARDS

These represent the core values that we, as Watershed Protection staff, aspire to as stewards of Austin's watersheds. They were formally adopted by leadership in 2025 after extensive conversations with staff across the department about what matters most in how we do our work.



SERVICE
Show up

Service is at the core of our work, ensuring we provide high quality support and effective solutions to the community.

- We hold ourselves to the highest standards of customer service by listening, engaging, and responding in a timely manner.
- We provide accurate and consistent service to our internal customers to ensure our staff works safely and effectively while serving the community.

TEAMWORK
Paddle together

We promote teamwork and collaboration, knowing we can rely on each other and that we are stronger when we work together.

- We invest time and effort in cultivating effective teams, characterized by mutual support and respect for each other as whole people.
- We value collaboration beyond our department, understanding that working across agencies and with community members is essential to achieving our missions.

EQUITY
Lifts all boats

We are committed to equity by acknowledging that different people and environments need different resources to thrive.

- We foster a workplace where everyone is valued, empowered, and has the chance to succeed and grow.
- We prioritize our work towards achieving equal outcomes for all.

WISDOM
Reflect and listen

We strive for excellence in our work by leveraging the wisdom of our staff, community, and watersheds.

- We learn from the knowledge and experiences of our community, ensuring their voices shape our work and guide our decisions.
- We foster a culture of creativity, continuous learning, and data-informed decision making.



Staff at the Central Texas Juneteenth Parade

As stewards, we care for our watersheds and safeguard our infrastructure to support the communities that rely on them. We recognize the environment's fundamental connection to protecting health and safety. We address urgent needs while planning for a sustainable and resilient future. We use public funds responsibly and transparently to implement solutions. We are committed to equity, prioritizing efforts to achieve fair outcomes for all. Through shared stewardship, we collaborate with city and community partners, leveraging our collective wisdom and strengths.

ACCOUNTABILITY
Anchor trust

We hold ourselves accountable to each other, our community, and the environment to ensure trust in our actions.

- We build trust through transparent and timely communication and actions.
- We explain how and why decisions are made, clearly stating our capabilities and limitations.

RESILIENCE
Ride the waves

We embrace adaptability to navigate change, ensuring strategic decision-making.

- We strategically allocate our resources to advance our core mission in a rapidly changing world.
- We work effectively to adapt to the evolving needs of our community, staff, and environment.

DEDICATION
Dive in

We are a department full of dedicated and passionate staff committed to the needs of the community and watersheds we serve.

- We practice care and compassion with each other, our community, and watersheds.
- We go above and beyond, taking pride in everything we do.

SUSTAINABILITY
Shape tomorrow

We invest in a sustainable future for our creeks, infrastructure, community, and department.

- We protect our natural and built environment to secure healthy waterways and a safe community well into the future.
- We foster a healthy workplace for staff to grow and thrive.



Biologist surveying salamanders at Barton Springs Pool

WHO WE ARE & WHAT WE DO

We address the city's watershed challenges through a combination of projects, programs, and regulations. Each approach is designed to reduce flooding, mitigate erosion, and protect water quality while ensuring our communities and natural environment are resilient to growth and climate change.

- Construction projects build, improve, or repair the public infrastructure that handles rainwater throughout the city. Projects typically are used to help address existing problems. Examples of construction projects include improving storm drains to reduce flooding in the street, repairing eroding stream banks, or building rain gardens to capture and treat contaminated runoff.
- Programs are ongoing activities that help meet a specific purpose. Programs tend to target a need that is difficult to address through projects or regulations. Examples of programs include flood safety education, responding to spills of hazardous materials, inspecting and maintaining our infrastructure, and investigating drainage issues reported by residents.
- Regulations are rules that guide land development and other activities to help prevent the creation of new problems. Examples of watershed regulations include requirements that limit building houses in the floodplain or require developers to construct water quality controls that filter pollutants from impervious areas, such as parking lots. Regulations save Austinites millions of dollars in repair and restoration costs while reducing damage to our waterways and neighborhoods. In addition, flood regulations prevent more lives from being placed at risk as our population continues to rapidly grow.

Flood Risk Reduction

Goal

Safeguard lives and reduce the impact of flooding to the Austin community.

Why It Matters

Flash flooding poses a continuous threat to Central Texans. These dangers are mostly present along flooded creeks, especially where bridges and low water crossings have been inundated with floodwaters. In locations where storm drain systems do not exist or are undersized, rising waters—known as local flooding—can cause severe property damage even for those who do not live in or near floodplains.

What We Do

The severity and impact of flooding is evaluated using computer models as well as customer reports and field investigations. We protect our community from the impacts of flooding by completing projects like storm drain improvements, low water crossing upgrades, and voluntary buyouts that help residents move to a safer home outside of the floodplain. We inspect, repair, and maintain our existing drainage infrastructure. We prevent an increase in the number of flood-prone homes, businesses, and roads by enforcing drainage regulations. We also promote flood safety and preparedness through community education and outreach, monitoring of storm events, assisting emergency responders, and barricading flooded roads.



Staff preparing barricades for low water crossings

Erosion Mitigation

Goal

Create a safe and stable stream system that protects the community from erosion and encourages the use and enjoyment of Austin's creeks and lakes.

Why It Matters

As watersheds develop and more land is covered by impervious surfaces—like pavement and rooftops—stormwater runs off quickly instead of soaking into the ground. This fast-moving water erodes creek banks, carves deeper channels, and widens creeks over time, threatening nearby homes and infrastructure. Erosion also washes extra sediment into creeks, making the water cloudy and harming aquatic life.

What We Do

Our staff respond to community reports of erosion and conduct assessments of potential threats to buildings, roads, and other resources. We mitigate the impacts of erosion by constructing stream restoration projects and stabilizing eroding banks to safeguard property and infrastructure as well as improve waterway health. We also implement erosion hazard zones and other protective regulations to ensure that new buildings and infrastructure are protected from future erosion threats.



Repairing an eroding channel on Tannehill Branch Creek

Water Quality Protection

Goal

Protect and improve the health of Austin's creeks, rivers, lakes, and springs to provide clean and flowing water for all.

Why It Matters

As the city grows and natural lands are developed, the increase in pavement, rooftops, traffic, and fertilized lawns can dramatically change our local waterways. Stormwater runoff carries pollutants such as bacteria, nutrients, heavy metals, and sediment into our creeks and lakes, posing risks to ecosystems and public health. Additional sources of contamination include leaking wastewater infrastructure, hazardous spills, and illegal discharges. These pollutants can trigger harmful algae blooms and even kill fish and other wildlife.

What We Do

We protect and improve the health of our waterways by constructing pollution removal projects, supporting practices to increase stormwater infiltration, restoring plants and trees along creeks, promoting education and outreach activities, implementing water quality regulations, remediating hazardous spills, protecting the habitat of endangered salamanders, and permanently preserving open space. Our staff monitors and analyzes the health of our waterways to assess things like water chemistry, aquatic life, vegetation along the banks, and whether the water is safe for recreation.



Environmental scientist sampling water quality

Maintaining Our Infrastructure

Goal

Protect and enhance the condition and function of the City's drainage infrastructure, including creeks, drainage channels, storm drain pipes, tunnels, and stormwater ponds.

Why It Matters

The community can enjoy our creeks and lakes that are better protected from flooding, erosion, and water pollution when our drainage infrastructure is in good condition and working properly. For example, if debris is not cleared from clogged bridges after storms, subsequent rain events could easily overtop the bridge, flood the immediate area, and erode adjacent stream banks. Each component of the drainage system must be operating as designed for the entire system to be effective.

What We Do

We keep our infrastructure working properly by inspecting, cleaning, repairing, replacing, and improving drainage pipes and associated infrastructure to help reduce flooding. We investigate drainage reports from 3-1-1 to determine the source and severity of the problem and route it to the appropriate work group for solution implementation. We remove debris and obstructions from culverts, bridges, and channels to promote the flow of water during heavy rainfall while allowing our creeks to remain as natural as possible. We inspect, maintain, and repair stormwater ponds to protect water quality and help reduce flooding. We also operate and maintain the Waller Creek Tunnel to protect resources in downtown Austin from flooding.



Crews removing debris from a bridge on Little Walnut Creek

OUR CHALLENGES

Austin's watersheds face interconnected challenges that threaten environmental health and community resilience. Climate change is driving more intense storms and heat, while historic inequities have left some neighborhoods more exposed to flooding and pollution than others. Rapid urbanization and population growth add pressure on our environment and infrastructure. These factors shape where risks are greatest and highlight the need for solutions that repair past harms and prepare for future threats.

Climate Change

In addition to increasing heat, climate projections show that our region will also see more extreme weather events. Austin is already feeling these impacts through heat waves, record droughts, winter storms, and catastrophic floods, and they are expected to get worse as the climate continues to change. While the future holds uncertainties, the trend toward more frequent and intense storms signals growing risks to public health, safety, and critical infrastructure.

We also know that climate change does not affect everyone equally. Low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately bear the brunt of these impacts. They face higher risks of property damage and injury from extreme weather events and often have fewer resources to recover. This is why we cannot talk about the impact of climate change without addressing equity and centering the community in our response.



Catastrophic flooding in Dove Springs during the 2013 Halloween Flood



Community members protesting pollution at the East Austin tank farm

History of Inequities

Austin's watershed inequities stem from a long history of policies that pushed Black, Hispanic, and low-income residents into areas with greater flood risk and fewer protections. The 1928 Master Plan forced Black Austinites into East Austin, often in low-lying, floodprone neighborhoods. Redlining in the 1930s—a discriminatory practice that denied loans and investment in certain areas—further limited infrastructure improvements. Midcentury zoning then labeled much of East Austin as "industrial," concentrating hazards near homes and deepening environmental burdens.

Even as Austin strengthened watershed protections over the decades, many communities continued to face the consequences of earlier decisions. Much of the city was built before modern regulations existed, leaving neighborhoods with aging infrastructure more vulnerable to flooding, pollution, and system failures. Today, the legacy of past inequities still shapes who faces the greatest risks and where the city must focus its efforts to repair harm and build a safer, healthier future.

For a more detailed history, visit www.raintoriveratx.com to read A History of Community Inequities in Austin's Watersheds, developed by MEASURE in 2022.



Severe erosion threatens homes along Fort Branch Creek

Urbanization & Development

When rain falls on buildings, parking lots, and roads, it picks up pollutants and carries them into our creeks. This impervious cover also prevents rain from infiltrating or soaking into the ground. More impervious cover means more water is funneled to creeks during storms and that water is moving much faster, contributing to erosion and flooding. Creeks in urban areas tend to have high flows during storms that drive erosion, flooding, and water pollution, followed by low flows that don't support recreation or aquatic life during dry periods.

Our regulations help prevent the creation of new problems, but a lot of the development in our city was constructed before the adoption of any regulations. Homes and businesses were built within floodplains and along the banks of eroding creeks. Drainage pipes were built too small and quickly became overwhelmed during storms, leading to flooding in streets and neighborhoods. Natural creeks were straightened and lined with concrete to make room for more buildings and roads. Untreated stormwater runoff was directed into waterways, carrying contaminants like lead, bacteria, and pesticides.

Population Growth & Affordability

The Austin metropolitan area is one of the fastest growing areas in the country. With increased demand for housing, Austin's housing costs have soared and led to displacement of longtime residents and an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness. As residents are pushed out of central neighborhoods, their access to daily needs and opportunities diminishes. These trends have been particularly prominent in Austin's "eastern crescent" neighborhoods, where a large proportion of Austin's communities of color have lived due to historic segregation.

At the same time, this increased demand for housing is also fueling rapid development of previously undeveloped areas and threatening our natural systems. Urban sprawl and development in previously rural areas degrades the creeks that feed treasured recreation spots like Barton Springs and McKinney Falls, damages the region's wildlife habitats, and leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions as more people must drive long distances into Austin.

Implementation Constraints

There are several constraints that influence where and how we do our work. One major challenge is that our watersheds stretch across multiple cities and counties in the region. This means our creeks and lakes are impacted by areas upstream of Austin. Another limiting factor is available funding. Watershed Protection is primarily funded by a drainage charge, which is assessed on the monthly utility bills of Austin residents and businesses. State law governs how this charge can be used, which can impact the scope and effectiveness of our solutions.

Finally, trying to fix watershed problems in the middle of a dense city can be difficult. There is often very limited space to construct new infrastructure and a workable solution may not be possible. For example, the project may need to work around or relocate other underground utilities, resulting in additional cost. In addition, upgrading the storm drains in a neighborhood means that the water is being sent downstream faster. We may need to acquire easements or construct flood detention ponds to ensure that the project does not cause downstream flooding.



Crews stabilizing a tributary of Williamson Creek

EXPANDING OUR IMPACT

The challenges facing Austin's watersheds and communities—such as extreme weather, urban growth, and affordability pressures—are interconnected and require action at many scales. Our department plays a vital role in addressing these issues, and we do so through three complementary areas of work: Lead, Partner, and Connect. These areas reflect the different ways we create impact, from delivering core services to collaborating across the city to linking our work with broader community priorities. Our ability to make progress grows as we strengthen relationships and demonstrate results. The opposite can also happen when funding constraints or state law limit what we can take on.



LEAD

We lead the work that directly aligns with our mission of reducing flood and erosion risk, protecting water quality, and maintaining critical infrastructure. This includes designing and building projects, adopting regulations that prevent future watershed problems, and launching programs to meet community needs. It also includes building trust by improving our communication and customer service as well as centering equity in how we serve the community. This is the foundation of our department and anchors the broader impact we can have across Austin.

PARTNER

We partner with other departments, community organizations, and residents to take on complex challenges that benefit from collective effort and resources. Through collaboration, we strengthen community resilience and advance shared priorities. Partnership also includes educating and empowering residents about everyday actions that protect our waterways and help keep people safe. By working together, we create meaningful progress that supports healthier watersheds and communities.

CONNECT

We connect our work to the broader issues that shape Austin's future, including climate change, affordability, and quality of life. While these areas extend beyond any single department, we can contribute in meaningful ways. For example, we can prepare our infrastructure to withstand extreme weather and promote green workforce development. By staying connected to the needs and goals of the people we serve, we ensure our work helps residents adapt and thrive.

HOW WE PARTNER

At Austin Watershed Protection, we don't work in isolation. Each of our three core mission areas—flood risk reduction, erosion mitigation, and water quality protection—is supported through close collaboration with other departments, governmental agencies, and community-based nonprofit organizations. These partnerships are essential for expanding our impact as the city grows and faces new challenges.



Ribbon cutting for the East Williamson Creek Greenbelt and Drainage Improvements

- **Planning and Development:** We integrate watershed considerations into long-term land use and growth strategies for a sustainable city. We work together to ensure development projects meet environmental, drainage, and floodplain standards to protect creeks and neighborhoods.
- **Infrastructure and Utilities:** We collaborate on opportunities for joint infrastructure projects to advance multiple needs, leverage shared resources, and minimize construction-related disruption. Examples include upgrading low water crossings, moving wastewater lines out of creeks, improving storm drains, and building green stormwater infrastructure.
- **Natural Systems and Resilience:** We align watershed strategies with citywide climate and resilience goals. We partner on open space acquisition and land management, including restoring trees and vegetation along creeks to provide shade and improve ecological health.
- **Emergency Management:** We work together to prepare for major storms, predict and monitor rainfall and stream flows, issue timely public alerts, and coordinate emergency operations with first responders.
- **Protecting Vulnerable Populations:** We collaborate to ensure our work promotes environmental justice, supports better outcomes for our staff, and reflects community priorities. We coordinate efforts to protect vulnerable populations such as the unhoused community during flood events and connect them to resources.
- **Education and Communications:** We partner on education and outreach initiatives such as Turn Around Don't Drown and Earth Camp to engage with residents and build community awareness.
- **Surrounding Jurisdictions:** We coordinate with neighboring cities and counties as well as intergovernmental agencies like the Lower Colorado River Authority to monitor and manage our shared watersheds, plan at a regional scale, and align watershed regulations.
- **State and Federal Government:** We work with governmental agencies such as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the Texas Water Development Board, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to maintain water quality and permitting compliance, coordinate floodplain management and disaster recovery efforts, and pursue grant funding that advances our mission.
- **Nonprofit Organizations:** Our work is strengthened by partnerships with a range of Austin nonprofits focused on water quality, ecological restoration, community health, disaster preparedness, and environmental education. These partnerships ensure that our strategies reflect the needs and experiences of the communities we serve.



Students test water quality with Austin Youth River Watch
Amelia Devivo

03 ENVISION

A Vision for the Community

This section lays out a shared roadmap for Austin's watershed future. The community vision reflects what residents and stakeholders want for the future, while the department vision defines how we will operate and deliver on that future. Both visions were informed by the ten community priorities that grew from years of listening to residents, organizations, and stakeholders. Together, these perspectives shape a future where watershed protection is a social contract, linking flood safety, water quality, climate resilience, access to nature, and public health with accountability and shared stewardship. This section shows how the vision and priorities align to guide how we plan, invest, engage, and deliver solutions—setting the stage for the commitments and strategies in the Enact section.

A peaceful stretch of Walnut Creek

COMMUNITY VISION 45
DEPARTMENT VISION 46
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES 47

This plan includes both a community vision and a department vision because they serve different but complementary purposes. The community vision reflects what residents want for the future, while the department vision explains how we will deliver on that future.

The community vision grew from years of engaging with residents and anchors the direction of the plan. For more information about community engagement and the process for developing the Rain to River Strategic Plan, see the Introduction Section.

The department vision was created by staff to articulate our shared purpose and guide how we work together to achieve the community vision. The longer description provides additional context about what it means and how it connects to our work.



Volunteers planting saplings at a Ready, Set, Plant! event

COMMUNITY VISION

We envision an Austin where our creeks, rivers, and natural spaces are healthy, vibrant, and accessible to everyone. This future rests on trust that the City and its communities can plan together, act together, and be accountable together.

In this vision, watershed protection is not a technical exercise but a social contract. Planning is proactive, solutions are co-created, and the voices of historically marginalized populations are central to every decision. Waterways and green spaces are not divided by zip code or history but united as shared public goods, spaces of connection, learning, and care.

The future imagined by the community is one where community knowledge guides environmental governance, where every flood mitigation project also strengthens social resilience, and where the City's investment in natural systems is inseparable from its investment in people.

DEPARTMENT VISION

We aspire to an equitable, resilient Austin for current and future generations, where our natural and built environments work in harmony to ensure our community feels safe when it rains and our waterways are healthy.

At Austin Watershed Protection, we imagine a future where every resident is safe from flooding, where creeks flow freely and cleanly through our communities, and where green spaces offer shade and connection. In this future, the health of our waterways reflects the health of our city, because when we take care of our natural systems, we take care of each other.

We are committed to reducing the impacts of flooding, mitigating erosion, and improving water quality across Austin. From the creeks and lakes to the storm drains and culverts beneath our streets, our work protects people, infrastructure, and ecosystems. We know that as climate change brings more intense storms and rising temperatures, this work is more important than ever.

We also know we can't do it alone. Our vision depends on strong partnerships with residents, non-profit organizations, developers, emergency responders, and city staff. Together, we share responsibility for shaping a city that is ready for the future.

Together, we are not just preparing for the next storm. We are building a legacy of equity and resilience, rooted in science, grounded in community, and shaped by a shared belief that everyone deserves to live in a city that is safe, healthy, and thriving—for generations to come.



Campers snorkeling in Barton Creek

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES



Connecting with our community ambassadors

The community priorities were developed through several years of listening, surveying, and working directly with Austin residents, especially those historically left out of city planning. Input was gathered through a multi-year community engagement process. Across these efforts, residents consistently raised concerns about flooding, water quality, equity, access to natural spaces, and the need for clearer communication and proactive action from the City. These findings were synthesized into draft themes and priorities. The Community Activation Group (CAG) then refined and validated these priorities to ensure they reflected community needs and values.

While these priorities highlight areas where the community sees the greatest opportunities for improvement, they do not encompass the full scope of our work. Our core services and functions remain the foundation of what we do, and we will continue delivering them reliably. The recommendations identified here are intended to build on that foundation, addressing gaps and strengthening the programs that matter most to residents.

Some of the community recommendations outlined in this section may go beyond what our department can directly lead. To address these priorities, we will need to rely on strong partnerships and connections with other city departments, community organizations, and residents. Through collaboration on initiatives such as parks, trails, and housing, we can expand our impact and work together to make meaningful progress.

The community priorities and our department values share a common focus on equity, resilience, sustainability, and collaboration. Acting as stewards, we draw on the wisdom of the community to guide decisions, prepare for challenges, and shape solutions. By grounding our work in these values, we aim to deliver results that are measurable and enduring.

Community Priorities:

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION
2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY
4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION
5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT
6. TRUST & COLLABORATION
7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH
8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS
9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP



Students showing their #creeklove at Barton Springs University

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION

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



Why This Matters:

Equity and Inclusion matter in Austin because historical policies and development patterns have left many communities of color and low-income neighborhoods disproportionately vulnerable to flooding, pollution, and limited access to natural waterways.

Community Recommendations:

- Partner with grassroots organizations and meet communities where they are through on-site outreach, signage, and co-hosted events.
- Ensure equitable access to information and resources, especially for historically underserved populations.
- Be transparent about funding, resource allocation, and decision-making, acknowledging past environmental injustices.
- Center co-creation and collaboration to address environmental, social, and public health equity.

Community Voice:

"It's time to focus on the areas that are marginalized. We know how awesome the parks and waterways are on the westside of Austin. It's time for the City and Watershed Protection Department to talk to the community members that live in impacted areas and see what they think solutions are. Get the community members involved and bolster their ideas, opinions, and communities. You can't just go in and start doing things — it's important to get to know the space, the community, how they utilize waterways and why they utilize them the way they do."

- Ambassador Interviewee

"We need to heal this segregated town, and work towards equity and fixing the impact of the obvious environmental racism, period."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Protect lives and property by addressing flooding and erosion proactively.



Why This Matters:

Flood Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness are critical in Austin because heavy rains and historic development patterns place lives, property, and neighborhoods, especially those in flood-prone areas at risk.

Community Recommendations:

- Partner with neighborhood associations and local coalitions to co-develop clear, proactive flood plans.
- Provide transparent, multilingual communication on flood risks, debris clearing schedules, and resident/city responsibilities.
- Ensure opt-in alerts and signage are accessible in trusted community locations, reaching all residents including renters and vulnerable populations.
- Require mandatory flood disclosures in leases and property tours, with accountability measures for noncompliance.

Community Voice:

"Development in Austin is worsening the erosion in my neighborhood and my house often floods because of this."

- Red Salmon Arts Survey Respondent

"I've been in my neighborhood for 5 years now and Onion Creek floods once or twice a year without fail. However, our community works together and makes sure everyone is aware to stay away from the areas that aren't safe."

- Ambassador Interviewee

3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY

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



Why This Matters:

Climate Resilience and Sustainability are essential for Austin as the city faces increasing drought, extreme heat, and pressures on natural habitats that affect both people and ecosystems.

Community Recommendations:

- Make green infrastructure and climate resilience practices accessible to underserved neighborhoods through subsidies, education, and equitable outreach.
- Highlight environmental, health, and financial benefits, including heat reduction, mental health improvements, and water conservation.
- Increase shade and tree canopy in high-use and heat-vulnerable areas, prioritizing parks, trails, and transit corridors.
- Provide multilingual, culturally relevant education that connects knowledge to action through signage, incentives, and ongoing community engagement.

Community Voice:

"I am so concerned about Austin's future (and Texas's future) with the climate crisis that I am considering moving with that being the sole reason. I love it here, but with drought and extreme heat I can't see my newborn son and 2 year old growing old here."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

"I feel that we're starting to reach a much bigger problem where our creeks are staying bone dry for years or they're flooding."

- Ambassador Interviewee

4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION

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



Why This Matters:

Natural Resource Protection and Restoration are vital for maintaining the health and beauty of Austin's creeks, lakes, and green spaces, which provide critical habitat, recreational opportunities, and community well-being.

Community Recommendations:

- Ensure consistent trash removal, maintenance, and transparent scheduling, with a focus on flood-prone and underserved areas.
- Prioritize ecological restoration, clean waterways, and accessible, safe, and welcoming green spaces over hard infrastructure when feasible.
- Protect greenspaces, wildlife corridors, and ecologically sensitive areas, balancing development with environmental preservation.
- Involve communities in land use decisions, giving equal weight to ecological, cultural, and public access considerations.

Community Voice:

"In all honesty, I feel like [natural spaces are] essential for whole health. Essential for mental, emotional, physical health to interact with nature. Whether it's in your yard, or you actually travel to a waterway or a hike."

- Whole Communities Whole Health Focus Group Participant

"Trash is a major issue now. Pollution flows downstream every single rain. Some of the neighbors try to clean the creek but it is more than we can keep up with."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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



Why This Matters:

Accessibility and Public Engagement are essential to ensuring that all Austinites can safely enjoy and benefit from the city's creeks, lakes, and green spaces.

Community Recommendations:

- Design safe, shaded, and ADA-accessible trails that connect homes to parks, creeks, and public spaces.
- Prioritize trail placement and green networks in underserved and low-income areas for equitable access.
- Incorporate community input in design, maintenance, and safety definitions, addressing diverse user needs.
- Host regular, visible, and culturally relevant educational events co-led by community leaders, providing information in multiple languages and formats, and fostering ongoing community learning and relationships.

Community Voice:

"I love being outside, but I don't feel safe being alone outside."

- Ambassador Interviewee

"Some of the things that do make you feel welcome is when you see that there are other people around, you know, people just using the space, people enjoying the space. It makes you want to be there, makes you feel more like a community."

- Black Women Who Focus Group Participant

6. TRUST & COLLABORATION

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



Why This Matters:

Trust and Collaboration are critical for fostering strong relationships between Austin City Departments and the communities they serve.

Community Recommendations:

- Center lived experience as expertise by grounding plans in neighborhood histories, strengths, and past harms, and by allowing communities to define their own goals.
- Build sustained, respectful relationships through ongoing engagement supported by deep listening and trust.
- Ensure transparency and shared power by explaining how decisions are made, how input shapes outcomes, and by investing authority and resources in community partners.
- Provide clear, consistent communication with plain-language, real-time updates about what is happening, when, why, and how plans may change.

Community Voice:

"We are tight-knit communities that are resilient and have sustained ourselves so the City keeps ignoring it."

- Ambassador Interviewee

"[S]how the community the city is open to servicing them first...There needs to be a way to instill confidence in the community. The reason those in the community are hesitant to respond is due to the fact they feel they are second-class citizens and why ask for input through surveys and other community events, when for years, they never see any changes for the best...The most important thing is ways to build community trust. It does not exist."

- African American Youth Harvest Foundation Survey Respondent

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH

Balance urban growth with environmental health and sustainability.



Why This Matters:

Sustainable Development and Growth are essential for ensuring that Austin's rapid urban expansion does not compromise the health of our creeks, lakes, and natural systems.

Community Recommendations:

- Hold developers accountable for meeting drainage, water quality, and impervious cover requirements.
- Conduct regional impact assessments to identify and prevent cumulative environmental harm.
- Require new development to include effective green infrastructure and nature-based solutions.
- Prioritize flood mitigation and water quality protection in all development approvals and reviews.

Community Voice:

"Development is encroaching more and more into the green."

- Ambassador Interviewee

"Keep the focus on what is the best sustainable plan we have right now no matter the cost. If we cut corners now, we will all pay in the future. Let's be a model for other cities around the country and world. I believe Austin has the brains and desire."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

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



Why This Matters:

Supporting Unhoused and Vulnerable Populations is critical in Austin, where rising housing costs and historic inequities have left some residents without stable homes in areas prone to flooding and environmental hazards.

Community Recommendations:

- Provide basic health and safety services in encampments, including trash collection, portable restrooms, and clear flood-risk guidance.
- Coordinate closely with housing agencies to create stable, long-term housing options for unhoused individuals.
- Avoid harmful practices such as sweeps during severe weather or unsafe conditions.
- Ensure shelters and support services are accessible, humane, and responsive to community needs.

Community Voice:

"We didn't pick this place. It was the only place we have left to go. The one little spot that's left."

- Queertopia Interviewee

Department Reflection on what we heard from the community: Many community members shared concerns about safety, trash, and environmental impacts associated with encampments along creeks and in natural areas. At the same time, people experiencing homelessness told us they are often forced to camp near waterways because they lack safe alternatives, which places them at heightened risk of flooding and limits access to basic services. We heard a strong desire for solutions that protect public health and environmental quality while also supporting our most vulnerable neighbors. Addressing these challenges in a humane and coordinated way is essential to strengthening the safety, resilience, and well-being of the entire Austin community.

9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Foster a culture of environmental stewardship and resilience among residents.



Why This Matters:

Education and Youth Engagement are vital in Austin to cultivate a community that values and protects its waterways, green spaces, and natural resources.

Community Recommendations:

- Create green job programs and youth internships focused on park maintenance and environmental education.
- Partner with schools and community organizations to promote conservation awareness and sustainable living.
- Organize community cleanup events and citizen science initiatives to support environmental restoration.
- Engage residents actively in hands-on projects that build environmental knowledge and stewardship.

Community Voice:

"Offer good paying jobs to people directly in the community that will be invested in making their areas better interactive and outdoors."

- Indigenous Cultures Institute Survey Respondent

"I don't know that the creek by me is polluted or not. How do I know that? What am I looking for? Honestly I think that I've seen flooding and just didn't realize that it was flooded. I think this is how it's always supposed to look. Should I have reported that to somebody? I have no idea."

- MEASURE Focus Group Participant

10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP

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



Why This Matters:

Innovation and Leadership are essential for Austin to remain a national leader in environmental stewardship and resilience planning.

Community Recommendations:

- Invest in innovative solutions for flood prevention, water quality, and climate resilience.
- Develop citywide policies that prioritize sustainability, including cleaner, low-emission equipment.
- Pilot and expand nature-based solutions to improve urban livability and ecological health.
- Integrate long-term climate adaptation strategies across city planning and operations.

Community Voice:

"Let's do it -- let's protect Austin, its citizens, and the environment. Better mass transit, better bikeways, better ways to get around town, plus protecting the watershed and improving the absorption of floodwater are all key."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

"As Austin continues to grow at a rapid pace, we need to be extra mindful and mission-driven to create sustainable spaces and infrastructure now before it's too late and the population is overrun. Austin has the opportunity to learn from other similar growth stories and ultimately lead the way."

- Community Vision Survey Participant

04 ENACT

Implementing the Vision

The Enact section describes how Austin Watershed Protection will turn the community's vision and priorities into accountable, long-term action. It sets out our commitment to center community, innovate together, and govern responsibly as the foundation for how we plan, invest, and deliver our work. This section looks ten years ahead, recognizing that reducing risk, restoring watersheds, and repairing historic inequities requires sustained effort and adaptation. Over this decade, we will make measurable progress toward our larger vision—laying the groundwork for a future where Austin's watersheds are healthy, resilient, and equitable for generations to come.

Cypress trees shade and anchor the creek bank

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OUR COMMITMENTS AND STRATEGIES

For 30 years, we have served Austin as the stewards of our watersheds. We've celebrated successes, learned from challenges, and remained dedicated to our mission of reducing flood and erosion risk, protecting water quality, and maintaining critical infrastructure. This is the foundation of our department and the work we show up to do every day.

This section focuses on how we will approach that work going forward. It includes 24 strategies that help guide our future direction. While the Understand section outlines the full scope of our department's functions, this section shows how we will strengthen and adapt our work so it reflects community priorities and builds long-term resilience.

The strategies are organized into three core commitments: Center Community, Innovate Together, and Govern Responsibly. Together, these commitments and strategies shape how we make decisions, collaborate, and innovate to better serve Austin.

This plan looks ten years ahead because meaningful progress for our community and watersheds requires time, consistency, and adaptability. A longer horizon allows us to plan responsibly, invest strategically, and avoid short term decisions that compromise our overall vision.



Water cascades over limestone ledges at McKinney Falls

We've already made meaningful progress on many of these strategies, and this plan provides the structure to sustain and accelerate that momentum. Achieving these outcomes will take many smaller steps where we are testing approaches, building capacity, refining systems, and adapting as we learn, with each step contributing to steady, measurable progress throughout the life of the plan.

That more detailed roadmap will live in our internal implementation plan, which translates strategy into actionable work plans, timelines, and responsibilities. We will also publish technical reports to share the details of our methodologies and frameworks as they are created. While the implementation plan and technical reports will evolve as conditions change, the Rain to River Plan provides steady direction to keep our decisions and work aligned with the vision and priorities of the community.

Center Community

Centering community means more than providing services. It means building trust through accountability, openness, and respect, creating space for voices that have often been overlooked, and ensuring that residents help shape the decisions that affect their lives and neighborhoods. By walking alongside residents as partners, we strengthen our outcomes, deepen relationships, and reflect the priorities, knowledge, hopes, and wisdom of the communities we serve, reinforcing that watershed protection is a collective effort grounded in shared purpose.

Innovate Together

Innovation is how we turn vision into action. At Austin Watershed Protection, we see innovation not just as new technology, but as a way of thinking that helps us plan smarter, act sooner, and work better with the community. We are using creativity, science, and collaboration to solve problems before they begin. By combining technical excellence with community insight, we are building a department that leads with integrity, learns from experience, and continuously adapts to meet Austin's changing needs.

Govern Responsibly

Governing responsibly means making decisions that are transparent, fair, and consistent with community values. It ensures that our internal systems and investments serve Austin's residents with accountability, integrity, and long-term vision. For Austin Watershed Protection, this means aligning how we plan, budget, and measure success with the values of equity, accountability, and wisdom. Together, these strategies create a foundation of trust between Austin Watershed Protection and the community, ensuring that every choice we make reflects our shared commitment to a resilient and just Austin.



Wildflowers blooming on the Water Quality Protection Lands



Earth Camp students reflecting on the water

Center Community

Partner with Communities in Decision-Making

1.1. Create a Dedicated Community Liaison Role

1.2. Create and Sustain a Community Advisory Group for Implementation

Embed Equity in our Operations & Practices

1.3. Cultivate a Strong, Inclusive Workforce

1.4. Create a Shared Framework for Equity

Safeguard & Empower Vulnerable Communities

1.5. Collaborate with Partners to Protect Vulnerable Populations

1.6. Enhance Community Education and Preparedness

Strengthen & Sustain Emergency Management

1.7. Enhance Readiness for Emergencies

1.8. Improve Response and Recovery After Major Storms

Innovate Together

Define & Measure Watershed Health

2.1. Create a Holistic Watershed Health and Safety Framework

2.2. Create Clear and Meaningful Watershed Targets

Modernize Data for Transparency & Action

2.3. Enhance Data and Modeling Capabilities

2.4. Deliver Clear, Actionable Data to the Public

Invest in Proactive & Equitable Infrastructure

2.5. Implement a Proactive Approach to Infrastructure

2.6. Promote Opportunities for Shared Stewardship

Achieve Greater Impact Through Partnerships

2.7. Collaborate with Partners on Shared Priorities

2.8. Collaborate to Promote Responsible Development

Govern Responsibly

Establish Level of Service Expectations

3.1. Define Clear and Achievable Levels of Service

3.2. Center Asset Management in Decision-Making

Integrate Equity into Strategy & Investment

3.3. Implement an Equitable Decision-Making Approach

3.4. Understand and Address Past Environmental Harms

Manage Our Portfolio & Performance

3.5. Create a Portfolio Management Structure

3.6. Report Our Performance and Progress

Sustain Workforce Capacity & Wisdom

3.7. Cultivate a Balanced and Proactive Work Culture

3.8. Maintain and Share Knowledge

1.1. Create a Dedicated Community Liaison Role

What We Will Do:

We're creating a community liaison role to strengthen the connection between Austin Watershed Protection and the people we serve. This position will be empowered within the department to ensure community voices are centered in our planning and decision-making. The community liaison will also lead and facilitate the community advisory group.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures community feedback informs long-term planning, policies, and projects.
- Builds continuity and accountability by clearly showing how input shapes outcomes.
- Helps surface concerns and opportunities for equitable solutions across neighborhoods.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Strengthens collaboration across teams to ensure community input is shared and coordinated.
- Positions engagement within planning and budgeting processes for better-informed decisions.
- Provides systems for tracking feedback, routing concerns, and closing communication loops.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will fully include the community in planning and decision-making. The community liaison and a network of engagement staff will work alongside community leaders to co-design policies, programs, and plans that reflect community priorities and build trust.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1.2. Create and Sustain a Community Advisory Group for Implementation

What We Will Do:

We're creating a community advisory group made up of trusted community leaders and representatives from local organizations. This group will help guide the implementation of the commitments and strategies in this plan by tracking progress, highlighting emerging needs, and providing feedback on key deliverables. The group will ensure community perspectives and lived experience continue to shape priorities and decision-making over time. The community advisory group will work closely with the community liaison to maintain a two-way exchange, sharing insights with the department and bringing timely, accurate information back to their neighborhoods and networks. We will allocate resources to support their participation and recognize the value of their time and expertise.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Creates a consistent space for dialogue, reflection, and course correction instead of one-time consultation.
- Ensures voices from communities most affected by watershed risks are included and valued.
- Builds trust through clear expectations, transparency, and compensation for time and expertise.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides an ongoing feedback loop to strengthen planning and implementation.
- Helps identify gaps and adapt strategies to meet community needs.
- Supports communication and outreach by equipping community leaders to share information broadly.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will create and sustain a community advisory group that serves as a trusted partner in ongoing dialogue. This group will help the department stay grounded in community experience, adapt to emerging needs, and deliver work that reflects both professional expertise and lived reality.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

1.3. Cultivate a Strong, Inclusive Workforce

What We Will Do:

We're strengthening our workforce through training, mentorship, and shared learning. This includes equipping staff with tools for respectful, culturally competent service and creating clear pathways for growth and collaboration. By investing in our workforce, we build trust, consistency, and accountability with the community and the department.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures staff respond with care and cultural awareness.
- Builds trust through equity-focused practices in everyday interactions.
- Reflects the diversity and lived experience of Austin's neighborhoods.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides training and support for community-facing work.
- Strengthens collaboration and shared understanding of equity principles.
- Creates opportunities for growth and professional development.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will maintain a well-supported, equity-driven workforce with the skills and structures needed to deliver responsive and effective service. Staff will be prepared to engage communities thoughtfully and make equity a consistent part of everyday actions and decisions.

Community Priority Tracker



1.4. Create a Shared Framework for Equity

What We Will Do:

We're creating a department-wide equity framework that provides clear definitions, expectations, and criteria for decision-making. This framework will be developed with community partners and City experts, making equity visible, actionable, and embedded in our daily work instead of treated as a separate initiative.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures equity commitments are clear, consistent, and transparent.
- Builds trust by showing how decisions address historic and current disparities.
- Creates accountability through published standards and ongoing dialogue.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides shared guidance for applying equity across all teams and processes.
- Reduces gaps and contradictions in planning and project decisions.
- Supports accountability and clarity in how equity goals are implemented.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will operate with a fully integrated equity framework that guides policies, plans, investments, and projects across the department. Equity will be a shared standard—consistently applied and publicly accountable—to reduce harm, address disparities, and strengthen outcomes for all communities, including our workforce.

Community Priority Tracker



1.5. Collaborate with Partners to Protect Vulnerable Populations

What We Will Do:

We're building strong partnerships with City agencies and community organizations to reduce risks for vulnerable populations. This includes clear protocols for coordination during high-risk situations and preparing staff with trauma-informed approaches and shared standards. Our role will be focused on safety and environmental health while connecting residents to appropriate services.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures actions during emergencies are predictable, compassionate, and focused on safety.
- Reduces harm for residents most exposed to flooding and environmental hazards.
- Builds trust through clear communication about roles and responsibilities.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides guidance and training for working with vulnerable populations and responding compassionately and safely in sensitive or high risk situations.
- Clarifies our role and strengthens coordination with other agencies.
- Supports staff with protocols and resources for complex situations.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will operate within a coordinated system of partnerships that protects the health, safety, and dignity of residents facing heightened watershed and environmental risk. Roles and responsibilities across city agencies will be clear, and staff will have guidance and training for complex, community-facing work.

Community Priority Tracker



1.6. Enhance Community Education and Preparedness

What We Will Do:

We're building a citywide approach to flood preparedness through community events, practical education, and partnerships with local organizations. Our efforts will prioritize neighborhood-specific information, renter-focused outreach, and culturally relevant materials, while empowering local leaders and volunteers to extend preparedness into everyday community life.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Helps residents understand their risk and how to prepare before, during, and after storms.
- Builds neighborhood capacity for preparedness and mutual aid.
- Ensures outreach is accessible and relevant for renters, unhoused residents, and other vulnerable communities.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Advances our mission by ensuring the community is informed and prepared.
- Strengthens collaboration with community partners and trusted messengers.
- Creates feedback loops that inform future programs and strategic decisions.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will maintain a citywide, community-centered flood preparedness network supported by neighborhood-based education, accessible tools, and strong partnerships. Every community will have the knowledge, connections, and resources needed to understand and respond to flood risk and strengthen resilience.

Community Priority Tracker



1.7. Enhance Readiness for Emergencies

What We Will Do:

We're enhancing readiness by clarifying roles and responsibilities, improving technical and operational training, strengthening communication protocols, documenting expectations, and standardizing the practices that guide how staff prepare for flood response and other emergencies. This includes proactively inspecting, improving, and maintaining our critical infrastructure and equipment as well as applying lessons learned from previous events to shape updates and drive continuous improvement. We will expand readiness across the department so all staff understand their role in emergency operations, have opportunities to practice and participate in exercises, and can support the City's broader response when needed. We will also deepen how we integrate community into emergency planning to ensure our preparedness work reflects local experience, priorities, and expertise.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures planning reflects the perspectives and priorities of residents most impacted by storms and is grounded in local knowledge and networks.
- Builds stronger relationships and shared understanding between us and the communities we serve before emergencies occur.
- Strengthens response to future emergencies through continuous improvement based on lessons learned and recommendations from past events.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides clear, consistent guidance on roles and responsibilities, defining boundaries and purpose within the broader emergency response system.
- Ensures equipment, infrastructure, and procedures are maintained and ready for activation.
- Builds the skills and readiness needed to step into emergency roles safely and effectively while distributing workload to sustain operational capacity.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will ensure readiness is embedded in our department culture and structure for major floods and other large-scale emergencies through clear roles, trained staff, and consistent practices that integrate community experience and expertise. As climate change drives more frequent extreme weather through the region already known as Flash Flood Alley, we will ensure our systems are informed by what we learn from the communities we serve, helping staff move smoothly and effectively when emergencies occur.

Community Priority Tracker



1.8. Improve Response and Recovery After Major Storms

What We Will Do:

We're improving response and recovery by collaborating with departments and agencies that support emergency management, expanding trauma-informed training for staff, and securing the resources and funding needed for effective operations and long-term recovery. We will work closely with community leaders and organizations to ensure that response and recovery efforts build on local knowledge, leverage trusted networks, and mobilize the community assets that are already in place to respond quickly after major storms. We will also support staff through the demanding work of response and recovery so they can sustain this work effectively.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures swift, coordinated action during storms through strong partnerships across the City and with community organizations.
- Provides trauma-informed support that recognizes the stress and disruption major disasters create.
- Strengthens recovery by working alongside trusted local networks that help residents navigate the aftermath of storms.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Offers clear structures and plans that guide decision making during fast-moving emergencies.
- Provides training, support, and resources that help staff manage the high-pressure demands of response and recovery work and reduce burnout.
- Ensures teams have the equipment, funding, and operational capabilities needed to contribute effectively within the City's larger emergency response system.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will contribute to a rapid, equitable, and coordinated response during major floods and other large-scale emergencies while supporting long-term community recovery. Working alongside community partners, staff will have the resources, coordination structures, and trauma-informed practices needed during and after storms to scale quickly into emergency operations, restore our systems and infrastructure, and help residents regain stability in the weeks and months that follow.

Community Priority Tracker



2.1. Create a Holistic Watershed Health and Safety Framework

What We Will Do:

We're building a watershed health and safety framework that brings together data from across our work into one clear picture of watershed conditions and priorities. This shared view will support smarter, more balanced decisions, combining technical performance with equity and community input to guide long-term planning and integrated solutions. This framework moves beyond a siloed and technical approach by creating a shared understanding of watershed health that includes the health and safety of our waterways and our community as well as the condition and function of our infrastructure.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Provides clear, accessible information about watershed conditions and City actions.
- Builds trust through transparent indicators and public accountability.
- Supports stewardship that reflects each watershed's unique history and needs.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Creates a consistent standard for prioritizing work and investments.
- Integrates technical and community data for better decisions.
- Strengthens long-term planning across watersheds.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will use a comprehensive watershed health and safety framework to inform and guide decisions. This framework will ensure every watershed is assessed and understood through transparent data and indicators that reflect ecological conditions, flooding and erosion risk, infrastructure performance, and community context.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.2. Create Clear and Meaningful Watershed Targets

What We Will Do:

We're defining what healthy means for Austin's watersheds through measurable, actionable targets that combine technical indicators with community values. These targets will be evaluated and measured using the integrated data in the watershed health and safety framework. They will help inform decisions, prioritize resources, and support transparent reporting, creating a shared definition of success across the department and with the public.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Makes watershed health understandable and trackable through clear benchmarks.
- Builds trust by pairing technical rigor with community-informed measures.
- Ensures progress toward our vision is transparent and equitable.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a shared direction and reference point for planning and investment.
- Strengthens outcome-based decision-making across programs and projects.
- Establishes specific goals so teams know what success looks like and can track progress.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will use a clearly defined, scientifically grounded, and community-informed set of watershed health targets to guide planning, investment, and stewardship. Every watershed will have targets that account for unique conditions, historical context, and future risks.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

2.3. Enhance Data and Modeling Capabilities

What We Will Do:

We're modernizing our data and modeling systems to move from reactive analysis to proactive planning. This includes improving our modeling capabilities and integrating siloed datasets so data can better inform and guide our decisions. Public-facing tools will provide clear, contextual information to build trust and understanding.

Why This Matters to Community:

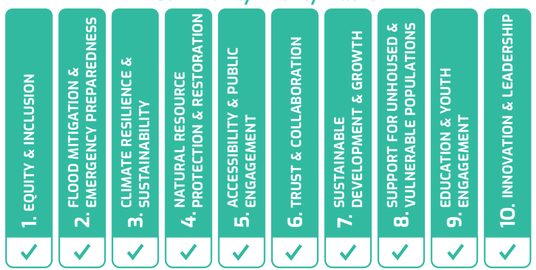
- Improves transparency through accessible maps and data.
- Builds trust by sharing accurate information about risks and progress.
- Supports proactive planning that reduces harm and strengthens resilience.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Connects data and modeling tools for coordinated decision-making.
- Provides training and support for applying advanced tools in daily work.
- Strengthens continuity and institutional knowledge across teams.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will operate with a resilient data and modeling foundation that is integrated into the watershed health and safety framework. Advanced tools and connected systems will help anticipate change, strengthen coordination, and share information clearly and responsibly.

Community Priority Tracker



2.4. Deliver Clear, Actionable Data to the Public

What We Will Do:

We're creating a reliable public-facing platform that organizes information by watershed and shows projects, service requests, and progress toward key goals. This tool will emphasize clarity and relevance, making it easy for residents to understand risks, investments, and outcomes.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Makes watershed information visible, understandable, and connected to real conditions.
- Builds trust through transparency and opportunities for engagement.
- Helps residents see how resources are used and how progress is measured.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a clear channel for sharing progress and integrating community input.
- Strengthens accountability and responsiveness in planning and service delivery.
- Creates a consistent, accessible way to communicate priorities and outcomes.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will maintain a trusted, publicly accessible platform that clearly shows service activity, investments, and progress across our watersheds, while allowing community insight to inform priorities and strengthen accountability.

Community Priority Tracker



2.5. Implement a Proactive Approach to Infrastructure

What We Will Do:

We're shifting from reactive repairs to planned, preventative investments that anticipate risk and reduce preventable failures. This approach applies to both natural and built infrastructure, using modern engineering standards, predictive modeling, and equity-focused prioritization to direct resources where they are most needed—ensuring consistent levels of service across all watersheds.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Reduces preventable harm to people, property, and the environment.
- Directs improvements toward areas with the highest vulnerability and historic underinvestment.
- Builds trust through transparency about infrastructure condition and progress.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Reinforces the critical importance of proactively maintaining our drainage infrastructure and setting levels of service that are clear, achievable, and sustainable.
- Provides data-driven tools for prioritizing investments and anticipating risk.
- Aligns inspection, maintenance, engineering, and construction through a unified approach.



By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will implement a proactive, equitable approach to managing our infrastructure that integrates community priorities and technical standards. Investments will be guided by reliable data, clear levels of service, and an understanding of current and future risk.

Community Priority Tracker



2.6. Promote Opportunities for Shared Stewardship

What We Will Do:

We're expanding opportunities for communities to help shape and care for green infrastructure and natural spaces through efforts such as tree plantings along waterways, rain gardens, wildflower meadows, and creek adoption programs. Equity and watershed conditions will guide where and how we invest, ensuring communities with the greatest need have access to meaningful stewardship opportunities. These activities will support healthier ecosystems and build community connections. They also can support green workforce pathways by prioritizing local hiring, training and skill building, and paid participation where possible. Each project will be developed in partnership with residents and local organizations to ensure it is responsive to community needs, grounded in local expertise, and includes a clear, sustainable plan for long-term care.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Provides more opportunities for people to actively care for the places they value.
- Ensures stewardship resources are directed to communities with the greatest need.
- Builds trust and pride through projects that reflect local knowledge and cultural context.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Expands our impact to support more resilient, healthy waterways and green spaces.
- Strengthens our relationships with community partners and residents.
- Promotes green workforce pathways by creating opportunities for collaborative stewardship.



By 2036, Austin will expand equitable opportunities for shared stewardship of green infrastructure and natural spaces that strengthens watershed health, builds community connection, and delivers benefits where they are needed most.

Community Priority Tracker



2.7. Collaborate with Partners on Shared Priorities

What We Will Do:

We're formalizing and strengthening partnerships with City departments as well as other governmental agencies and community organizations to address complex challenges like extreme heat, water conservation, and emergency preparedness. Through structured collaboration, we will align strategies, share resources, and test solutions that improve resilience while maintaining clarity about roles and responsibilities.

Why This Matters to Community:

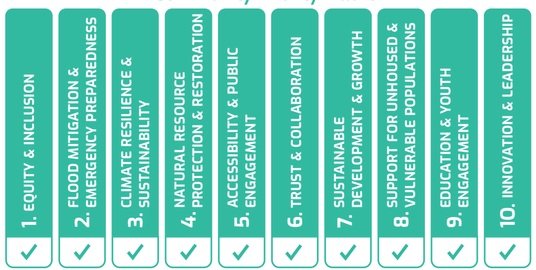
- Strengthens decision making by connecting diverse expertise, data, and perspectives.
- Improves quality of life outcomes and accelerates progress by working together on shared priorities.
- Builds trust through transparent collaboration and measurable public benefits.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Unlocks broader networks of expertise, funding, and operational support for innovative, integrated solutions.
- Clarifies roles and expectations for collaborative projects and initiatives.
- Creates opportunities for shared learning, coordinated community engagement, and more efficient service delivery.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will work with a sustained network of City departments, other governmental agencies, and community organizations to advance watershed and climate resilience. These partnerships will be clearly scoped, grounded in shared priorities, and focused on measurable public benefit.

Community Priority Tracker



2.8. Collaborate to Promote Responsible Development

What We Will Do:

We're committed to making our environmental and drainage standards clear, consistent, and enforceable. By improving how we work together and share expectations, we will reduce uncertainty while holding projects accountable for meeting watershed protection goals. This work prioritizes transparency and responsibility so that development supports the health, safety, and resilience of our community.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Promotes responsible growth by upholding strong, enforceable standards.
- Builds trust through transparency and consistent enforcement of regulations.
- Protects watersheds by holding development accountable for watershed impacts.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a clear framework for communicating expectations and compliance.
- Reinforces accountability and consistency in applying environmental and drainage standards.
- Supports predictable review processes that uphold the mission of watershed protection.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will strengthen collaboration and transparency with the development community and residents by clearly communicating expectations, consistently applying watershed standards, and sharing information about trends and potential impacts to watershed health.

Community Priority Tracker



3.1. Define Clear and Achievable Levels of Service

What We Will Do:

We're creating a level of service framework that sets clear, achievable standards for how work is prioritized and delivered. This framework will help staff navigate competing demands with confidence, protect capacity, and ensure consistent service—even during emergencies—while giving residents and partners a transparent view of how decisions are made.

Why This Matters to Community:

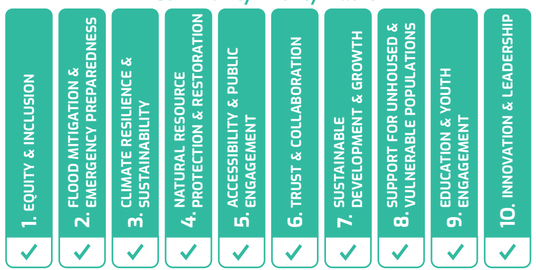
- Builds trust and accountability through clear communication of service expectations.
- Sets realistic expectations about what we can deliver and why.
- Provides transparency about how decisions are made when trade-offs occur.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Creates clarity for decision-making, reducing confusion and stress.
- Protects staff capacity by guiding prioritization during urgent or competing demands.
- Strengthens collaboration by clarifying roles and responsibilities across departments.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will operate with a clear, shared, and publicly understood level of service framework that defines what residents can expect and what staff can realistically deliver. This framework will guide daily decisions, long-term planning, and emergency response while strengthening transparency and accountability.

Community Priority Tracker



3.2. Center Asset Management in Decision-Making

What We Will Do:

We're making asset management a central part of decision-making to prioritize preventive maintenance alongside urgent needs. By linking asset conditions, risk thresholds, and community input into one system, we can act earlier, allocate resources strategically, and reduce uncertainty. By setting clear expectations, we can help staff plan ahead and take care of problems before they become emergencies.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Builds trust and transparency by explaining how and why maintenance decisions are made.
- Reduces risk of flooding, erosion, and infrastructure failure through proactive maintenance.
- Provides clear expectations by showing planned work and service levels.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Creates a unified approach for balancing preventive work with urgent needs.
- Improves consistency across teams with shared standards and risk thresholds.
- Reduces uncertainty by clarifying priorities and protecting staff capacity.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will manage stormwater infrastructure through an integrated asset management approach that drives proactive decisions, sets clear service standards, and ensures equitable outcomes. This approach will help staff and residents understand how maintenance choices reduce risk, protect watershed health, and strengthen long-term resilience.

Community Priority Tracker



3.3. Implement an Equitable Decision-Making Approach

What We Will Do:

We're creating a unified, transparent process for prioritizing work across the department. This approach balances technical risk, funding availability, and feasibility with equity, community experience, and human impact. It ensures decisions are explainable, consistent, and publicly understandable. Decisions will be supported by the tools outlined across this plan, including the watershed health and safety framework, the shared equity approach, defining levels of service, proactive asset management, and addressing past environmental harm. The results and methodology will be shared to make our tradeoffs visible and defensible.

Why This Matters to Community:

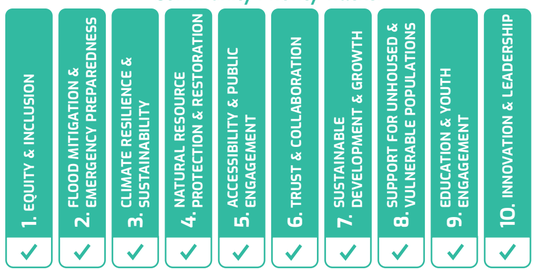
- Builds trust through transparency and clarity about how decisions are made.
- Ensures equity and community priorities are core decision inputs, not afterthoughts.
- Demonstrates accountability by showing how our decisions reflect the community vision and deliver meaningful progress.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a consistent framework for comparing diverse projects and programs.
- Improves coordination by aligning decision support tools into one portfolio view.
- Allows flexibility to test and refine our approach over time as data quality improves and community expectations evolve.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will consistently use a transparent, equity-centered decision-making approach to prioritize work across projects, programs, operations, and services. This approach will clearly show how technical need, community priorities, feasibility, funding realities, and long-term resilience shape our investment decisions.

Community Priority Tracker



3.4. Understand and Address Past Environmental Harms

What We Will Do:

We're adopting a transparent method for acknowledging and responding to historic environmental disparities within our existing authority and mission. This approach will define clear criteria based on watershed conditions, environmental risk, infrastructure performance, and community vulnerability, focusing on measurable improvements to environmental health and reduced risk. These priorities will integrate with the portfolio-level decision process so historic harm is a core input in how we prioritize work, evaluate tradeoffs, and measure outcomes.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Builds trust by making clear how decisions address historic harm and reduce risk.
- Ensures restorative actions deliver measurable improvements to watershed health and community resilience.
- Creates transparency and accountability through published criteria and progress reporting.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a consistent, lawful approach for integrating equity into prioritization and planning.
- Aligns decision-making with citywide equity policies and regulatory mandates.
- Strengthens internal coordination and public confidence through clear, explainable choices.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will use a clear, disciplined approach to identify and address historic environmental harm and reduce risk. This approach will embed equity as a durable practice shaping watershed protection, resilience, and long-term environmental stewardship—and will feed directly into the department's equitable decision-making approach.

Community Priority Tracker



3.5. Create a Portfolio Management Structure

What We Will Do:

We're creating a portfolio management structure that connects strategy, project and program coordination, and data-informed planning across the department. This structure will not replace or centralize division work—it will enable alignment so day-to-day decisions and long-term investments move in the same direction. By providing shared tools, common language, and integrated tracking, the structure will help staff understand priorities, manage tradeoffs, and sequence work realistically.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Builds trust through clear communication about priorities, investments, and progress.
- Ensures resources align with community priorities and long-term goals.
- Improves accountability by making tradeoffs and sequencing visible and explainable.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Provides a unified structure for aligning projects, programs, and operations.
- Reduces inefficiencies and burnout by surfacing constraints and dependencies early.
- Strengthens coordination and clarity without slowing down urgent work.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will operate with a fully integrated portfolio management structure that supports consistent, transparent decision-making across projects, programs, policies, and operations. This structure will help balance urgency with long-term stewardship, preserve agility while improving coordination, and ensure investments align with the community vision and priorities.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
					✓				✓

3.6. Report Our Performance and Progress

What We Will Do:

We're aligning and strengthening our performance management approach to show how our work delivers on the commitments and strategies in this plan. Rather than adding new layers of reporting, we'll focus on clarity and usefulness—connecting daily work to our long-term vision and making results visible to staff and the public. Reporting will highlight progress on implementation, challenges, and how community input and changing conditions shape decisions.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Builds trust through transparent reporting on progress and priorities.
- Provides clarity on how actions deliver meaningful outcomes for neighborhoods and the environment.
- Creates accountability by showing where progress is strong and where improvements are needed.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Aligns performance measures with strategies and vision.
- Supports learning and adaptation through regular evaluation and feedback.
- Integrates reporting to eliminate redundancies and provide a transparent view of performance.

By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will maintain a clear, transparent performance management system that demonstrates progress on our commitments and strategies, supports learning and improvement, and builds public trust through accessible reporting on outcomes and service expectations.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
				✓	✓			✓	✓

3.7. Cultivate a Balanced and Proactive Work Culture

What We Will Do:

We're shifting from a reactive culture to one that values prevention, planning, and proactive service. This means protecting staff time for planning, collaboration, and professional development, while ensuring urgent needs don't crowd out long-term work. Leadership will set clear priorities, provide training, and make explicit tradeoffs so proactive expectations are achievable and not an added burden. We will also center the needs of our operations staff to ensure they have the support and resources required to meet level of service expectations and reduce burnout.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Ensures staff have the capacity to deliver consistent, high-quality service.
- Builds trust by prioritizing safety and planning over reactive fixes.
- Supports equitable service delivery by reducing gaps caused by resource constraints.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Protects time for planning, collaboration, and professional growth.
- Reduces burnout through clear prioritization and realistic workload expectations.
- Strengthens capacity and tools for proactive work across teams.



By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will sustain a healthy, equitable, and proactive workforce culture where staff have the time, tools, and leadership support to plan ahead, work safely, and focus on solutions that prevent harm and deliver lasting benefits for the community and environment.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

3.8. Maintain and Share Knowledge

What We Will Do:

We're committed to capturing and sharing the expertise that makes us strong. By creating consistent documentation practices and a centralized digital knowledge base, we'll make it easier for staff to learn from past work, build on proven ideas, and adapt to new challenges. This approach ensures lessons learned today become the foundation for tomorrow's decisions, reducing fragmentation and improving continuity as staff, tools, and structures evolve.

Why This Matters to Community:

- Strengthens service delivery by ensuring decisions are informed by experience and evidence.
- Builds trust through transparency about how knowledge shapes actions and outcomes.
- Supports continuity so progress isn't lost when staff or leadership changes.

Why This Matters to Staff:

- Makes critical information accessible and usable for planning and implementation.
- Preserves institutional memory to support learning and innovation.
- Reduces duplication and uncertainty by providing clear documentation standards.



By 2036, Austin Watershed Protection will maintain a living knowledge system that preserves institutional memory, supports learning across generations of staff, and strengthens decision-making at every level.

Community Priority Tracker

1. EQUITY & INCLUSION	2. FLOOD MITIGATION & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS	3. CLIMATE RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY	4. NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION & RESTORATION	5. ACCESSIBILITY & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	6. TRUST & COLLABORATION	7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & GROWTH	8. SUPPORT FOR UNHOUSED & VULNERABLE POPULATIONS	9. EDUCATION & YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	10. INNOVATION & LEADERSHIP
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

05 APPENDIX



Community Activation Group learning about green stormwater infrastructure

PROJECT TEAM ACKNOWLEDGMENTS III
GLOSSARY VII

PROJECT TEAM ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We sincerely thank the individuals and organizations listed here for their time, expertise, and dedication throughout this process. Your thoughtful contributions have been instrumental in shaping meaningful outcomes, and we deeply appreciate the effort you invested to make this work possible.

We also want to recognize the many community members and staff who participated in surveys, attended events, and joined conversations. Your input has been essential every step of the way. We are proud to be stewards of this vision and look forward to working together to turn it into action.

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Partner Organizations

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allgo
American YouthWorks
Art Spark Texas
Asian American Employee Network

Partner Organizations

Asian American Resource Center
Asian Family Support Services of Austin
Asian Texans for Justice
Austin Animal Services
Austin Area Urban League
Austin Chinese-American Network
Austin Climate Action and Resilience
Austin Development Services
Austin Economic Development
Austin Energy
Austin Equity and Inclusion
Austin Homeless Strategies and Operations
Austin Independent School District
Austin Mutual Aid
Austin Neighborhoods Council
Austin Parks and Recreation
Austin Planning
Austin Pride
Austin Public Health
Austin Public Library
Austin Voices for Education and Youth
Austin Water
Austin Youth Climate Equity Council
Austin Youth Forest Council
Austin Youth River Watch
Black Austin Coalition
Black Women Who
Blazier Elementary
Bridging Barriers (University of Texas at Austin)
Burnet Middle School
Buzz Mill Shore Corps
Capital Area Master Naturalists

Partner Organizations

Center for Government & Civic Services at Austin Community College
Central Texas African American Family Support Conference
Central Texas Youth Alliance (formerly CTOYC)
Central Texas Juneteenth Committee
Colorado River Alliance
Community Powered ATX
Community Resilience Trust
Deaf Artisan Market Day
Del Valle Community Coalition
Dove Springs Proud
Earth Day Austin
East MLK Combined Neighborhood Plan Contact Team
EcoRise
El Buen Samaritano
Emerging Green Leaders
Equity Action Team
Festival Beach Food Forest
Forklift Danceworks
Foundation Communities
Friends of Grand Meadow Park
Go Austin/Vamos Austin (GAVA)
Great Springs Project
Green Workforce Collaborative
Hill Country Alliance
Huston-Tillotson University
Indigenous Cultures Institute
KAZI 88.7 FM Austin
La Raza Roundtable
Lower Colorado River Authority

Partner Organizations

PODER
Project CRESSLE (University of Texas at Austin)
Queertopia
Raasin in the Sun
Red Salmon Arts
Refugee Collective
Roots & Wings Festival
Save Barton Creek Association
Scouting America
Shoal Creek Conservancy
Sierra Club
South Austin Creek Alliance
St. John's Faith Community Garden
STEMSign
Stonewall Equity Employee Network (SEEN)
Texas Alliance for Retired Americans (TARA Austin)
Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
Montopolis Recreation and Community Center
The Mosaic Workshop
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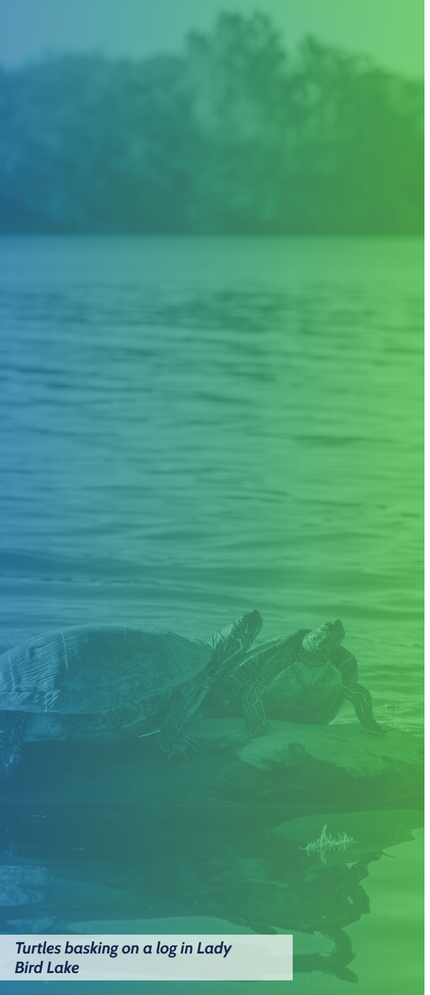
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In Memory

We honor the memories of Dawn Maria Howell and Rakhi Agrawal, whose thoughtful contributions enriched our process and helped shape this plan.

We also remember Nick Down and Dana Lappin, whose light and laughter shine on in everything we do.



Turtles basking on a log in Lady Bird Lake

GLOSSARY

AQUIFER

Porous rock layers that store rainwater underground like a sponge. The Edwards Aquifer in Austin is formed from limestone and is highly susceptible to pollution.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

Large-scale, long-term projects aimed at improving infrastructure, such as upgrading storm drains, restoring eroding creek banks, or building water quality ponds.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The long-term, human-caused warming of the earth driven by greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels. Locally, this can lead to increasing temperatures as well as more frequent droughts and flooding.

CREEK FLOODING

Overflow of water from major creeks and their tributaries onto nearby land, roads, or structures during heavy rain, creating hazardous conditions and property damage.

DRAINAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

Systems of natural and built features—such as creeks, channels, pipes, tunnels, and stormwater ponds—that manage stormwater to reduce flooding, erosion, and water pollution.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Movement to address systemic inequities that place low-income communities and communities of color at greater risk from pollution, climate impacts, and hazardous facilities.

EQUITY

The condition when race no longer predicts a person's quality of life outcomes in our community. In Austin's watersheds, this means repairing historic harms like lack of infrastructure and ensuring fair access to safe and healthy waterways.

EROSION

The process by which soil and rock are worn away by flowing water, which can destabilize creek banks and threaten homes, roads, and other infrastructure.

EROSION MITIGATION

Efforts to prevent or reduce creek bank erosion and protect property through stream restoration, bank stabilization, and regulations that limit future erosion risks.

FLOODPLAIN

The area adjacent to a creek or river that is subject to flooding. The 100-year floodplain is the area that is predicted to flood during a 100-year storm, which has a 1% chance of occurring in any given year. This area may change based on an improved understanding of risk factors or changing conditions.

FLOOD RISK REDUCTION

Efforts to protect people and property from flooding through drainage improvements, safety measures, and community preparedness.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Networks of natural and landscaped areas—such as parks, wildlands, forests, and waterways—that provide environmental benefits and improve quality of life.

GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Features designed to use vegetation and soils to mimic natural processes and manage rain where it falls, soaking water into the ground and filtering pollutants. Examples include rain gardens, porous pavement, and rainwater harvesting.

IMPERVIOUS COVER

Surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground, including asphalt, concrete, and buildings. Impervious cover increases stormwater runoff and contributes to flooding, erosion, and water pollution.

INFILTRATION

The process by which water soaks into the ground, replenishing groundwater and providing baseflow for our creeks.

LAKES / RESERVOIRS

In Austin, the waterbodies commonly referred to as lakes are actually man-made reservoirs. Lake Travis, Lake Austin, and Lady Bird Lake were created by dams on the Colorado River to provide flood control, drinking water, power generation, and recreation. Lake Walter E. Long was created by a dam on Decker Creek to cool the adjacent power plant and is primarily kept full with water pumped from the Colorado River.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Knowledge gained from being directly affected by an issue such as flooding, based on personal history and perspective. It provides firsthand understanding that can inform policies, programs, or projects.

LOCAL FLOODING

Flooding that occurs outside of floodplains when undersized storm drains and channels are overwhelmed by heavy rain, causing water to flow into nearby streets, yards, and buildings.

LOW-WATER CROSSING

A road or bridge designed to allow water to flow over the driving surface during rain events, making them dangerous or impassable during a flood.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Actions that protect, restore, or manage natural systems to address challenges like flooding, water quality, and climate impacts while providing benefits for people, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is the capacity of communities, local governments, and businesses to coordinate and prepare for, respond to, and recover from both sudden shocks—such as extreme heat or flooding—and ongoing stressors like aging infrastructure, public health inequities, or rising housing costs, to ensure Austinites can adapt and thrive.

STORMWATER RUNOFF

Rainfall that does not soak into the ground and instead flows over land surfaces into storm drains and creeks. It carries pollutants and contributes to downstream erosion and flooding.

WATER QUALITY PROTECTION

Efforts to keep Austin's creeks, rivers, lakes, and springs clean and healthy by reducing pollution, restoring natural areas, enforcing regulations, and monitoring conditions.

WATERSHED

An area of land where all rainfall and stormwater runoff drain to a common creek, lake, or river. Watersheds are defined by natural high points and ridgelines in the landscape that separate one drainage area from another.



The rugged beauty and wonder of McKinney Falls

Together, we can shape a city that is safer, more equitable, and more connected to the natural rhythms that define it. From the smallest raindrop to the vast flow of the Colorado River, Austin's story is one of water. Rain to River is our commitment to steward that story wisely for this generation and the ones to come.

Austin
Watershed Protection