

City of Austin
Flood Mitigation Task Force
Sept 2015 – May 2016

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Background

Austin City Council, by Resolution 20150604-044, (June 4, 2015), created the Flood Mitigation Task Force (TF) to gather information and make recommendations about citywide and area flooding, and its impacts to property, public safety, and City finances, with an emphasis on flood mitigation solutions and funding options.

Twenty two citizens were appointed to the Task Force. Each City Council member and the Mayor appointed 2 people to serve.

The Task Force began meeting on September 22, 2015, and concluded its presentation to the various city boards and commissions on May 31, 2016. The full Flood Mitigation Task Force met in open public meetings and received testimony from citizens and briefings from Watershed Protection Development (WPD). WPD posted 85 presentations on Bloomfire site.

The TF split into 4 working groups, Buyout, Capital Improvements, Operations & Maintenance and Report Writing to facilitate the goals of the Resolution. Each Work groups met independent of each other to review WPD practices and strategies.

Executive Summary

Findings and recommendations for each section of the Resolution can be found in the each area of the report, but these overarching conclusions stand out:

- Flooding has been addressed in a reactive, rather than a proactive manner;
- Flood mitigation has been organized on a “squeaky wheel” basis rather than prioritized on a basis of importance;
- Catching up and establishing a flood damage-free status will be costly and will require enacting, funding and enforcing strong and difficult regulations.
- Expectations of Resolution were broad in scope. A 7 month citizen task force can only conduct a cursory review of City policies and procedures. Recommend appointing citizen task force to conduct more in depth review of each Resolution and make recommendations to City Council.

Task Force Members, names, appointments and committees:

Rose Marie Klee (Mayor) Buyouts Committee, Report Writers

Jeffrey Henke (Mayor)

Marvin Chaney (District 1) Operations & Maintenance, Report Writers

Ben Hodges (District 1) Operations & Maintenance

Ana Aguirre (District 2) Capital Improvements, Report Writers
Robert Kibbie (District 2) Buyouts
Kate Mason-Murphy (District 3) Capital Improvements
Richard Maness (District 3)
Rolando Delgado (District 4)
Carol Olewin (District 4) Secretary, Operations & Maintenance, Report Writers
Ken Jacob (District 5) Capital Improvements, Report Writers
Rollin MacRae (District 5) Capital Improvements
Paul Morales (District 6) Operations & Maintenance
Jay Scanlon (District 6) Capital Improvements, Report Writers
Dale Gray (District 7) Vice President, Buyouts
Dorsey Twidwell, Jr, (District 7) Operations & Maintenance
Robert Henneke, (District 8) Capital Improvements, Report Writers
Matthew L Rienstra, President
John Gleason (District 9) Capital Improvements, Report Writers
Elloa Mathews (District 9) Capital Improvements
Raymond Canfield (District 10) Capital Improvements
John Pitts, Jr (District 10) Operations & Maintenance, Report Writers

Recommendations by Resolution Sections – from Resolution No. 20150604-044

1.a Flood mitigation and preparedness strategies- See Appendix D

1.b Flood plain variances and flood buyout policy -

1.c Structure and use of the adopted drainage utility charge -

1.d Storm water management system operations and maintenance cost (O&M), capital costs, city fees, flood insurance, and other identified factors that have impacts to affordability and equity in anticipation of the 2016-2017 Council budget conversation -

1.e Methods and means to provide more public education and outreach to new residents and visitors to raise awareness of flash flooding potential, as well as actions and strategies for the public to take to remain -

1.f Standard and Green Infrastructure utilization; impacts, regulations, and management of impervious cover, master planning and studies underway -

2) Identifying available funds, including federal, state. And local sources as well as prioritizing future capital investment for flood mitigation and management.

1. Investigate opportunities for grants or cost sharing with US Geological Survey to install additional rainfall and stage gages through the City.
2. Evaluate and identify opportunities to share costs with private development to upgrade outdated drainage systems.
3. Recommend implementing a Storm Water Impact Fee assessed on new development to offset increased costs of upgrades and increased maintenance to drainage infrastructure surrounding development.
4. Examine budgetary requests of other City Departments to identify projects less critical to public safety than flood mitigation and use these resources to increase staff and resources of WPD.
5. Evaluate opportunities to leverage volunteer activities to encourage greater citizen participation in keeping waterways clear. Examples include Keep Austin Beautiful and the Colorado River Alliance. Understanding that the structure may be overly complex, Council should also explore simple straightforward financial incentives to spur citizen engagement, which could occur in the form of a tax credit or similar.
6. Council should prioritize capital spending in future budgets to focus spending on mitigating the most critical flood mitigation projects and to fund necessary maintenance operations over spending money on non-critical projects that do not impact public health and safety to reduce the fiscal impact to citizens.
7. Leverage local funding with state and federal programs and funding options where practicable; however, take into considerations potential project delays or additional project needs/spending that may be part of the matching funds.
8. Immediately begin formulating the first in a series of necessary Certificate of Obligation Bond packages to address the highest priority flood mitigation capital improvement projects.
9. Develop a schedule and dedicate resources to perform routine maintenance, inspections, and repairs to all storm water infrastructure (such as pond, pipes, inlets).

3) Evaluating best practices in peer cities with similar climate and flood issues -

4) Progress and recommended action for the Upper Onion Creek study -

5) Collaborating with the City's Environmental Commission -

6) Collaborating with other jurisdictions and agencies that have interest, expertise, and investment authority regarding flood mitigation potentially impacting areas inside and outside of the City of Austin as well as with work groups or other regional initiatives focused on flood issues and storm water management

Work Group Scope & Strategies

The FMTF separated into 3 work groups to gather information. Work Groups meet independent of each and meet with individual staff members of the Watershed Protection Department. Following are the three Work Group and their areas of purview.

Capital Improvements Work Group Strategies: Flood mitigation, flood preparedness, flood buyout policy, capital costs, affordability and equity, green and grey infrastructure, Master Plan, other studies, identify funds and prioritization of CIP, peer city benchmarking.

Operations & Maintenance Work Group Strategies: Flood mitigation, flood preparedness, floodplain variances, operations & maintenance costs, capital costs, affordability and equity, public education & safety, green and grey infrastructure, Master Plan, other studies, peer city benchmarking.

Buyouts Work Group Strategies: Flood mitigation, flood preparedness, flood buyout policy, affordability and equity, Master Plan, peer city benchmarking.

Report Writers Group Strategies: Compile the three Work Group Reports into recommendations by resolution section and prepare an executive summary.

Work Group Reports

Capital Improvements Work Group Report-Appendix A

Buyouts Work Group Report- Appendix B

Operations & Maintenance Work Group Report– Appendix C

Watershed Protection Department Comments

Watershed Protection dedicated its staff to providing information and support to the full FMTF as well as to the individual work groups.