



# City of Austin

## Recommendation for Action

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**File #:** 26-1632, **Agenda Item #:** 45.

5/21/2026

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### **Posting Language**

Approve adoption of the Rain to River Strategic Plan, which provides direction for the next decade to strengthen and guide the work of Austin Watershed Protection so it reflects community priorities and supports long-term resilience for our residents, waterways, and infrastructure. Funding: This item has no fiscal impact.

### **Lead Department**

Austin Watershed Protection.

### **Fiscal Note**

This item has no fiscal impact.

### **Prior Council Action:**

February 29, 2024 - Council authorized negotiation and execution of a contract with Jodon Maclem Corporation for the creation of a strategic plan to protect Austin's creeks and communities.

### **For More Information:**

Erin Wood, Environmental Conservation Program Manager, 512-974-2809.

### **Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:**

April 15, 2026 - Recommended by the Environmental Commission on a vote of 10-0.

### **Additional Backup Information:**

Rain to River is the strategic plan that will guide the work of Austin Watershed Protection (WPD) for the next decade. As the City's drainage utility, WPD remains dedicated to its mission of reducing flood and erosion risk, protecting water quality, and maintaining critical infrastructure. This plan builds on that foundation by setting a clear direction, strengthening and adapting staff's work over time so that it reflects community priorities and supports long-term resilience.

The plan is organized around the following elements that will shape WPD's work in the years ahead:

- Mission - Why we exist as a department and what drives our work.
- Goals - Desired outcomes we aim to achieve to advance our mission.
- Community Priorities - Needs and recommendations residents identify as most important.
- Community Vision - What residents want for the future of their waterways and neighborhoods.
- Department Vision - Our shared purpose and how we work to achieve the community vision.
- Department Values - How we do our work and show up for the community.
- Strategies - The actions that ground our approach and guide our future direction.

Austin faces many of the same challenges it faced in 2016, when the strategic plan was last updated, but these challenges have grown in scale, urgency, and complexity. The City has experienced severe floods, extreme heat, winter storms, and prolonged drought. Climate change and rapid population growth have increased pressure on the City's natural systems and aging infrastructure.

The previous plan helped us make meaningful progress. We built projects, responded to emergencies, strengthened regulations, repaired infrastructure, and preserved green space. However, the pace of change now requires us to do more and to do it differently. We also recognize that how we work is as important as what we deliver. A sustainable and equitable future depends on strong collaboration with other departments, agencies, nonprofits, and the community we serve.

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 critical 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.

For this process, we dedicated extra time and resources toward engaging priority stakeholders whose voices have been left out of past planning efforts. We partnered with local organizations, community ambassadors, and advocacy groups to reach residents across every watershed, with particular focus on historically excluded communities. 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.

Looking ahead, we want to ensure Rain to River can be responsive to community needs and operational realities. While vision and values serve as a strong foundation, our strategies will need to adapt and evolve over time. WPD will work with City staff across departments, 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.