

NOTE: THIS IS A DRAFT OF THE NORTH SHOAL CREEK PLAN NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT. THIS DRAFT CONTAINS ONLY TEXT. GRAPHICS, MAPS, AND PHOTOS TO BE INSERTED LATER ARE REFERENCED IN THE TEXT. TEXT MAY BE EDITED FOR CONSISTENCY OF STYLE IN FINAL DOCUMENT.

Natural Environment

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Introduction

The natural environment of the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Planning Area includes creeks, trees, waterways, public parks, and landscaping on City rights-of-way and private property. These natural areas contain old growth trees, and potential greenbelts providing habitat for wildlife that existed before the City was settled.

The residents in North Shoal Creek place high value on parks and the natural environment, and aspire to protect these assets for future generations. Access to parks represents a future challenge due to a lack of land available for additional development or for preservation as parkland.

The North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Plan outlines a comprehensive approach to foster a vibrant natural environment, accessible to residents of all ages and abilities, in a manner that maintains the North Shoal Creek Community's role as an environmental steward. The plan reflects the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood stakeholder's input related to the environment.

Achieving these goals will require collaboration among the neighborhood plan contact team, residents, the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Association, property owners, various agencies and City departments. Neighborhood groups/organizations can apply to City programs and nonprofit organizations for resources and support on increasing, preserving, and cultivating the natural environment.

Add: relationship to Imagine Austin and sidebar with Neighborhood Plan Contact Team information

Parks

Pillow Elementary School Park is the only park in NSCNPA and is located at the core of the community adjacent to residential properties. NSCNPA participants expressed interest in gaining more access to park space in the neighborhood and to additional amenities at Pillow Elementary School Park that can support outdoor usage. The Parks and Recreation Department (PARC) acknowledges the need for additional parks in the NSCNPA, however, only limited recreational opportunities can be provided in this built-out neighborhood school park. The City shares ownership of this land with Austin Independent

School District (AISD) and recognizes AISD as having priority use of the site, which often constrains PARD in terms of park design, development, amenities, and availability of public use.

The table below lists Pillow Elementary School Park's acreage and amenities (from PARD's Long Range Plan)

School Park	Acres	Sports	Trails	Playground	Picnic Area	Parking
Pillow Elementary: 8500 Rockwood Ln	7.20	1 multi-purpose field 4 basketball goals	0.25 miles	Yes	1 table	Yes

The City has a goal for all residents in the urban core to live within a quarter mile of a publicly accessible and child-friendly park or green space. Currently, there are many homes in the planning area that are not within a quarter mile of a park or do not have a safe walking or biking path to a park.

Add: ¼ map access to parks and images of Pillow Elementary Park

Tree canopy

Throughout the neighborhood planning process, community members identified the scarcity of trees and natural green spaces in the community. Stakeholders in the community have voiced their desire for large shade trees and landscape green features in the public realm.

According to an analysis conducted in 2010, 20.3% of the NSCNPA is covered by tree canopy. This is 1.5% less than the 21.8% coverage rate in 2006 and below the city-wide average of 32%. The following map illustrates a lack of tree canopy at the edge of NSCNPA where commercial, multi-family, and industrial uses are found and a fairly robust tree canopy inside the residential core.

Add: tree canopy map

Like many neighborhoods built in Austin during the 1960s and 1970s, the Arizona Ash trees used as landscaping are reaching the end of their lifespans. While some have been replaced with longer-living hardwood trees and faster-growing ornamental trees, there are some gaps in the tree canopy. As the aging Arizona Ash trees continue to die off, the residential core's tree canopy will shrink without new tree plantings. The City of Austin has programs that can help replace these trees and provide additional educational resources and tools to allow residents to take an active role in preserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Add: sidebar with COA trees and landscaping programs

Shoal Creek

Shoal Creek is a hidden jewel that traverses generally flat from a large detention basin for approximately 1.25 miles through a culvert located under US 183 and it continues over a channelized stream bed

located along the western third of the planning area. Shoal Creek rises in northwest Austin and runs south for approximately ten miles to join the Colorado River.

Throughout the neighborhood planning process, community members expressed interest in gaining public access to Shoal Creek. Unfortunately, the creek is abutted by private properties (including many single family homes) for its entire length. Recently, the Shoal Creek Conservancy, a nonprofit organization, has partnered with the City and others to establish an urban trail that follows the creek along its entire length. The trail plan will improve the creek for all Austinites – present and future. Within the North Shoal Creek neighborhood, the trail would likely run along Shoal Creek Boulevard, rather than through the back yards of homeowners. The City will continue to look for opportunities to provide access to the creek itself as adjacent properties redevelop.

Add: images of Shoal Creek and watersheds

Green Infrastructure

The ecological fabric of NSCNPA includes a green infrastructure network with assets such as creeks and drainage, trees, and parks. Green infrastructure incorporates both the natural environment and engineered systems to provide clean water, conserve ecosystem values and functions, and provide a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife. It is an approach to water management that protects, restores, or mimics the natural water cycle. Green infrastructure is effective, economical, and enhances community safety and quality of life.

Participants in the North Shoal Creek Neighborhood Plan process have identified several issues and potential improvements for the neighborhood's green infrastructure, including improvements to storm water systems and areas where the tree canopy could be enhanced.

Add: Environmental issues map identified by the community (meeting #4 environmental issues map)

A number of properties are affected by the flood plain in North Shoal Creek; most of these are immediately adjacent to the creek. Approximately 290 parcels are affected by the flood plain, 261 are residential and 29 are non-residential. Although, a parcel is affected by the flood plain, it does not necessarily mean any structures fall within it. Based on a mapping analysis, 69 single-family houses are within the 100-year floodplain. The following map illustrates the 25-year and 100-year flood plains. Various natural channels, subsurface drainpipes, and paved ditches move storm water from other parts of the NSCNPA into Shoal Creek.

Add: 25-100 year old flooding map, images of Shoal Creek and watersheds

Goals, Priorities, and Actions

The community is actively seeking ways to improve its natural environment and expand its existing parks facilities and grounds. The following section describes goals, priorities and actions for accomplishing their goals based on input from the planning process and collaboration with potential partners.

Goal: Enhance and increase open space and greenery throughout the neighborhood.

Priorities:

- Increase publicly-accessible parkland within redevelopment and new development.
- Investigate opportunities to provide increased access along Shoal Creek.

Actions:

EN-1 Create walk/bike path/greenbelt access connection along small creek in front of Office Depot (2620 W Anderson Ln) towards Ashdale Dr.

Potential partners: Public Works (PW), Watershed Protection Department (WPD), PARD, Neighborhood Association, Neighborhood Planning Contact Team (NPCT)

RELATED ACTIONS: Mobility and Connectivity

EN-2 Create walk/bike path/greenbelt access connection along creek north to South behind KVUE (3201 Steck Ave).

Potential partners: PW (Austin Urban Trails), WPD, Neighborhood Partnering Program (NPP), Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Shoal Creek Conservancy

EN-3 Encourage commercial property owners to accommodate public space and walkable areas in existing and future developments/redevelopments.

Potential partners: PW, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Development Service Department (DSD), Planning and Zoning (PAZ), PARD

EN-4 Require on-site parkland dedication for new redevelopment projects.

Potential partners: PAZ

EN-5 Encourage parkland dedication through redevelopment on Shoal Creek Blvd to provide public access to Shoal Creek.

Potential partners: PARD, PW (urban trails), WPD, Neighborhood Association, NPCT

- Improve access to and expand the amenities at Pillow Elementary Park.

Actions:

EN-6 Continue to engage and collaborate with Pillow Elementary to enhance/improve future community garden participation, public park access improvements, and installation of covered shade, tree planting.

Potential partners: PARD, AISD, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability, DSD, NPP, Austin Parks Foundation

EN-7 Work with PARD and Pillow Elementary to continue park improvements with more recreational use and to maximize neighborhood park amenities for all.

Potential partners: PW, PARD, AISD, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, NPP

EN-8 Install signage indicating hours when Pillow Elementary School Park and areas are in use by school students and when it is open to the public.

Potential partners: PARD, Pillow Elementary

- *Establish a healthy and vibrant tree canopy*

Actions:

EN-9 Publicize resources to plant and/or replace trees for small businesses (e.g., in parking lots and around businesses) in neighborhood association newsletter and website.

Potential partners: ACT, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Urban Forestry, Treefolks, DSD, NeighborWoods

EN-10 Plant shade trees and landscape green features within the public realm on:

- EN-9a Buell Ave
- EN-9b Burnet Rd between US 183 and Anderson Ln
- EN-9c Anderson Ln between MoPac and Burnet Rd
- EN-9d Shoal Creek Blvd between US 183 and Anderson Ln
- EN-9e Steck Ave between MoPac and Burnet Rd

Potential partners: ATD, PWD

Secondary partners - ACT, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Urban Forestry, Tree folks, DSD, Neighbor Woods

EN-11 Work with TxDOT to plant shade trees and landscape green features on US 183 frontage rd between Mopac and Burnet Rd an identified priority area by residents.

Potential partners: TxDOT, Neighborhood Association, NPCT

EN-12 Work with TxDOT to plant shade trees and landscape green features on MoPac frontage rd between Anderson Ln and US 183 an identified priority area by residents.

Potential partners: TxDOT, Neighborhood Association, NPCT

EN-13 Educate homeowners about the proper planting of trees and tree maintenance (e.g., presentations at community meetings and community events).

Potential partners: ACT, Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Treefolks

EN-14 Work with non-profit organizations such as TreeFolks, Inc. (www.treefolks.org) to participate in the free tree enhancement program, NeighborWoods, in order to acquire and plant trees in residential areas (front yard and side yard).

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Treefolks

EN-15 Apply for the City of Austin Urban Forest Grant Program to use available funding for enhancement of the urban forest through projects associated with tree planting, education, public service announcements, award programs, disease control, inventory, and other related efforts.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, DSD

- *Develop a community garden.*

Note: These actions have been moved to the Quality of Life section under Health and Food Access. * The community garden is currently underway

Actions:

Create a fundraising plan to support and maintain the community garden.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability

Create a farmers' market/stand.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability, Sustainable Food Center

Coordinate a garden network to encourage edible gardens and fruit/nut tree planting.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability

Promote composting through education and a compost cooperative/exchange as part of the community.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, Office of Sustainability

Promote City of Austin recycling programs in the neighborhood association newsletter/website.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability

Promote volunteerism at the community garden at Pillow Elementary School in the neighborhood newsletter/website and through Pillow School communications.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability, Pillow Elementary

Coordinate with Sustainable Food Center to research ways of putting community gardens on private properties.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Office of Sustainability, Sustainable Food Center

Goal: Protect environmental quality and reduce the effects of flooding

Priorities:

- *Maintain Shoal Creek as an amenity that provides for storm water management and habitat for wildlife.*

Actions:

EN-16 Adopt North Shoal Creek through the Adopt-a-Creek program.

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, (partner with Keep Austin Beautiful)

EN-17 Work with area residents and business to reduce trash from entering North Shoal Creek.

Potential partners: WPD

EN-18 Encourage participation in the environmental programs with the Watershed Protection Department.

Potential partners: WPD, Neighborhood Association

EN-19 Work with neighborhood groups and organizations to educate neighborhood residents and businesses about water conservation strategies and resources (e.g. discounts for rain barrel purchases).

Potential partners: Neighborhood Association, NPCT, Austin water conservation programs

- *Integrate natural storm water abatement techniques and green infrastructure into developments and public projects.*

Actions:

EN-20 Incorporate rain gardens whenever possible into the right-of-way to help in traffic calming and allowing for bike/pedestrian routes.

Potential partners: PW, WPD, Neighborhood Association, NPCT

EN-21 Install rain gardens and/or other appropriate local storm water management techniques in priority flooding areas or upstream to mitigate flooding:

- EN-28a Intersection of Penny Ln with Rockwood Ln,
- EN-28b Area abutted by homes in between Little Laura Dr and Benbrook Dr,

- EN-28c On Steck Ave and railroad crossing,
- EN-28d Intersection of Buell Ave with Stillwood Ln,
- EN-28e Millway Dr from Crosscreek Dr to Daleview Dr,
- EN-28f Rockwood from Steck Ave to Anderson Ln,
- EN-28g Dead end street of Stillwood Ln
- EN-28h Area abutted by homes in between Rockwood and Briarwood Ln,
- EN-28i Area abutted by homes in between Charlwood Dr and Steck Ave,
- EN-28j Parking lot of Playland Skate Center on McCann Dr,
- EN-28k Apartments/condos on Mossrock Dr and Shoal Creek Blvd,
- EN-28l Along Shoal Creek and Daleview Dr, and;
- EN-28m Stillwood in between Steck Ave and Penny Ln.

Potential Partners: *PW, WPD*

EN-22 Incorporate green infrastructure on the right-of-way on Shoal Creek Blvd to support bike and pedestrian traffic (i.e. locations include pedestrian and bicycle corridors, bus stops, street medians, and near shopping areas).

Potential partners: *PW, WPD*

EN-23 Incorporate green infrastructure on the right-of-way on Anderson Ln to support bike and pedestrian traffic (i.e. locations include pedestrian and bicycle corridors, bus stops, street medians, and near shopping areas).

Potential partners: *PW, WPD*

EN-24 Incorporate green infrastructure on the right-of-way on Burnet Rd to support bike and pedestrian traffic (i.e. locations include pedestrian and bicycle corridors, bus stops, street medians, and near shopping areas).

Potential partners: *PW, WPD*

EN-25 Work with TxDOT to incorporate green infrastructure on the right-of-way on the frontage of Mopac to support bike and pedestrian traffic (i.e. locations include pedestrian and bicycle corridors, bus stops, street medians, and near shopping areas).

Potential partners: *TxDOT, PW, WPD*

EN-26 Work with TxDOT to incorporate green infrastructure on the right-of-way on the frontage of US 183 to support bike and pedestrian traffic (i.e. locations include pedestrian and bicycle corridors, bus stops, street medians, and near shopping areas).

Potential partners: *TxDOT, PW, WPD*

EN-27 Ensure green infrastructure to support bike and pedestrian traffic.

Potential partners: *ATD, WPD*

RELATED ACTIONS: Mobility and Connectivity

EN-28 Promote storm water management techniques and encourage them to apply these techniques to their properties.

Potential partners: *PW, Neighborhood Association, NPCT*

EN-29 Promote energy efficiency strategies and resources.

Potential partners: *Austin Energy (green bld), WPD, Neighborhood Association, NPCT*