



A Strategic Plan to Protect Austin's Creeks and Communities

Rain to River Project Update & Current Engagement Effort

Climate, Water, Environment, & Parks Committee

August 27, 2025

What is Rain to River?

A Strategic Plan to Protect Austin's Creeks and Communities

GUIDING BLUEPRINT FOR DEPARTMENT

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

DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK

Provides a framework for evaluating and prioritizing potential solutions

COMMUNICATION TOOL

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

Why are we updating the plan?

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

Watershed Protection MASTER PLAN

FY 2015 | 2016



Goals for Rain to River Update

REFLECT COMMUNITY VALUES

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

INCORPORATE EQUITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

- Advance racial equity in all department operations, resulting in equitable outcomes for all Austinites
- Incorporate climate adaptation to increase community's resilience to impacts of climate change
- Focus on groups most vulnerable to watershed impacts in terms of both exposure and ability to recover

ACCESSIBLE & INFORMATIVE

- Be accessible and informative to a broad audience, including staff, City leadership, policymakers, and the Austin community

Our Engagement Approach

RESPECTFUL TO PARTICIPANTS

- Make it easy and enjoyable to contribute input
- Be transparent about how feedback is being used; respect participants by only seeking feedback when it will inform a decision
- Utilize the most appropriate strategies and tools for specific groups or topics
- Use an iterative process; check in about what we've heard

ADAPTIVE PROCESS

- Define success metrics for engagement, track performance, and commit to continuing engagement until we have met the metrics for success
- Coordinate and collaborate with other organizations on engagement efforts when possible

FOCUSED ON RELATIONSHIPS

- Build relationships and trust with entities, leaders, and individuals in historically under-served groups and groups impacted by negative watershed outcomes
- Create systems to gather input from historically under-served communities that can be used beyond this engagement process





Reaching Priority Stakeholders

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

- **Under-served groups.** Residents who have been systematically marginalized from or denied a full opportunity to participate in past planning and decision-making processes and/or who are more likely to experience negative quality of life outcomes
- **Impacted groups.** Residents who have experienced or are at an increased risk of experiencing impacts of negative watershed outcomes (flooding, erosion, water pollution)
- **Organizations with relevant expertise.** Organizations that work on environmental, community health, or safety issues and who bring environmental and/or technical and policy expertise

And reach the full Austin community!

Project Timeline

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



Phase 1 of Community Engagement

Broad Engagement

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

Focused Engagement

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



Phase 1 of Community Engagement



The Rain to River Community Ambassador cohort



Del Valle Community Coalition and Watershed staff doing R2R outreach



Queertopia and Watershed staff assembling care packages for people experiencing homelessness



Community Ambassadors share findings with Watershed leaders



Juneteenth event at Rosewood Park



Focus Group with Foundation Communities residents

Learn About What We Heard in Phase 1

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

www.RainToRiverATX.com

Amplifying Diverse Voices
RAIN TO RIVER COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM REPORT

Rain to River
De la Lluvia al Río

Listening in Collaboration
Partnering with Community Organizations to Amplify Diverse Voices

MEASURE
Community Led Data Driven

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY INEQUITIES IN AUSTIN'S WATERSHEDS
City of Austin Watershed Protection Department | November 2022

1930s-1940s
A THRIVING EAST AUSTIN
Despite the economic and cultural impacts of being forced to leave (2), communities in East Austin grew and began to thrive. Community gardens and other uses were established, and small businesses took root with higher stock support (2, 24). In 1933, the first library was opened in East Austin (2). In 1941, the Victory Café opened in East Austin, becoming a beacon for the community, and host to generations of famous Black musicians (2).

1935
MAY & JUNE 1935 FLOODS
The tragic 1935 Texas flood was considered one of the worst in Central Texas during the 1900s. These floods disproportionately impacted communities of color living along floodplains.

1957
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN
Over time, new Austin jobs and infrastructure engineering communities of color. While leading from state agencies, through leaders, and resources compared, middle members of the generations made new groups and developed programs in East Austin as "volunteers" including single-family residences. This allowed polluting facilities into the neighborhood, where they caused health and/or property issues (2).

1960s
1960 BOGGY CREEK FLOOD
A severe flood caused the evacuation of 200+ East Austin residents and 12 homes in the watershed area. The event signaled the beginning of a 20-year struggle for flood control. The fight with an urban renewal project that displaced families.

1960s
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
The 1960s saw a new emergence of racism and a rapidly growing number of color, with growth in the Black community and Black Panthers that worked together to fight social discrimination and health issues (2).

1974 - 1975
AUSTIN WATERWAY ORDINANCE
The 1974 Watershed Ordinance was the only watershed protection ordinance of its kind "designed to protect" for US and Texas regulations. Key features of the ordinance included a goal to maintain the "natural and traditional character" which would allow for expanded and enhanced waterways and requirements to prevent adverse flooding made possible by floodplains. Land of floodplains until 1974 led to many homes being constructed in the vulnerable floodplains of the Barton Creek and many such homes crossed with underused drainage systems.

1974 - 1975
WATERLOO PARK
In 1975, Waterloo Park was established as a "rehabilitation" project, allowing Black and Brown families along the river (2).

1980s
WATER QUALITY ORDINANCES
Water Quality Ordinance focused primarily on mitigating impacts to West Austin. These included: The Upper Austin Watershed Ordinance (UAWO), The Barton Creek Watershed Ordinance (BCWO), The Hill Country Watershed Ordinance (HCWO), and The Lower Colorado Watershed Ordinance (LCWO).

1980s
BOGGY CREEK CHANNELIZED
Boggy Creek in East Austin, Texas, was channelized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1980s through a project, allowing Black and Brown residents and some flooding throughout the 1980s and the

1980s
MEMORIAL DAY FLOOD (1981)
In the Memorial Day Flood (1981), a heavy flooding occurred, killing three and doing more than \$11 million in damage.

Community Activation Group

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



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

R2R Community Priorities

Priority #1: Equity & Inclusion

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

Priority #2: Flood Mitigation & Emergency Preparedness

Protect lives and property by addressing flooding and erosion proactively.

Priority #3: Climate Resilience & Sustainability

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



R2R Community Priorities

Priority #4: Natural Resource Protection & Restoration

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

Priority #5: Trust & Collaboration

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

Priority #6: Accessibility & Public Engagement

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

Priority #7: Sustainable Development & Growth

Balance urban growth with environmental health and sustainability.



R2R Community Priorities

Priority #8: Support for Unhoused & Vulnerable Populations

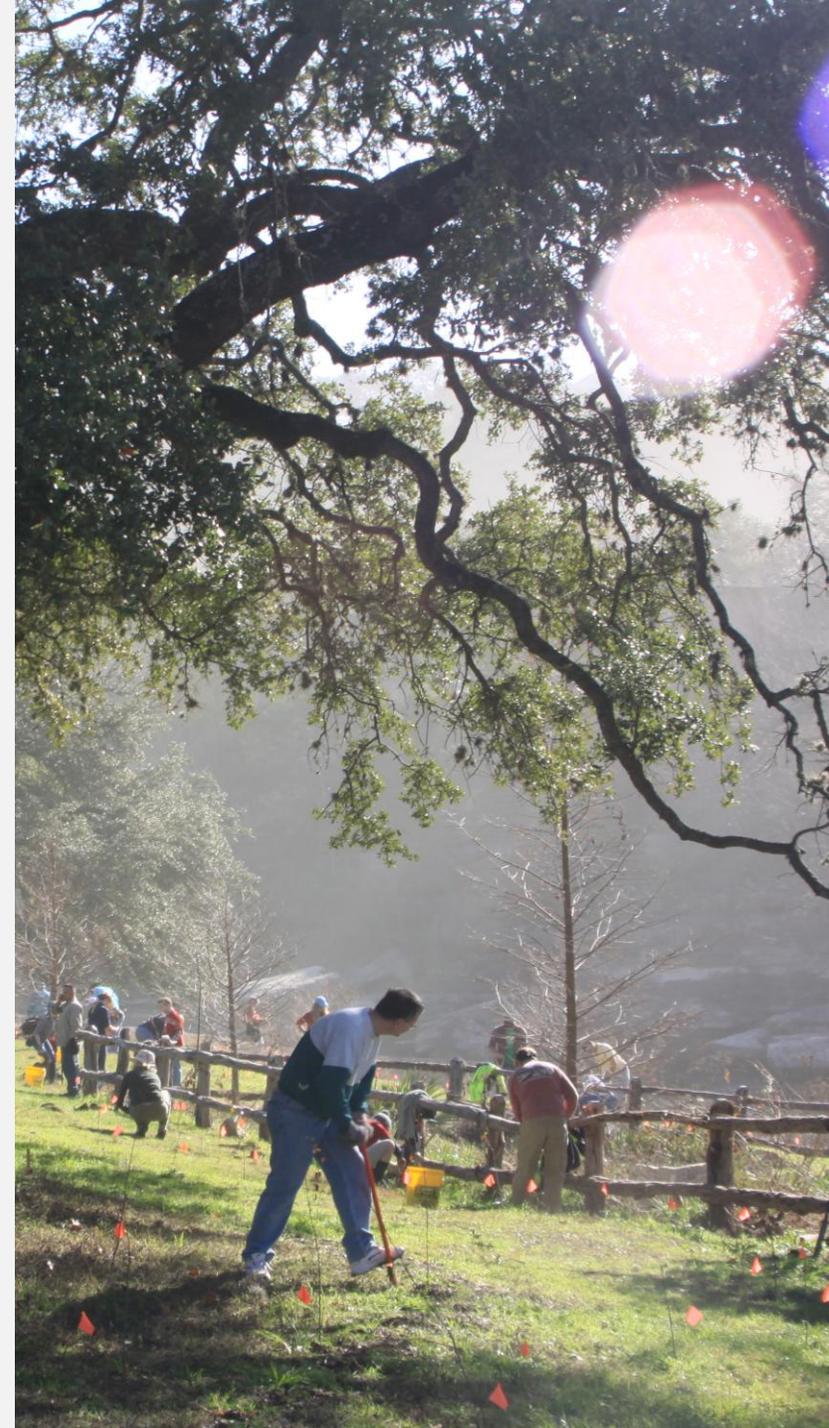
Provide resources and safety for unhoused individuals while addressing systemic issues.

Priority #9: Education & Youth Engagement

Foster a culture of environmental stewardship and resilience among residents.

Priority #10: Innovation & Leadership

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



Current Community Engagement Effort

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



Take our survey!

Help shape Austin's plan to protect our communities, waterways, and reduce the impact of flooding.

RainToRiverATX.com



Rain to River

WATERSHED PROTECTION



An aerial photograph of a river winding through a lush green forest. The water is a deep blue-green color, and the surrounding trees are vibrant green. In the lower right quadrant, a person is seen kayaking down the river, leaving a small wake. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle that serves as a background for the text.

Thank You!

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