

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

Local Planning Session – June 2nd 2017
San Antonio River Authority
8:30am – 12:30pm

Attendees (in no particular order)

- Adele Cardenas – Environmental Protection Agency
- Brian Mast – San Antonio River Authority
- Therese Kenner – San Antonio River Authority
- Eduardo Carrasco – City of San Antonio Intergovernmental Relations
- Allison Blazosky – Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Adelyn Alanis – Parks and Recreation
- Lissa Martinez – Master Naturalist/ TX Stream Team
- Amalia Sollars – NSISD
- Steve Graham – San Antonio River Authority
- James Oliver – National Parks Service
- Beth Keel - San Antonio Housing Authority
- Judit Vega – Health Equity/ Metro Health
- Veronica Ramirez – Diabetes Education/ Metro Health
- Justin Bates – National Parks Service (Austin, TX)
- Erick Melville – National Parks Service (Austin, TX)
- Eloisa Portillo-Morales – City of San Antonio Office of Sustainability
- Hailey Campbell - City of San Antonio Office of Sustainability
- Sara Mendiola - City of San Antonio Office of Sustainability
- Colleen Swain – World Heritage Office
- Nefi Garza – Transportation and Capital Improvements
- Chris Babis – Green Spaces Alliance
- Zuleika K. Morales – Housing and Urban Development
- Perla Alarcon – Center for Disease Control and Prevention/Metro Health

Agenda

- Introductions
- History of the local Urban Waters Partnership
- Develop Themes – Overlapping Group Goals and Objectives
 - 3 Breakout Sessions
 - Education: Water Quality and Natural Environment
 - Community Engagement
 - Economic Development and Revitalization
- Brainstorm initial Action Items and plans for follow-up planning session

History

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership began in 2011 to promote collaboration between federal agencies and local partners in urban communities with the goal of restoring waterways. Around this time, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) had partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, City of San Antonio, Bexar County, and the San Antonio River Foundation to restore 10 miles of the San Antonio River through the San Antonio Missions National Park, and SARA realized their work shared the same goals as those of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This realization sparked

discussions between the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, San Antonio River Authority, San Antonio Housing Authority, and San Antonio Water System about how they could become part of the partnership and increase the pace of improvements in local waterways. In 2013, local partners met with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to help bring this idea to fruition. Their application was submitted and approved in 2014 as one of the 19 designated locations across the United States, making San Antonio the only city to apply to become part of the Partnership. While the partners are quite diverse, they all have common goals –to work together to improve water quality in the San Antonio River basin within Bexar county and to revitalize communities' relationship with their local waterways.

In October of 2015, the San Antonio UWFP welcomed Perla Alarcon, a CDC Fellow working with the San Antonio Metropolitan Health Department, as the location's Ambassador. UWFP Ambassadors serve as coordinators, facilitators, and reporters, providing support in both strategic planning and project implementation. One goal of the ambassador program is to accelerate and prioritize on-the-ground projects that are critical to improving water quality, restoring outdoor spaces, and fostering community stewardship in urban watersheds.

Nationally, the UWFP seeks to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are underserved, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. Specifically, the partnership will:

- Break down federal program silos to promote more efficient and effective use of federal resources through better coordination and targeting of federal investments.
- Recognize and build on local efforts and leadership, by engaging and serving community partners.
- Engage and empower community members
- Work with local officials and effective community-based organizations to leverage area resources and stimulate local economies to create local jobs.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

Currently, work plans and factsheets detailing the San Antonio River Basin focus on specific projects that have been supported by the partnership, creating the illusion of exclusivity. Shifting to a more thematic narrative, where goals and objectives the partnership wishes to accomplish are at the focus, would encourage additional stakeholders to assess where their priorities overlap with ours and contact the partnership for support. We hope to effectively communicate that this coalition between various agencies and organizations of all levels and provides opportunity to access resources, technical assistance and training opportunities.

Several partners stressed that a stronger community voice, as well as the topic of environmental justice, was missing from the conversation. Adele Cardenas of EPA Region 6 also suggested that we provide stakeholders with continuous opportunities to share themes that maybe weren't addressed at the initial planning meeting. Members of the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) and Sustainability reiterated that they saw this initial planning meeting as the beginning of what management and outreach strategies may or may not be effective for the local partnership.

San Antonio Rivers Basin - Ongoing Collaboration as part of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership

The City of San Antonio, working in conjunction with the US Army Corps of Engineers, private landowners, and local partners has developed a greenway hike and bike trail system along Salado Creek and is set to begin construction Summer 2017. The Greenway Trail System links communities across Bexar County to creeks and rivers providing recreational, health, educational, and engagement opportunities. A planned section of the Salado Creek trail will be

adjacent, will pass through, Fort Sam Houston, allowing military personnel to benefit from the Greenways. Helps with core of engineers fast track processes

Bexar County, National Park Service (NPS), the San Antonio Conservation Society, and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) petitioned to be designated a World Heritage location by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) beginning in 2006. On July 5th, 2015, the San Antonio Missions were designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. This designation is projected to provide educational opportunities about the missions and *acequias*, increasing the area’s visibility as an international tourist destination, and creating a substantial economic impact.

San Antonio Metropolitan Health District (SAMHD) Healthy Neighborhoods Community Health Workers (CHW) have partnered with environmental educators at the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) to connect residents serviced by Healthy Neighborhoods with opportunities to engage in outdoor recreational activities and education provided by SARA. CHW can demonstrate how said programming would be beneficial to residents in these communities. Community Health Workers interact with community members on a regular/daily basis, many times living in the neighborhoods themselves, and are most families, children, and residents need most.

Breakout Sessions

A series of breakout sessions followed, allowing all participating members to brainstorm important topics for each the following three “themes”. Below is a summary of some of the topics that emerged throughout the three breakout sessions:

Group 1 – Education on Water Quality and the Natural Environment	Group 2 – Restoring watersheds and improving community engagement	Group 3 – Economic Development and Revitalization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure and amenities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parks, TCI and SARA must collaborate to assist in the success of Urban Waters ○ Improved quality of life for everyone - hospitality ○ Geocaching and the virtual experience ○ QR Codes on signage ○ Spanish translations ○ Signage on trails to businesses ○ Asset Mapping ○ Mission Reach surveying residents and visitors, feedback ○ Appropriate sustainable reconnections ○ June 10th talk with District 3. Community gathering at Stinson Trail ○ School Groups and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Restore water bodies and ecosystems ○ Crackdown on illegal dumping, trash, tires, plastic bags ○ Connecting water conservation to water quality ○ Changing state laws- “Ban the Bag”, “Stay from Styrofoam” ○ Promote anti-littering campaigns (Rain → River) ○ Establish riparian buffer zones ○ Groundwater protection ○ Low Impact Development and other Best Management practices • Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using community venues for water conservation resource 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invite TXDot to more public meetings ○ Neighborhood Engagement ○ Showcasing value of waterways ○ Facilitate awareness website ○ CoSA – Community Centers ○ OLLU ○ EcoCentro ○ TX A&M ○ High School Environmental Science Programs ○ Documenting History and Storytelling ○ Engage Schools, PTA’s in their nearby creekway usage • Economic Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Art at trailheads ○ Walkable Development ○ Create destinations - <i>Mercados</i> – amenities,

Group 1 – Education on Water Quality and the Natural Environment	Group 2 – Restoring watersheds and improving community engagement	Group 3 – Economic Development and Revitalization
<p>Youth Corps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outreach efforts at community centers, students teaching adults ○ Council Offices ○ San Antonio Speak Up ○ Metro Health’s Project Worth, Healthy Neighborhoods ○ HOA/Neighborhood Association outreach ○ Engage Joint Base San Antonio (Lackland, Ft. Sam, Camp Bullis) ○ Expanding access of trail heads into neighborhoods ○ Identify places to listen to community ○ Public Clearing House ○ Cultural Storytelling, Elders, connecting with group involved in cultural preservation ○ Library Collection on San Antonio Waters ○ Citizen Science ○ Stream Teams • Education/Outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Address community safety concerns/needs ○ ADA compliant, improving access for everyone, improving sidewalk connectivity ○ Eco-restoration ○ Flood education ○ Urban Waters presence at open houses (scheduled World Heritage open house in August) ○ Education signage ○ Educational Campaign, resource page re-design ○ Community Watershed education in schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Urban Agriculture - Community and School Gardens ○ Involve Chamber of commerce, involve business community ○ Involve Solid Waste department, Transportation and Capital Improvements, Office of Sustainability ○ Return on investment – Triple Bottom Line (social, environmental, and financial) ○ Expand San Antonio Water Systems (SAWS) ○ Partner with local nurseries ○ TX Stream Team, Citizen Science • Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Targeting linkage to schools ○ Educational components in schools ○ Connectivity of all water waterways ○ Resources – Public Education Access ○ Value of native plants ○ Retired educators to support outreach efforts I neighborhoods ○ Visual Aid – how water is a necessity in life and all humans should have access to clean water, show struggle some communities face in attaining access to this human right ○ Honor waterways as lifeline – decolonized, indigenous perspective 	<p>farmers markets, art, music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engaging small businesses along waterways to parallel roads ○ Incentivize and encourage compatible business ○ Invent in community ○ Eco/Historic Tourism ○ Self guided tours ○ Farmers Market’s at trail heads ○ Sustainable/Non-invasive development ○ Historical Water Fairs ○ Make waters swimmable ○ Professional Tour Guide Association ○ Campgrounds along river ○ Nature tours ○ Cooking classes ○ Promote river recreation endeavors and businesses, water class 1 and 2 ○ Consolidating access to websites detailing opportunities around waterways ○ ADA Access ○ Historic Signage – create destination sites, historic restaurants and locations in addition to missions, encourage neighborhood exploration ○ Capturing “original” feel of SA River and its surroundings ○ Art can bridge gaps between all groups ○ Indigenous lens - water is a lifeline

Partners also considered how the local Urban Waters priorities align with San Antonio Tomorrow’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is designed around various individual neighborhood plans. It would be important to honor strategies outlined in this plan as well, specifically if it is true to community voice.

Emerging Themes

- Education
- Community Engagement – at different levels (schools, HOA’s, NA, community groups)
- Access to Natural Environment
- Engagement through Listening and Storytelling

<u>Group 1 – Education on Water Quality and the Natural Environment</u>	<u>Group 2 – Restoring watersheds and improving community engagement</u>	<u>Group 3 – Economic Development and Revitalization</u>
Provide Engagement and education opportunities for the San Antonio community regarding infrastructure and access to the Natural Environment	Engaging San Antonio through local partnerships to educate and inspire action while focusing on concentration and water quality as a local value with national benefits	Wide-spread neighborhood enhancement through collaboration and community engagement, eco-tourism and improving access to neighborhood amenities and historic staples from Mission Reach

Partners engaged in productive discussions around the idea that when there is improvement in the quality of urban waters and access to open space, you invite economic development. However, investments need to be placed back into the neighborhoods that are generating the revenue for these businesses. Social enterprise is essential to a prosperous community. Partners also suggested the partnership pinpoint where the “connection” within the community went missing, whether it is a physical disconnection or social/perceived disconnection or both.

Action Items

Sub-committee groups were established in the following areas:

Sub-committee Group 1 – Identify community groups and community leaders- Who is missing from the conversation?

Sub-committee Group 2 – Collect data and compile asset maps containing agencies, groups, or other community assets that should be part of the conversation

Sub-committee Group 3 - Inventory of environmental educators and programs

Sub-committee groups were encouraged convene sometime in **June or July 2017**, in preparation for a follow-up planning session in **September or October 2017**.