

Walnut Creek Urban Trail Phase II Emergency Services Issues



North Walnut Creek Trail Phase 2 is a 10-12 foot wide impervious concrete road/trail currently in the design phase of construction. Per the Project Manager, the design is 50% complete.

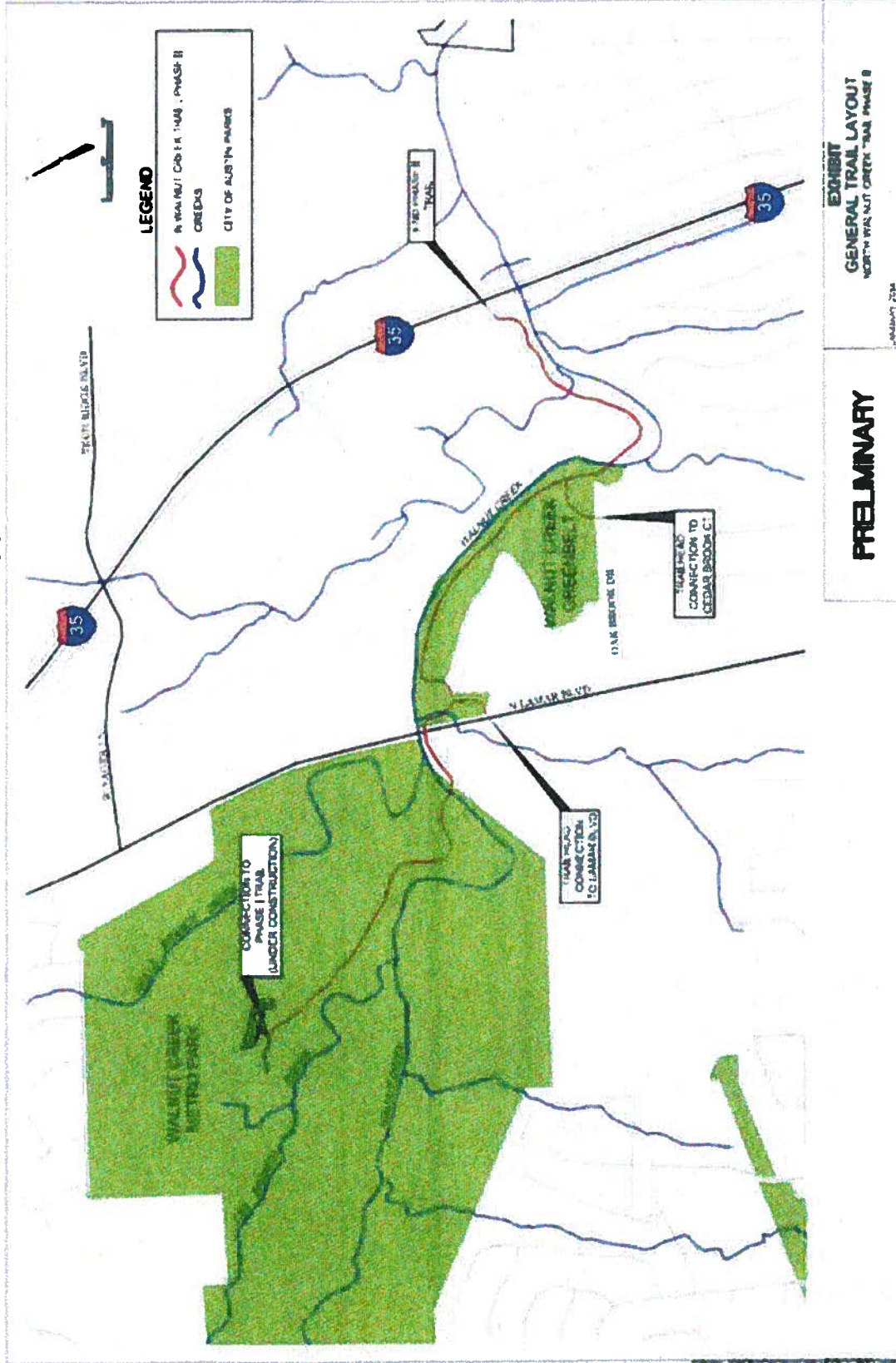
The general area covered by the road we are discussing is bordered by North Lamar, Oakbrook Drive, IH 35, and Walnut Creek to the North (see map on next page). As neighbors of the proposed trail/road, we have supported it for decades and continue to support it. We are looking forward to this enhancement to our neighborhood. However, with the design half completed, we are concerned over unanswered questions regarding Public Safety. That is why we are here before you tonight.

- In general, most of the questions center around - Is there enough Public Safety resources – both manpower and equipment, to address this new concrete trail?
- Is there enough oversight during the design phase to prevent costly situations that would not have happened unless the trail was in place?
- Will we be protected from fire, flood and criminal activity or will the trail become an aid to these things?

We don't want our Trail to become an expensive public safety hazard for COA emergency crews and an unsafe area for citizens. We do not want a repeat of Onion Creek.

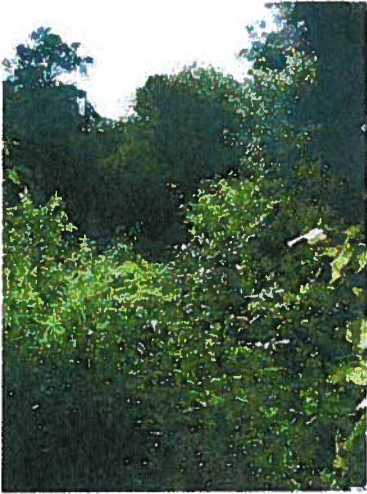
Who is watching over this project? Who has oversight?

Northern Walnut Creek Trail - Phase 2, in design
 10 ft. Wide Concrete Trail to be located along a large portion of creek, without WPO buffer, and cutting through a large undeveloped private greenbelt.
 Public Works will build elevated trail (boardwalk) to locate trail on the steep part of the creek bank.



Police Response

This is the chosen location for the Urban Trail and Bridge in a natural undeveloped are, near homes.



During the Urban Trail design process we have been given inconsistent and incomplete answers to policing of the Urban Trail:

- **1/21/14 stakeholder meeting,**
Project Manager stated that he did not have Police contact information. His assistant at the meeting, "Duke" (employee of consulting company) was given police contact information via email. We received no acknowledgement.
- **1/21/14 stakeholder meeting,** Project Manager stated that trail could not be closed because it was considered a road by Public Works and was receiving TXDOT funding therefore making it always open.
At the 9/16/14 Environmental Board Presentation, Project Manager stated that Park Rangers would patrol trail and the trail would be closed at night. This contradicts statements made in the 1/21/14 meeting.
- **9/16/14 Environmental Board Presentation,** Project Manager also stated that "we" considered that Call Boxes for emergencies were not practical because call boxes were expensive to purchase and studies of other trails with call boxes showed that the boxes are subject to vandalism and not repaired. Project Manager stated that "We think everyone carries a cell phone now anyway, and that should be enough."

Unanswered questions include:

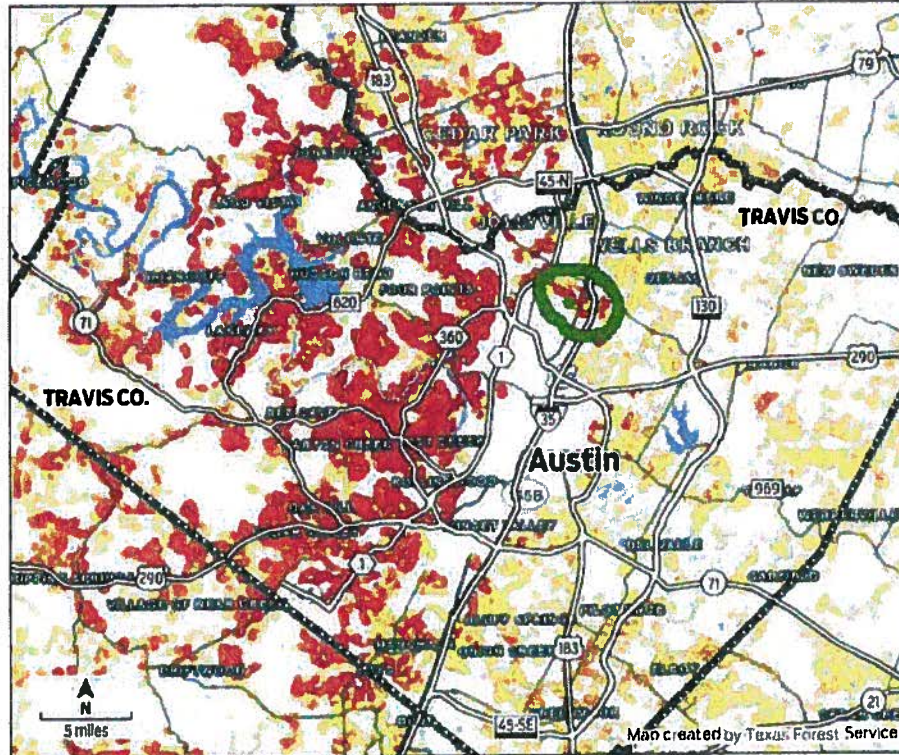
- Will the Phase II Walnut Creek Urban Trail be policed?
- If trail is going to be "closed" and have a curfew, how will this be enforced? Will there be posted signs and/or gates that will close? Who will do the opening and closing?
- What is the specific role of Park Rangers? Who do they report to? Will they be doing a patrol?
- Without Call Boxes or markers, how will a member of the public, using their phone, locate themselves on the trail during a 911 call? During the Environmental Board meeting presentation there was no mention of mile markers for the trail by the Project Manager.
- The Trailhead at Hornsby and Oakbrook is already a hotspot for drug business deals. It has never been given an official address so problems there are difficult to report.
- **Does the Police Department have the equipment and staff to address emergencies on the Phase II Urban Trail?**

Wildfire Response

Fire Danger

The Wildlife Urban Interface Response Index rates the potential impact of wildfires on people and property.

Most negative impact -9 -8 -7 -6 -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 Least negative impact



Source: Texas Forest Service (Texas Wildfire Risk Assessment Summary Report) Robert Calzada/American-Statesman

The portion of the Urban Trail from North Lamar to IH 35 is undeveloped greenbelt that has already been experiencing wildfires during the current drought. The Green circle in the graphic above is the area in question. The green dot inside the circle is the approximate location of the proposed trail design.

Already at risk:

- * In 2011 a transformer spark caused a small greenbelt fire next to homes
- * During Summer 2011, neighbors carried buckets and wet towels in the back of our trucks and kept an eye out for embers/beginning brush fires.

Once the trail is built and the wild areas are more accessible by the general public, the human risk factor for fires increases substantially.

- Is appropriate Fire Fighting Equipment available to access this area and its unique geography?
- Is the pumping capacity in this area adequate?

The only answer that neighbors have had from the Project Manager concerning fire hazards are "The trail will provide fire breaks" and "the trail is large enough for light duty brush trucks". The last iteration included 10 foot wide trails. This response does not answer the public safety concerns about wild fires. (see attached email dated May 13)

Will the Fire Department be able to address fires originating in the unique geography of the Phase II Urban Trail that are threatening nearby homes?

Can the AFD offer oversight on the trail design with these concerns in mind?

EMT Response



EMT Coverage

Regarding EMT coverage: In 2011 there was the necessity for a helicopter rescue out of a ravine near the creek only feet away from where the current design of the Urban Trail is to lay. A neighborhood visitor broke his leg in a fall and was unable to climb back out. This is a heavily wooded area. With a road providing increased public access to previously inaccessible areas, the risk for more first responder calls increases.

Again, this Urban Trail could become an expensive public safety hazard for COA emergency crews and an unsafe area for citizens and neighbors alike.

Is there any oversight during the design of this Urban Trail that can make it not become a continuing problem to both Public Safety entities and the neighborhood?

Do our EMTs have the equipment and staff available to address an emergency in this kind of landscape?

Flooding

From 1981 to the present, Big Walnut Creek has not been a flooding concern in North Austin like Shoal Creek and Little Walnut Creek. However, with increasing impervious cover and the concrete additions and bridges Public Works has planned for the North Walnut Creek Trail Phase II, we are afraid that the current design will create a problem where there is currently not a problem.

The plan places impervious cover next to and over the creek at several points. There are several instances of Big Walnut Creek leaving its banks during heavy rain episodes:

- Memorial Day 1981 – Little Walnut and Big Walnut flooded in this same area. See below graphic, page 27 from The Austin Texas Flood of May 24-25, 1981 produced by the committee on National Disasters, Commission on Engineering and Technical Systems and the National Research Council. Houses were flooded in the Walnut Creek neighborhood.

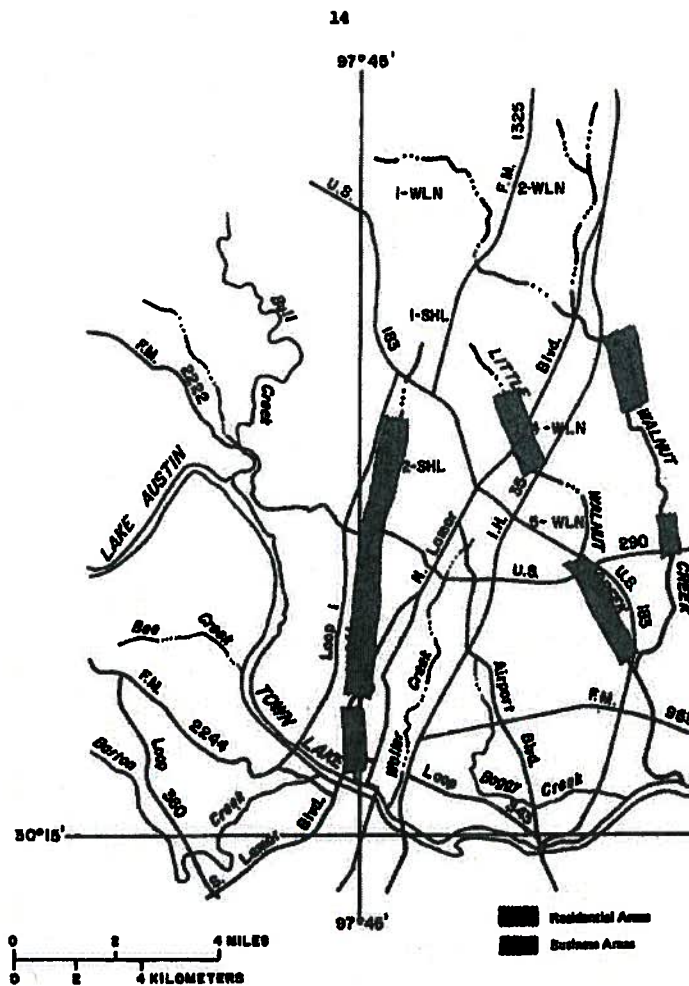


FIGURE 3.2 Damaged areas in Austin.

Flooded areas in 1981

There have been notable high water incidences since then such as November 15, 2001 when Austin experienced storms and multiple tornadic activity within the city limits.

More recent flooding activity:

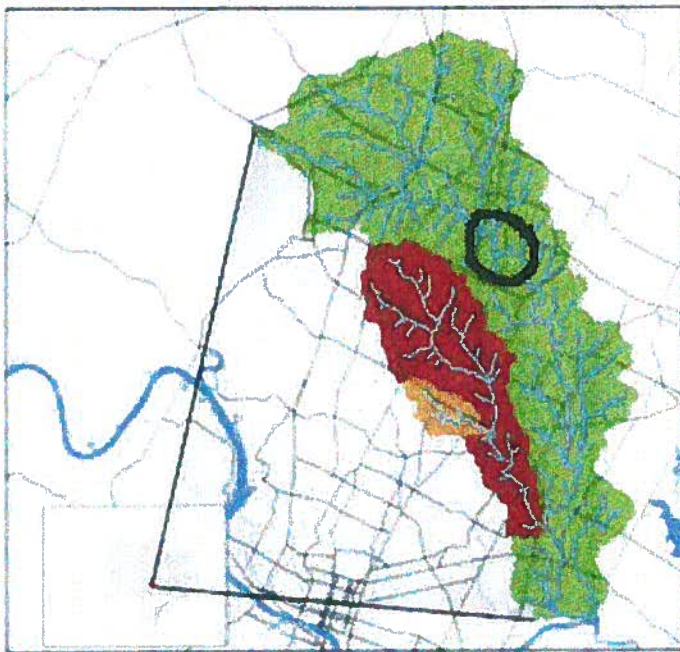
• **Halloween 2013** – out of banks and close to houses, but no house flooding.

• **September 2014** rains, creek rose 9ft to bank full with just 1 day of rain. At this time we invited the Project Manager to come and see what Big Walnut looks like and does during a high water episode in the very area where the Urban Trail is being planned for. His response:

“The Consulting Engineer is currently using computer simulations to model the creek hydraulics. As we begin to design improvements that may include armoring, bank shaving or dredging, we expect to make site visits and look forward to working with you then.”

(see copy of email attached)

Per his response, Mr. Duane, the Project Manager, had a perfect chance to actually see what Big Walnut does in a high water episode but declined to do so, preferring computer models.



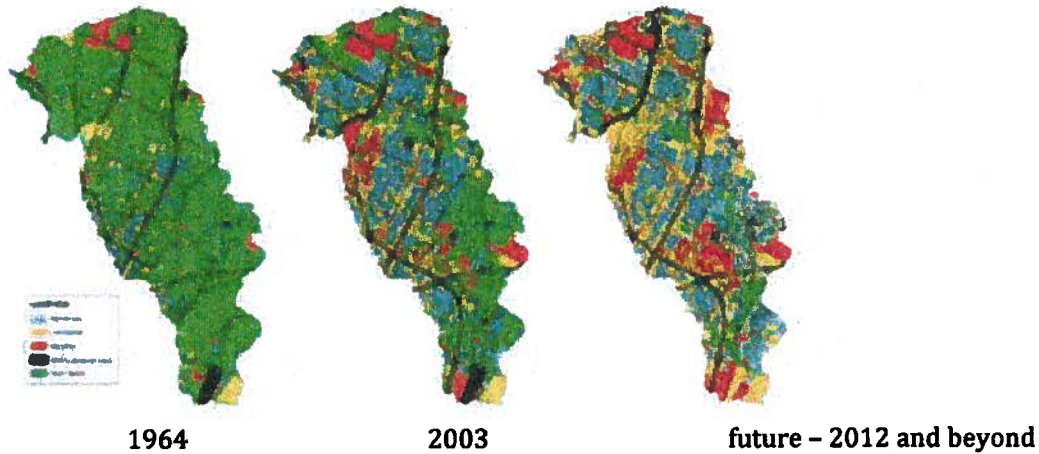
Big Walnut watershed with Phase II marked. Dark area is Little Walnut watershed.

We already know from the first and only public meeting on 1/21/14 Project Manager stated that the trail is not being constructed to the 100 year flood plain.

In subsequent meetings, opposite statements, such as “of course we are considering the flood plain” were made by other Public Works staff. At the Environmental Board meeting in September, Mr. Duane stated that he cannot make any statements concerning flooding at this time.

We are wondering if the Project Manager is taking into account further additions of impervious cover upstream. There is lots of land to be built on and lots of density yet to come such as existing plans for new apartment complex at Braker and Yager.

From *Stormwater* January-February 2012 issue, (<http://www.stormh2o.com/SW/Articles/15796.aspx?format=2>) the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department predicted urban growth in the Big Walnut area:



In addition during the Environmental Board meeting in September the Project Manager stated that he had only become aware of Watershed protection ordinance 4 weeks prior to the meeting. The Phase II trail has been in design for years, why is the watershed ordinance only just being taken into consideration?

We DO NOT want to become another Onion Creek due to inadequate planning and design by a maverick/rogue project manager with no oversight by any government entity. Boards and Commissions have not been given complete information, the City Council is not doing oversight on this project.

We do not want to become the next Onion Creek. At the very least existing regulations regarding construction in flood plains need to be adhered to.

What can be done during the design phase to put proper oversight on this project to prevent unnecessary loss due to flooding?



Dorsey Twidwell <[redacted]>

RE: North Walnut Creek Trail Phase 2 - Hydrology Studies

Duane, Richard <Richard.Duane@austintexas.gov>

Mon, Sep 22, 2014 at 7:22 AM

To: Dorsey Twidwell <[redacted]>
Cc: [redacted], "Brennes, Robert" <Robert.Brennes@austintexas.gov>, "Cragger, Chad" <Chad.Cragger@austintexas.gov>, "Perez, Carolyn" <Carolyn.Perez@austintexas.gov>

Dorsey:

The Consulting Engineer is currently using computer simulations to model the creek hydraulics. As we begin to design improvements that may include armoring, bank shaving or dredging, we expect to make site visits and look forward to working with you then.

Thanks

R

Richard Duane PE
City of Austin
Project Management Division
Public Works Department
Phone (512) 974-7730

From: Dorsey Twidwell [mailto:[redacted]]
Sent: Friday, September 19, 2014 12:24 PM
To: Duane, Richard
Cc: [redacted]; Brennes, Robert; [redacted]; Cragger, Chad
Subject: North Walnut Creek Trail Phase 2 - Hydrology Studies

Hello Richard,
I trust this e-mail finds you well.

With the recent heavy rains, Big Walnut Creek has risen to bank full twice in the last 48 hours. With a 60% chance of rain through tomorrow, this would be a good time to for an on-site study of the hydrology of the creek bank near Cedarbrook Court where, as you know, a bridge is planned for Phase 2 of North Walnut Creek trail.

I would be available to allow access to my property to allow for a close investigation of the water flow.

Please advise.

I look forward to hearing from you.

respectfully, Dorsey Twidwell cell [redacted]

Contact Information

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