

A G E N D A



Recommendation for Council Action

Austin City Council	Item ID	44613	Agenda Number	20.
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Meeting Date:	5/21/2015	Department:	Watershed Protection
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Subject

Approve an ordinance amending the Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Watershed Protection Department Capital Budget (Ordinance No. 20140908-002) to accept and appropriate \$16,300,000 for the implementation of the Onion Creek Forest/Yarrabee Bend Partnership Project with the United States Army Corps of Engineers, including the buyout and demolition of single family houses in the floodplain of Onion Creek near the intersection of South Pleasant Valley Road and East William Cannon Drive, ecosystem restoration, and the creation of recreational facilities.

Amount and Source of Funding

Funding is available from the 2015 federal appropriations for the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Fiscal Note

A fiscal note is attached.

Purchasing Language:	
Prior Council Action:	August 28, 2014 – City Council approved the execution of the Project Partnership Agreement between USACE and the City. September 25, 2014 – City Council approved a budget amendment for the Fiscal Year 2014-2014 Watershed Protection Department Capital Budget to accept and appropriate \$11,135,500 from the USACE from their 2014 federal appropriations.
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Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:	
MBE / WBE:	
Related Items:	

Additional Backup Information

The most severe flooding in Austin occurs along Onion Creek where several large neighborhoods are located in the floodplain. These include the Onion Creek Forest, Yarrabee Bend, Silverstone, and Onion Creek Plantation neighborhoods, 855 properties collectively referred to as lower Onion Creek. Lower Onion Creek has experienced flooding on multiple occasions, including 1998, 2001, and most recently the Halloween Flood of 2013.

The City, Travis County, the Lower Colorado River Authority, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have partnered since 1998 on projects to evaluate several flooding problems in the City of Austin, the City of Sunset Valley, and Travis County, including lower Onion Creek, and to identify potential solutions to those

problems. Flood mitigation solutions evaluated included both structural solutions (traditional engineering projects including detention ponds, channel modifications, flow diversions, levees, and floodwalls) and non-structural solutions (floodplain buyouts). In 2006, the USACE published its Interim Feasibility Report and Integrated Environmental Assessment which detailed the flood hazard mitigation projects recommended for each area within the study. Because of the depth and extent of the floodplain in this area, the USACE study determined that even the most extensive structural solution to the flooding problem would not be more effective than acquiring the flood-prone properties and relocating the families to areas safe from flood hazards. The recommended project for the lower Onion Creek area (the neighborhoods of Onion Creek Forest, Yarrabee Bend, and Onion Creek Plantation near the intersection of William Cannon Dr. and S. Pleasant Valley Rd.) was the buyout of flood-prone properties.

A partnership project between the City and the USACE was recommended that consists of the buyout of 483 properties located in the 25-year floodplain within this area. The project also includes ecosystem restoration and the construction of new recreational facilities once the area is purchased. This project was officially authorized for construction by Congress in 2007, but federal construction funding for this project was not appropriated until 2014. The total cost for the USACE project is estimated as \$76,670,000, which will include a \$48,779,000 federal contribution.

As early as 1999, the City began acquiring properties in the lower Onion Creek area and continued to acquire properties while the Corps was conducting their study. Between 1999 and 2006, the City acquired 109 properties in this area. With the help of a grant from FEMA, the City was able to acquire another 114 properties in this area between 2006 and 2008. In 2007, the Water Resources Development Act authorized the continued partnership between the City and the Corps to acquire 483 properties at the highest risk of flooding in this area (the 223 properties acquired by the City through 2008 were among the 483 properties identified for Corps participation). However, while the Corps partnership project was authorized by Congress in 2007, federal funding for this project had not been approved through 2013. Despite the lack of federal funding, the City proactively continued acquiring properties in the project area relying solely on local funding. Between 2008 and October 2013, the City acquired 100 additional properties within the boundaries of the Corps project area.

Immediately following the Halloween Flood, the Watershed Protection Department was able to pull together funding to begin the acquisition process for an additional 116 of the 160 properties remaining in the Corps project area. As of April 16, 2015, 103 of those properties have been acquired. In summary, 426 properties have been acquired since 1999 in the Corps project area, leaving 57 properties still to acquire within that area.

The Project Partnership Agreement between the City and the USACE was executed on August 28, 2014. On September 25, 2014, the Capital Improvement Budget of the Watershed Protection Department was amended to accept and appropriate \$11,135,000 from the USACE for the project, which was the first federal funding appropriated for the implementation of this project. The 2015 federal appropriations for the USACE include up to \$16,300,000 in additional funding for this project. As of April 16, 2015, the City has acquired 426 of the 483 properties identified for flood hazard mitigation as part of this project. The federal funding will be used to continue to acquire the remainder of the properties in the USACE project area.

In addition, in June 2014, City Council approved \$35.5 million of funding for the Watershed Protection Department to begin the first phase of acquisitions in this area outside of the Army Corps project boundaries. This phase is referred to as the "25-year At Risk" floodplain buyouts and the funding has allowed the City to move forward with the acquisition process for 140 properties with structures at risk of flooding in the 25-year floodplain of lower Onion Creek. As of April 16, 2015, the City has acquired 78 of these properties.

As part of the FY 2014-15 Budget, City Council approved \$78 million of funding for the Watershed Protection Department to implement the final phase of flood mitigation buyouts for Onion Creek and Williamson Creek areas for properties with structures at risk of flooding in the 100-year floodplain. The planned allocation of this appropriation was \$60 million for Onion Creek and \$18 million for the Williamson Creek area. This "100-year At Risk" buyout phase for Onion Creek currently includes 232 properties and City Council authorized these acquisitions on March 5, 2015. This phase of buyouts will begin in the summer of 2015 and is expected to take 3-4 years to complete.