ONION CREEK BUYOUTS:
AN UPDATE – JULY 17, 2019

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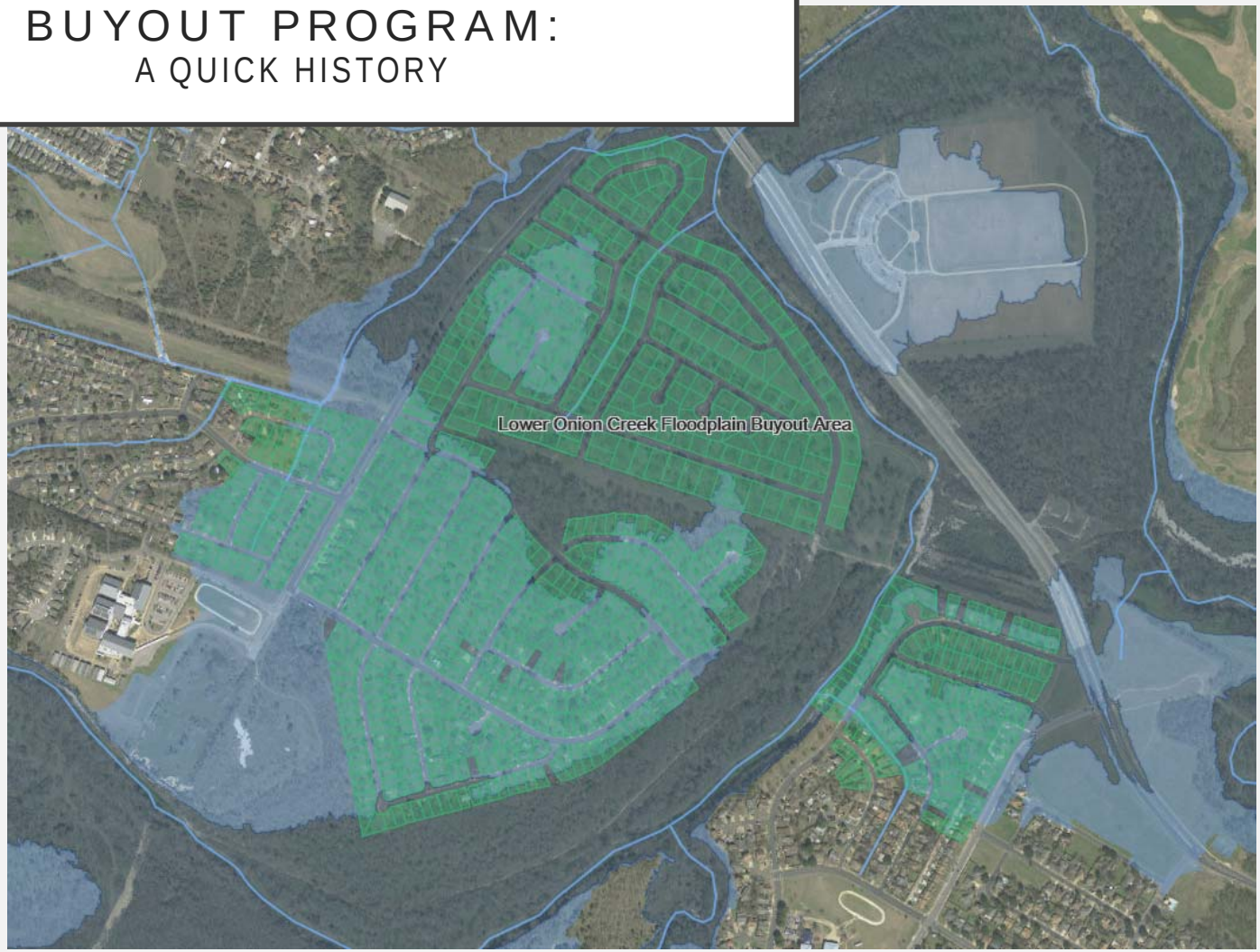
City of Austin – Watershed Protection Department

Field Operations – Green Infrastructure Management

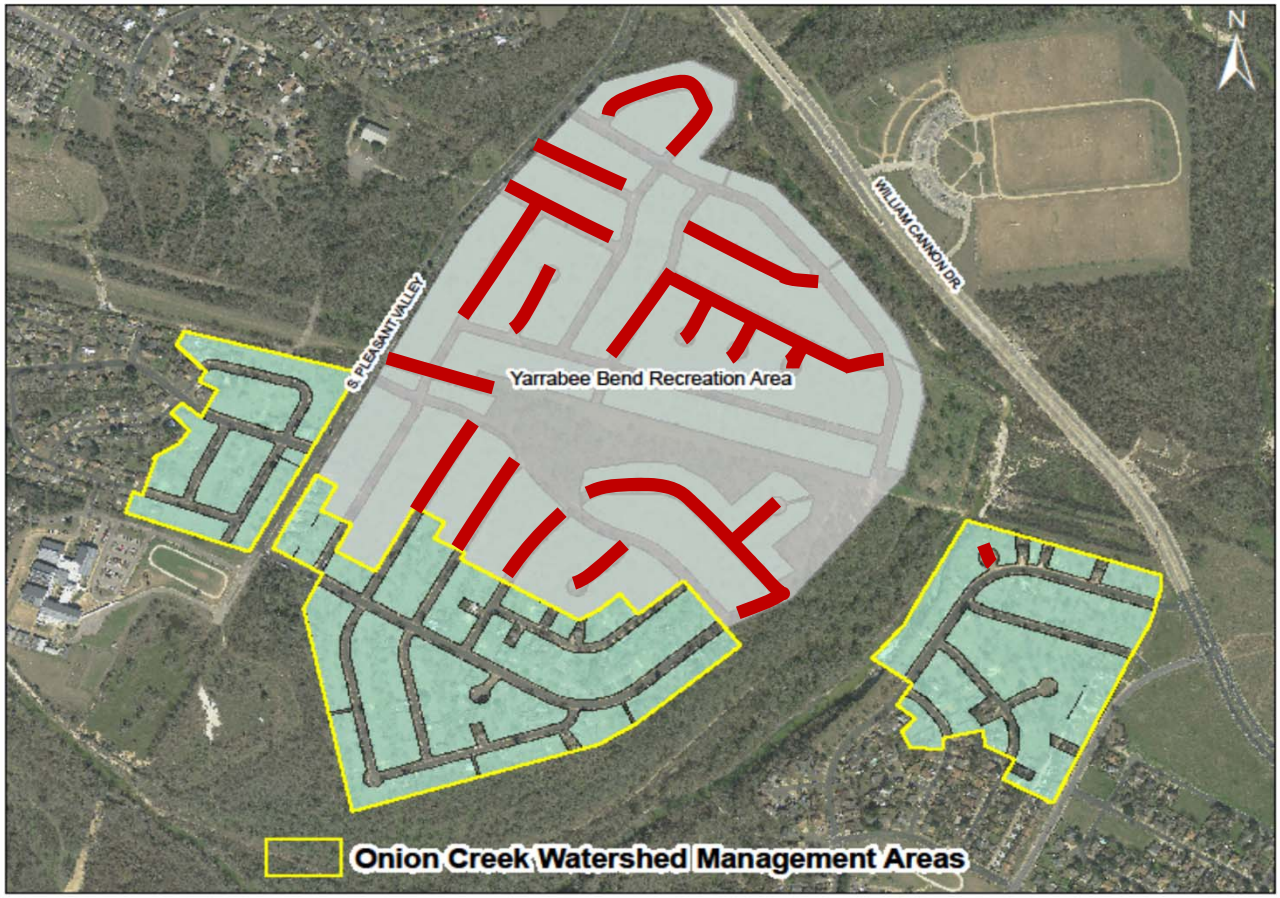
ONION CREEK FLOODPLAIN BUYOUT PROGRAM:
A QUICK HISTORY

813 houses removed from 25 and 100-year floodplains

- 483 with matching funds from US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) partnership
  - 1998-2017
- 340 funded 100% by COA WPD
  - 2014-2018
  - 10 homes left (refused offer)



ONION CREEK FLOODPLAIN BUYOUT PROGRAM:
ARMY CORPS PARTNERSHIP



Yarrabee Bend Recreation Area – USACE project

- Street removal and conversion to trails
  - Concrete and gravel
- Added parking and restroom
- Designated ecosystem restoration areas (over 200 acres) with tree plantings
- Low water crossing trail
- 31 pavilions
- Ribbon cutting held June 22

Thornwood

Pleasant Valley
DANGER
DO NOT ENTER
Thornwood
Demo
Demo
Demo

CAUTION

Same tree
2007
2019

FLOODPLAIN BUYOUTS IN AUSTIN
MANAGING NEW OPEN SPACE

- Once acquired, added to mowing contract
  - 4-6 times per year depending on site
- Community engagement after 1 year
  - Neighborhood meetings, survey
- Potential uses:
  - Wildflower meadow
  - Grow Zone, wildlife habitat
  - Orchard
  - Community garden
  - Native landscaping
  - Trails
  - Invasive removal
  - Tree planting
  - Public art, outdoor education

BUYOUT MANAGEMENT
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

BUYOUT MANAGEMENT
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

BUYOUT MANAGEMENT
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

THE BAYTON LOOP EXAMPLE

25 homes removed in 2011 after frequent flooding

Bayton Loop story map

- Community Garden
- Orchard
- Trail
- Flood-proof amenities (benches, dog waste stations)
- Sapling planting
- Ligustrum removal
- Native seeding
- Very limited mowing
- Rain gardens

POMEGRANATE

DOG WASTE
STATION

MOVING FORWARD WITH ONION CREEK

- What can we offer with our limited resources to supplement existing services/amenities?
- How can we create partnerships to help us repurpose this area to best serve the community and also be compatible for floodplain use?
- How can we leverage new partnerships to help us reach a diverse population, and keep them engaged throughout this process?

REACHING OUT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

- **GAVA** – Go Austin Vamos Austin (non-profit)
  - Improve equitable access to healthy lifestyles
  - Reduce barriers to healthy food and safe physical activity
- **Sustainable Food Center** (non-profit)
  - Improving access to nutritious, affordable food
- **Onion Creek Park Neighborhood Association**
- **Austin Parks Foundation**
- **COA Parks & Recreation**
- **COA Office of Sustainability**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Collaboration with COA staff on content, design, and creation
  - Paper copies, SurveyMonkey, Door Hangers, Flyers

ATX FLOOD SAFETY

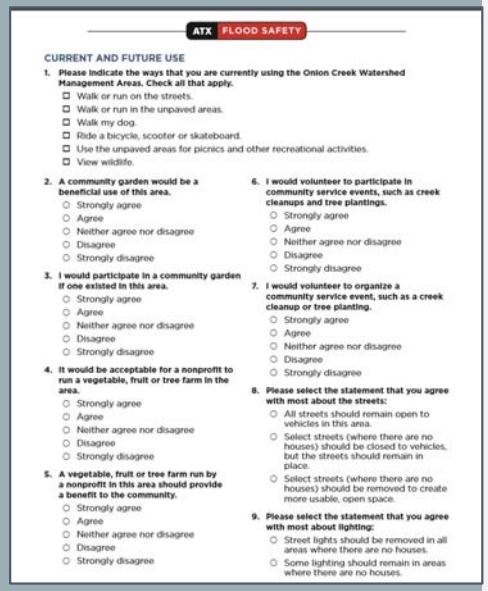
ONION CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AREAS: FUTURE MAINTENANCE SURVEY

The Lower Onion Creek floodplain buyouts are nearly complete. Work is underway on the new Yarrabee Bend Recreation Area, which will provide trails, picnic areas and restrooms. The City's Parks and Recreation Department will be responsible for managing this recreational area. The Watershed Protection Department will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the remaining open space within the floodplain buyout area. This area is called the Onion Creek Watershed Management Areas. This survey is only about the Onion Creek Watershed Management Areas. See the map below for the boundaries.

There are limitations to activities within the Onion Creek Watershed Management Areas due to floodplain regulations and requirements. We would like to hear from the community to guide us in the maintenance and use of the area. Please fill out this survey or you can take the survey online at surveymonkey.com/t/OnionCreek. Drop completed paper surveys off at the Southeast Branch Library, 5803 Nuckols Crossing Road, by [illegible].

For more information about the Yarrabee Bend Recreation area, please visit http://www.austintexas.gov/page/onion-creek-corps-project.

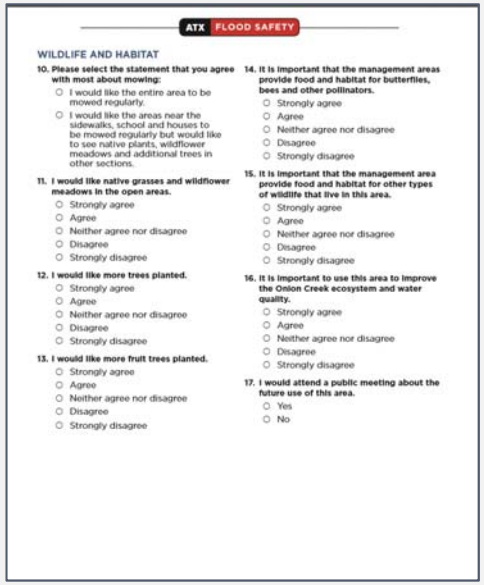
Please answer the following questions about the Onion Creek Watershed Management Areas.
Please refer to the front page map for the location and boundaries of this area.



ATX FLOOD SAFETY

CURRENT AND FUTURE USE

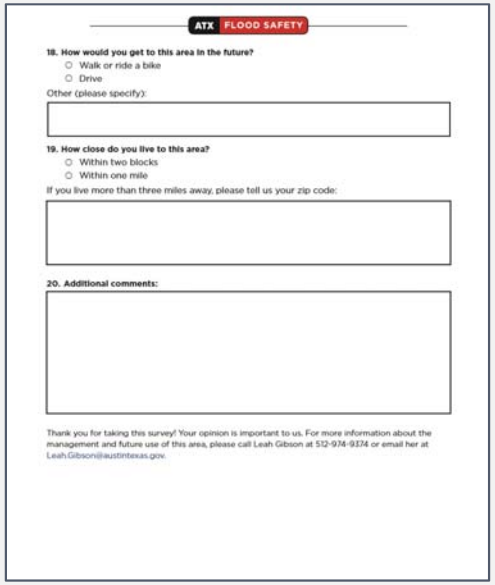
1. **Please indicate the ways that you are currently using the Onion Creek Watershed Management Areas. Check all that apply.**
   - ☐ Walk or run on the streets.
   - ☐ Walk or run in the unpaved areas.
   - ☐ Walk my dog.
   - ☐ Ride a bicycle, scooter or skateboard.
   - ☐ Use the unpaved areas for picnics and other recreational activities.
   - ☐ View wildlife.
2. **A community garden would be a beneficial use of this area.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
3. **I would participate in a community garden if one existed in this area.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
4. **It would be acceptable for a nonprofit to run a vegetable, fruit or tree farm in the area.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
5. **A vegetable, fruit or tree farm run by a nonprofit in this area should provide a benefit to the community.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
6. **I would volunteer to participate in community service events, such as creek cleanups and tree plantings.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
7. **I would volunteer to organize a community service event, such as a creek cleanup or tree planting.**
   - ○ Strongly agree
   - ○ Agree
   - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   - ○ Disagree
   - ○ Strongly disagree
8. **Please select the statement that you agree with most about the streets:**
   - ○ All streets should remain open to vehicles in this area.
   - ○ Select streets (where there are no houses) should be closed to vehicles, but the streets should remain in place.
   - ○ Select streets (where there are no houses) should be removed to create more usable, open space.
9. **Please select the statement that you agree with most about lighting:**
   - ○ Street lights should be removed in all areas where there are no houses.
   - ○ Some lighting should remain in areas where there are no houses.



ATX FLOOD SAFETY

WILDLIFE AND HABITAT

10. **Please select the statement that you agree with most about mowing:**
    - ○ I would like the entire area to be mowed regularly.
    - ○ I would like the areas near the sidewalks, school and houses to be mowed regularly but would like to see native plants, wildflower meadows and additional trees in other sections.
11. **I would like native grasses and wildflower meadows in the open areas.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
12. **I would like more trees planted.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
13. **I would like more fruit trees planted.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
14. **It is important that the management areas provide food and habitat for butterflies, bees and other pollinators.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
15. **It is important that the management area provide food and habitat for other types of wildlife that live in this area.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
16. **It is important to use this area to improve the Onion Creek ecosystem and water quality.**
    - ○ Strongly agree
    - ○ Agree
    - ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    - ○ Disagree
    - ○ Strongly disagree
17. **I would attend a public meeting about the future use of this area.**
    - ○ Yes
    - ○ No



ATX FLOOD SAFETY

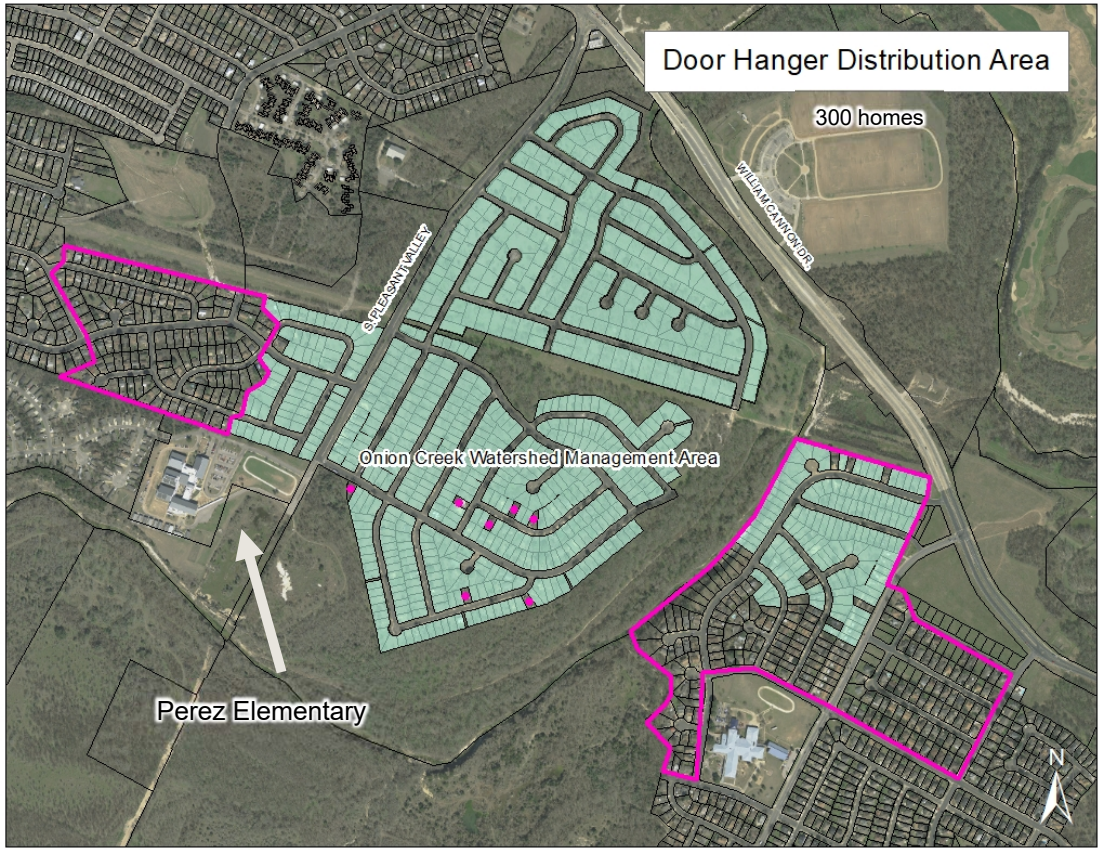
18. **How would you get to this area in the future?**
    - ○ Walk or ride a bike
    - ○ Drive

    Other (please specify):
19. **How close do you live to this area?**
    - ○ Within two blocks
    - ○ Within one mile

    If you live more than three miles away, please tell us your zip code:
20. **Additional comments:**

Thank you for taking this survey! Your opinion is important to us. For more information about the management and future use of this area, please call Leah Gibson at 512-974-9374 or email her at Leah.Gibson@austintexas.gov.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



- Targeted social media posts (FB, Nextdoor)
- Elementary school circulation
- Neighborhood meetings
- Partner distribution lists (non-profit partners, COA programs, neighborhood associations)
- Flyer locations (library, rec center, etc)

ATX FLOOD SAFETY

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

SHARE YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE FUTURE MAINTENANCE OF PART OF THE ONION CREEK FLOODPLAIN BUYOUT AREA.

The survey is brief and will take five minutes of your time. The deadline is <<date>>.

Two Easy Options:

- Fill out survey online at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/OnionCreek
- Pick up a paper copy, or access the Internet, at the newly reopened **South East Branch Library**, 5803 Nuckols Crossing Road.

Library Hours:
MON-THU: 10am-9pm; **FRI:** 10am-6pm; **SAT:** 10pm-5pm; **SUN CLOSED**

WATERSHED PROTECTION

ATX FLOOD SAFETY

¡QUEREMOS SABER SU OPINIÓN!

COMPARTA SUS COMENTARIOS SOBRE EL MANTENIMIENTO FUTURO DE PARTE DEL ÁREA INUNDABLE DE ONION CREEK QUE ESTÁ COMPRANDO LA CIUDAD.

La encuesta es breve y solo le tomará cinco minutos de su tiempo. La fecha límite es <<date>>.

Dos opciones sencillas:

- Llene la encuesta en línea en: es.surveymonkey.com/r/OnionCreekEsp
- Recoja una encuesta en papel o acceda a Internet en la nueva sucursal sureste de la biblioteca, 5803 Nuckols Crossing Road.

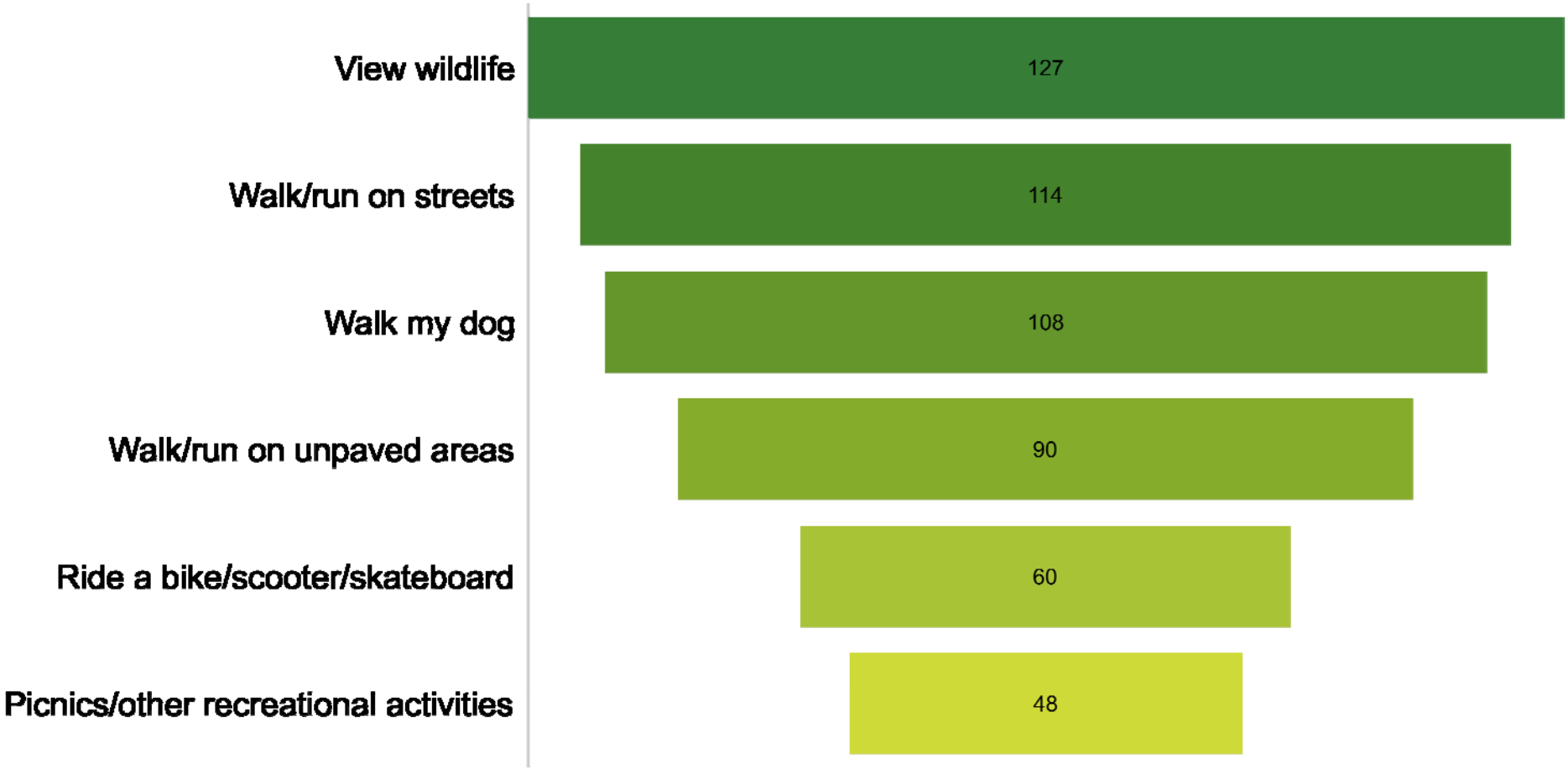
Horario de la biblioteca:
Lunes a jueves: 10AM – 9PM; **viernes:** 10AM-6PM; **sábado:** 10AM-5PM; **cerrada los domingos**

WATERSHED PROTECTION

WPD OUTREACH SURVEY RESULTS

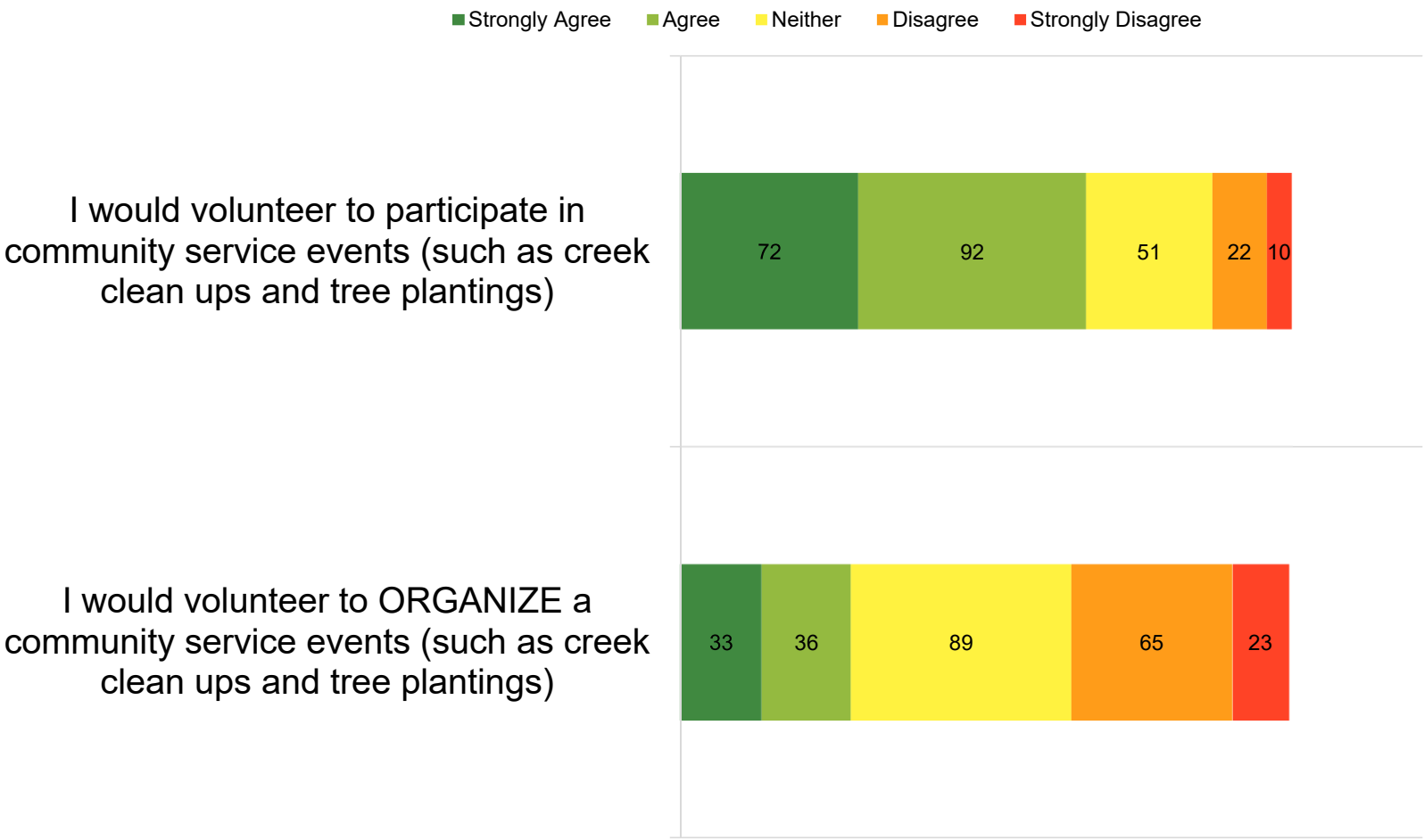
- Open for 28 days in November 2018
- 250 total responses
  - 50 living in, or within two blocks of, buyout area- very similar results to non-residents
  - 3 Spanish
  - 3 paper copies
  - 86 optional comments

CURRENT USAGE

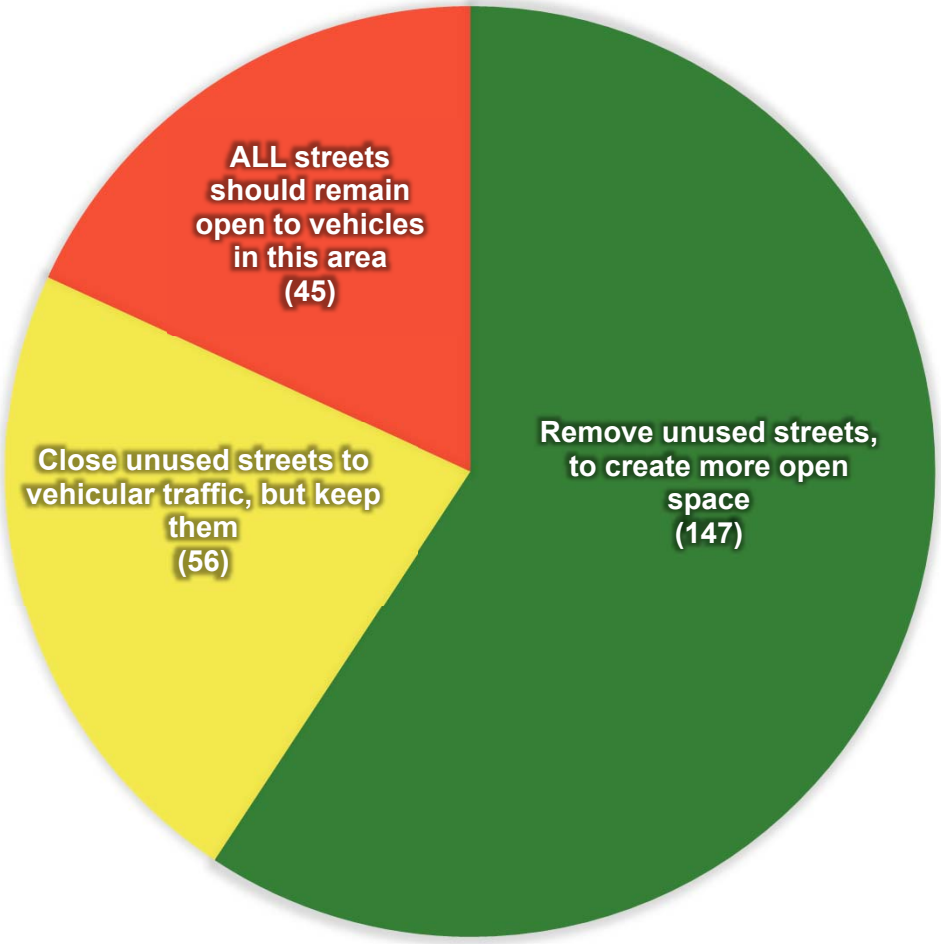


COMMUNITY GARDENS AND URBAN AGRICULTURE

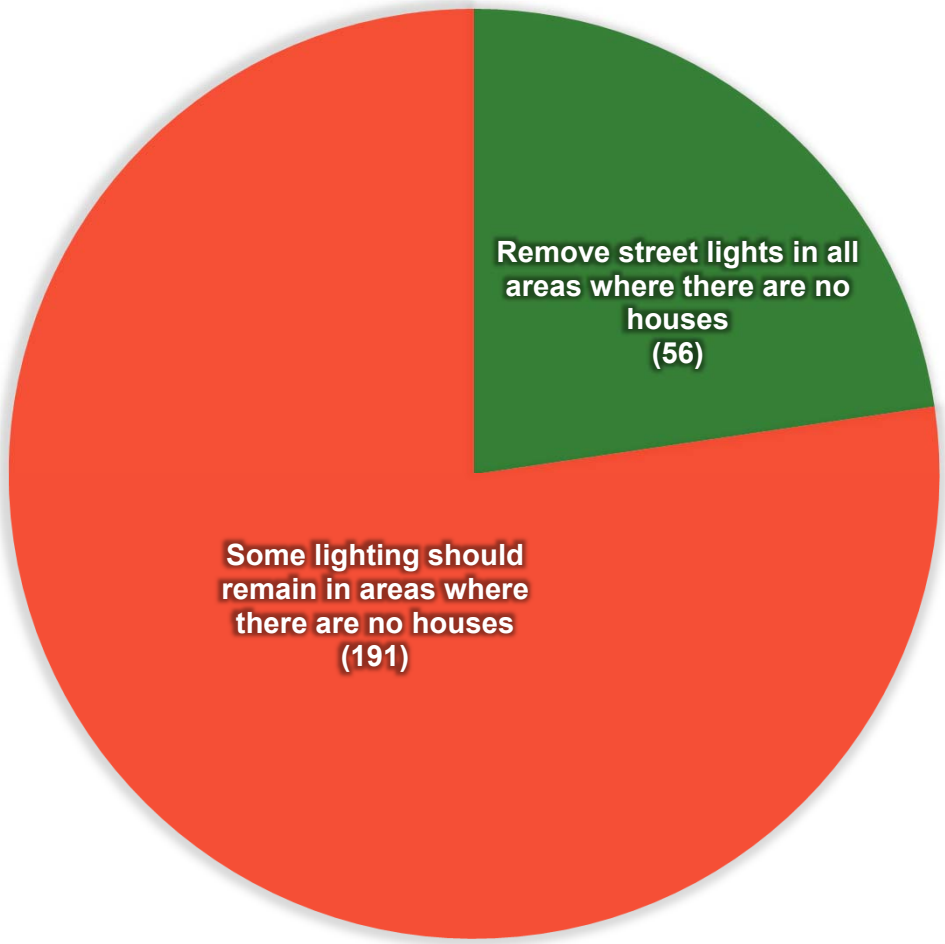
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM



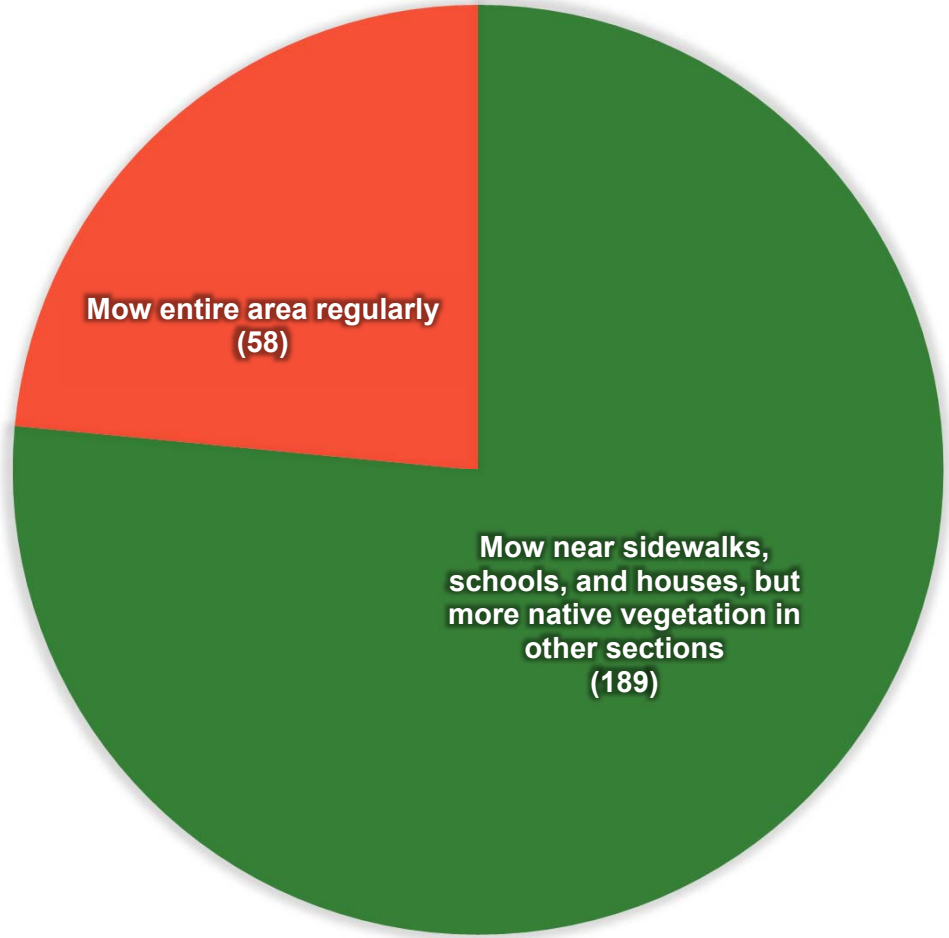
REMAINING INFRASTRUCTURE: STREETS



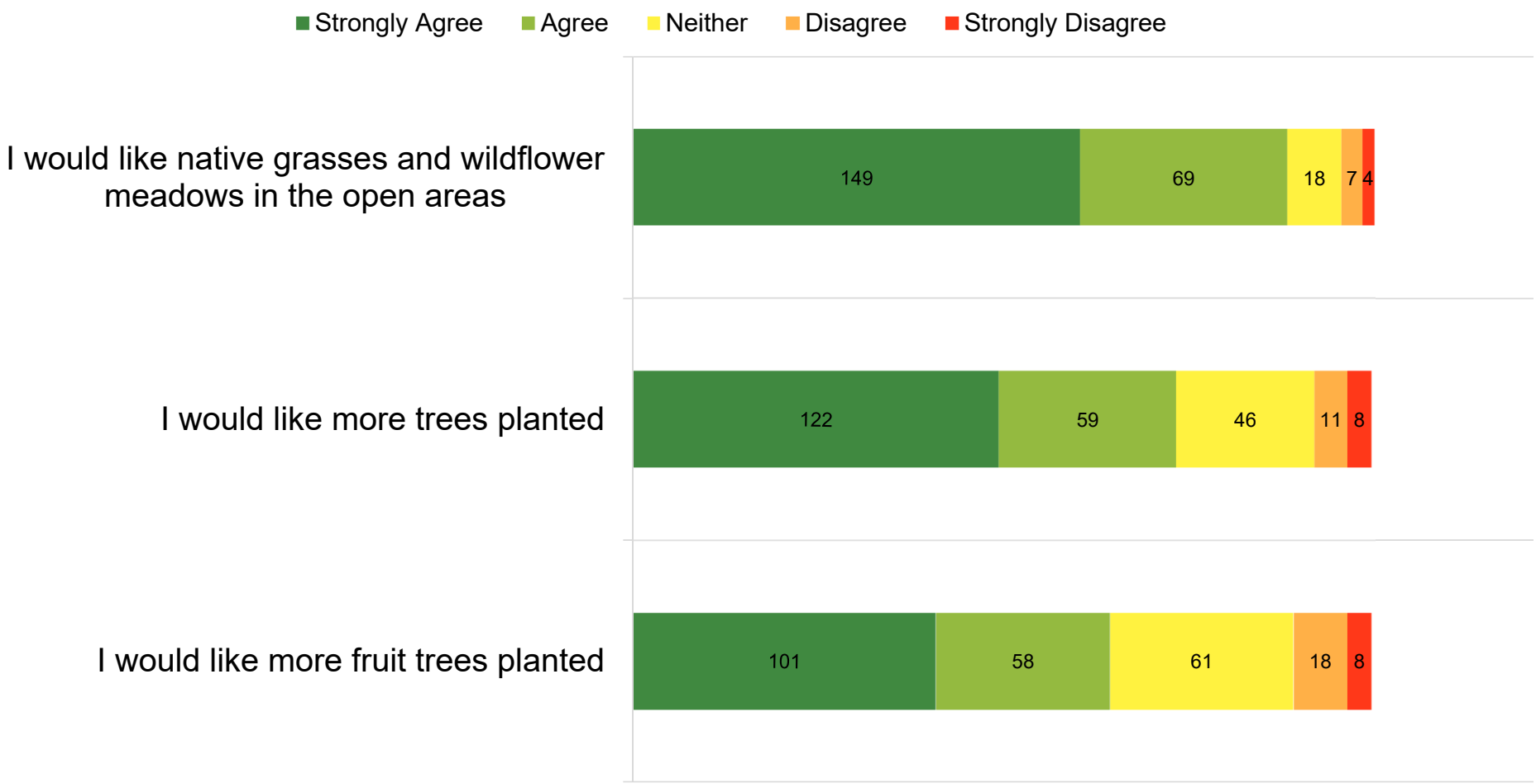
REMAINING INFRASTRUCTURE: LIGHTING



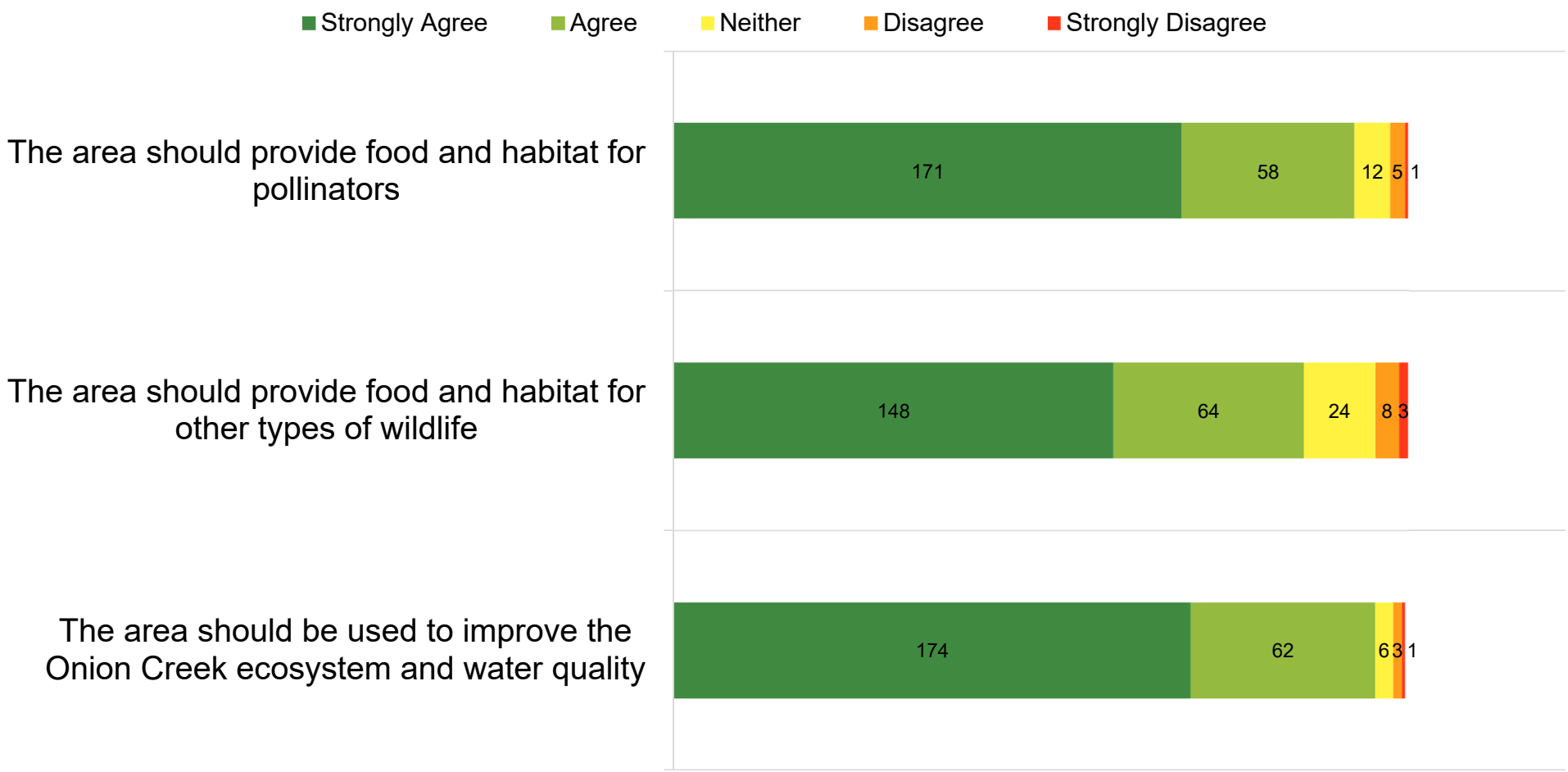
VEGETATION MANAGEMENT: MOWING

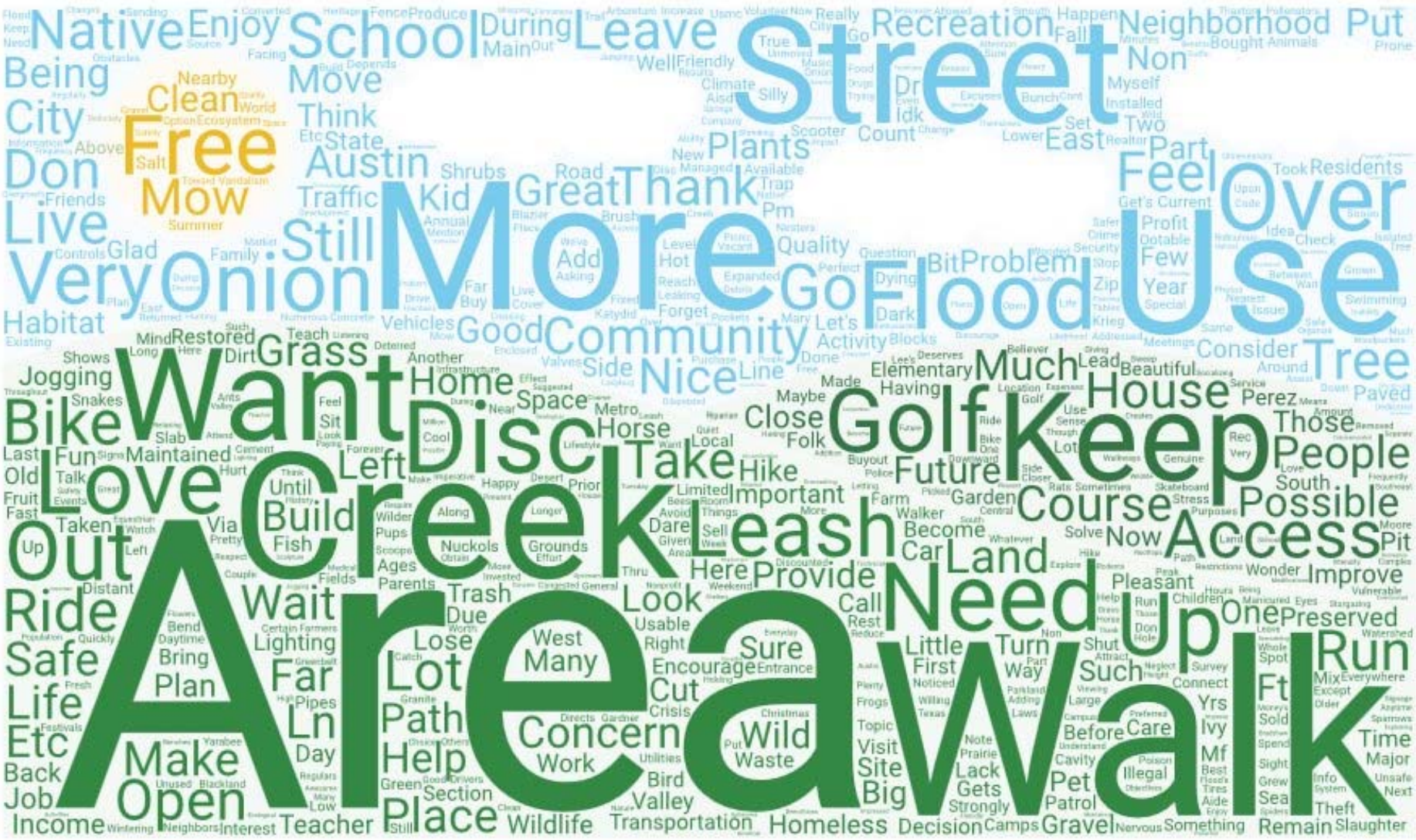


VEGETATION MANAGEMENT



ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

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Snakes
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Medical
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Ages
Scoop
Pups
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Grounds
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Effort
Invested
Thru
Discounted
Weekend
Nonprofit
Call
Rest
Reduce
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SURVEY RESULTS
PRAISE AND SUPPORT

Overwhelming support of:

- Less mowing
- More street removal, closures
- Less street lights
- More pollinator habitat
- More trees
- Community agriculture
- Fruit trees
- Walking/biking/equestrian paths
- Using the area to benefit the Onion Creek ecosystem

SURVEY RESULTS
CONCERNS FROM THE PUBLIC

- Security after dark
- Homeless
- Illegal dumping
- Fallen trees, perceived lack of mowing

RESPONSE
SECURITY AFTER DARK

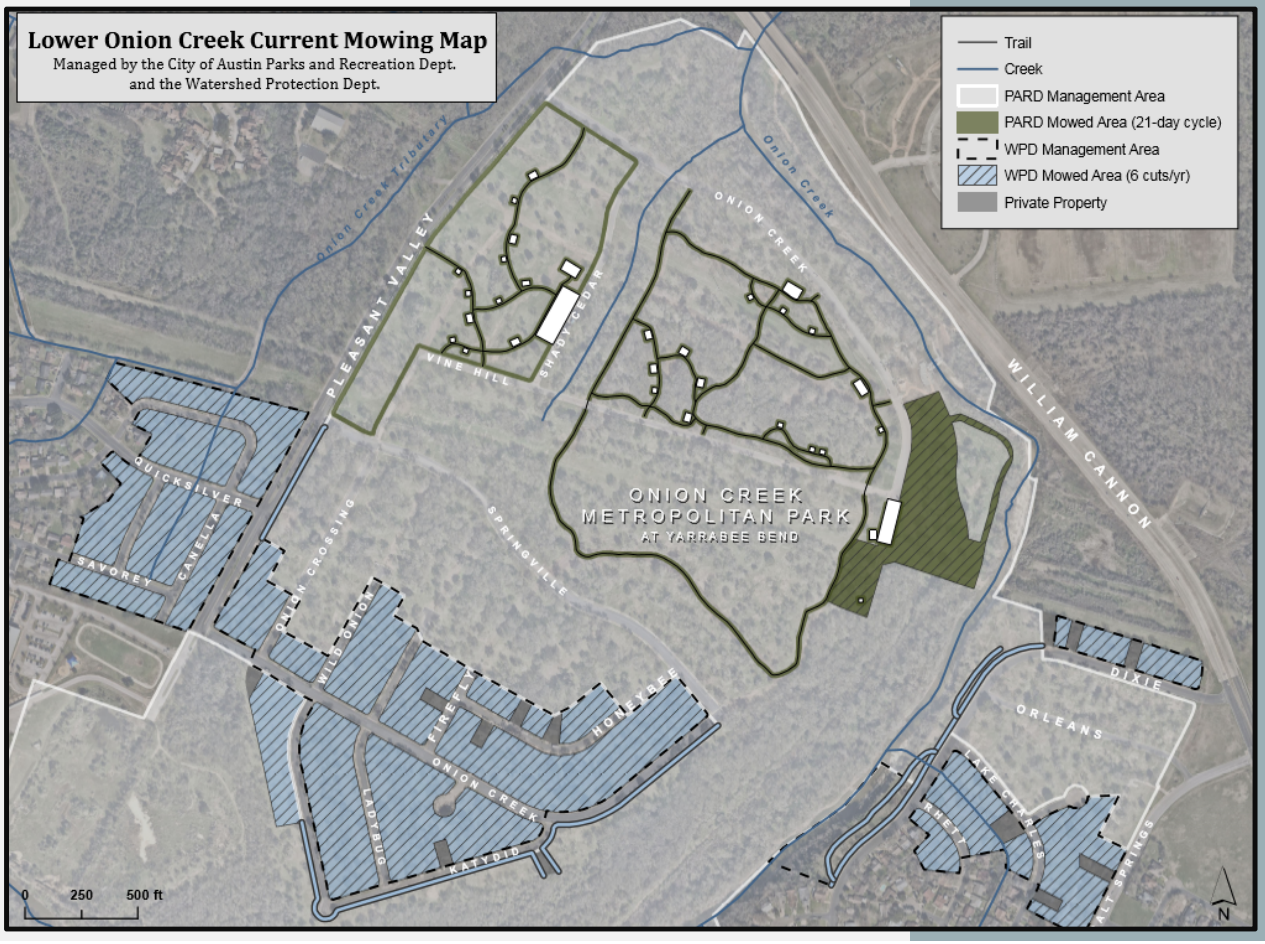
- Frequent check-ins with APD area representatives
- Working with Legal to establish curfew via administrative rules
- Potential partnership with PARD Rangers
- Signage

RESPONSE: ILLEGAL DUMPING

- Coordinate with Austin Resource Recovery for regular sweeps

- Strategic closing of streets using boulders, gates

RESPONSE:
MOWING & FALLEN TREES



- Education & communication
- Mowing buffer areas
- Utilize contracts to address “weedy” species (Johnson grass, etc)
- Biannual sweep with chipper after spring and fall storms

ONGOING TASKS & NEXT STEPS:

SEEDING AND REDUCED MOWING OF SOME AREAS; MORE TO BE DONE IN FALL 2019

ONGOING TASKS AND NEXT STEPS: EXPLORE POTENTIAL FOR COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE

Soil Testing

GAVA discussions

-Neighbors, elementary schools, city departments, Sustainable Food Center

-What does community ag look like?

-Who would be involved?

ONGOING TASKS AND NEXT STEPS: COMMUNITY MEETINGS AND CONVERSATIONS

Community Ag conversation (March 2019)

GAVA Health Fair (May 2019)

Austin Parks Foundation/TARG meeting (June 2019)

Ongoing conversations with neighbors – Friends of Onion Creek, Onion Creek Park Neighborhood Association, etc

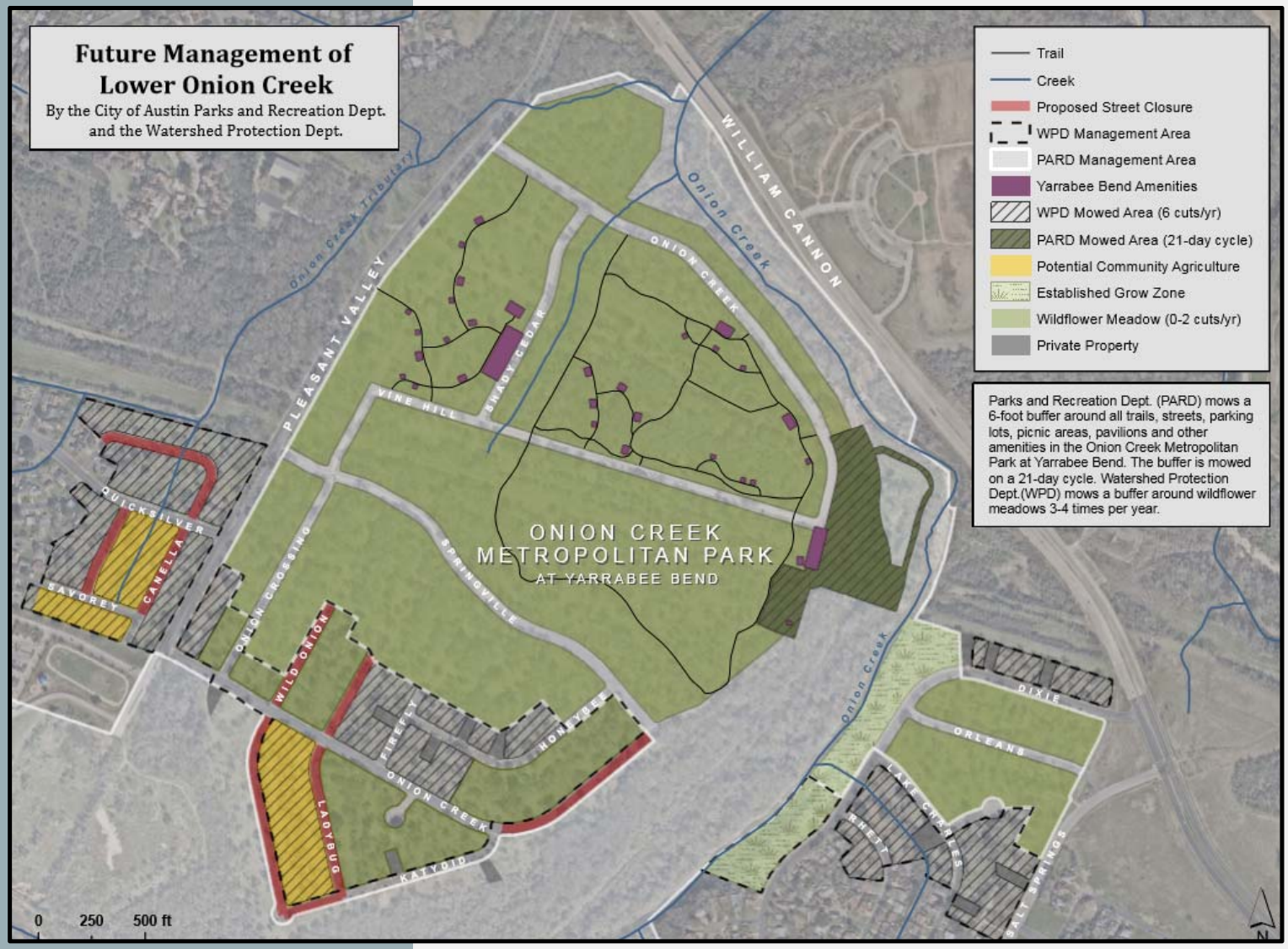
Continue to use network of partnerships to gather feedback & make management decisions

ONGOING TASKS AND NEXT STEPS: MANAGEMENT PLAN & MAPS

Work with PARD to create cohesive management plan

Make available on website

Signage



QUESTIONS?

Leah.Gibson@austintexas.gov