

# URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

*Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities*

## San Antonio River Basin Local Workplan Summer 2017



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## I. History

Nationally, the Urban Water Federal Partnership 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 seeks to:

- 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.

The national Urban Waters Federal Partnership began in 2011, the same year 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. SARA realized their work shared the same goals as those of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and this realization sparked discussions between these partner agencies as well as San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA), and San Antonio Water System (SAWS) about how they could become part of the partnership. 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. Initial focus was placed on the following local projects and locations:

- *Brackish Water Desalination*

As of Spring 2017, San Antonio Water System (SAWS) has launched H2Oaks, the brackish groundwater desalination program that provides 12 million gallons of drinking water each day from the previously untapped Wilcox Carrizo Aquifer, diversifying the regions' water supply. H2Oaks also hopes to serve as a center that will function as an educational, research, and meeting facility for SAWS, local universities, and school districts. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 SAWS hosted an open house to introduce interested parties to the facility.

- *Olmos Basin/San Antonio Zoo Water Quality and Ecosystem Restoration*

- *Choice Neighborhood Initiative (Eastside Choice Neighborhood/Promise Zone)*

In 2011, agencies supported by the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative set out to develop a large scale neighborhood transformation plan to develop and revitalize a historically segregated and underserved community. As a result, East Meadows, a mixed-income, low-impact, safe, and walkable community where residents have access to new parks and recreational opportunities,

broke ground in 2015 and is set to be fully completed by 2018. Menger Creek, a former drainage channel, is currently being revitalized into a linear creek trail, equipped with various park amenities. As of September 2017, 226 trees have also been planted in the community, providing residents with much needed tree canopies and shade from the Texas heat. The Gracia Street Urban Farm, a 4.1 acre empty lot, is also in the process of being rezoned and repurposed to provide community members residing in with an additional source of fresh fruits and vegetables.

- **Westside Creeks Ecosystem Restoration**

The City of San Antonio (City) invested \$6.7 million and expanded the Howard W. Peak Greenway Trails System to the Alazán, Martinez and Apache/San Pedro Creekways through the City Parks Development and Expansion Venue Project. The City and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) worked together to design, construct and improve trails along the Westside Creeks. Recently, Alazan and Martinez Creeks received additional funding and the community is excited about the additional improvements to the trail segments. The additional trails will give residents living in the Woodlawn Lake area (Alazan Creek), Deco District and Beacon Hill Neighborhoods (Martinez Creek) access to approximately 12 miles of Westside Creeks hike and bike trails connecting to area parks, local businesses, schools, downtown and to the San Antonio River.

- **San Pedro Creek Restoration**

The City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), and Our Lady of the Lake University joined community leaders and residents on January 21, 2017 to celebrate the re-opening of a \$15.4 million investment to restore Elmendorf Lake Park. Elmendorf Lake Park has been transformed into a beautifully reimagined destination park that boasts many Low Impact Development (LID) features such as rain gardens, wetlands, and bio-filtration swales to restore water quality. Play areas, expanded bus stops, pedestrian bridges, a fishing pier, picnic areas, and hike and bike trails also enhance this neighborhood park which draws families to recreate. The intricate tile benching along the Lake Plaza showcases the community's culture making it a great place for the Westside.

- **San Antonio Missions – World Heritage and Cultural Connections**

A detailed description of the projects above can be found [here](#).

On 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. Urban Waters 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.



II. Participating Agencies and Organizations

| 14 Federal Agency Partnerships  | State Agency Partnerships  | Local Government Agency Partnerships   | Non-Governmental Organization Partnerships   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Agriculture               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ U.S. Forest Services</li> <li>○ Natural Resource Conservation Service</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Department of Commerce               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Economic Development Administration</li> <li>○ National Weather Service</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Department of Defense               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers</li> <li>○ Joint Base San Antonio</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Department of Health and Human Services               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Center for Disease Control and Prevention</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Department of Housing and Urban Development</li> <li>• Department of the Interior               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fish and Wildlife Service</li> <li>○ National Park Service</li> <li>○ Bureau of Reclamation</li> <li>○ U.S. Geological Survey</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Department of Transportation</li> <li>• Environmental Protection Agency</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Commission of Environmental Quality</li> <li>• Texas Health and Human Services</li> <li>• Texas Department of Transportation</li> <li>• Texas General Land Office</li> <li>• Texas Historical Commission</li> <li>• Texas Parks and Wildlife</li> <li>• Texas State Forestry Division</li> <li>• Texas Water Development Board</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alamo Area Council of Governments</li> <li>• Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization</li> <li>• Bexar County</li> <li>• City of Alamo Heights</li> <li>• City of San Antonio</li> <li>• Edwards Aquifer Authority</li> <li>• San Antonio Housing Authority</li> <li>• San Antonio Independent School District</li> <li>• San Antonio River Authority</li> <li>• San Antonio Water System</li> <li>• VIA Metropolitan Transit</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audubon Society/Jack Kudson Nature Trail</li> <li>• Brackenridge Park Conservancy</li> <li>• CI: Now</li> <li>• Edwards Aquifer Alliance</li> <li>• Family Service Association</li> <li>• Friends of Hondondo Creek</li> <li>• Green Spaces Alliance</li> <li>• Neighborhood Associations – Olimos Park Terrace, Northmoor, Shearer Hills/Ridgeview, Westside</li> <li>• Hope in Action, Five Points</li> <li>• Neighborhood Association</li> <li>• Municipal Golf Association – San Antonio</li> <li>• NOWCastSA</li> <li>• Olimos Basin Alliance</li> <li>• Our Lady of the Lake University</li> <li>• San Antonio Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• San Antonio for Growth on the Eastside</li> <li>• San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce</li> <li>• San Antonio Zoo</li> <li>• St. Luke's Episcopal Church</li> <li>• St. Philip's College</li> <li>• Texas A&amp;M – San Antonio</li> <li>• Texas Children In Nature</li> <li>• Trust for Public Lands</li> <li>• United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County</li> <li>• Witte Museum</li> <li>• Vecinos de Mission Trails</li> </ul> |

**a) 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.

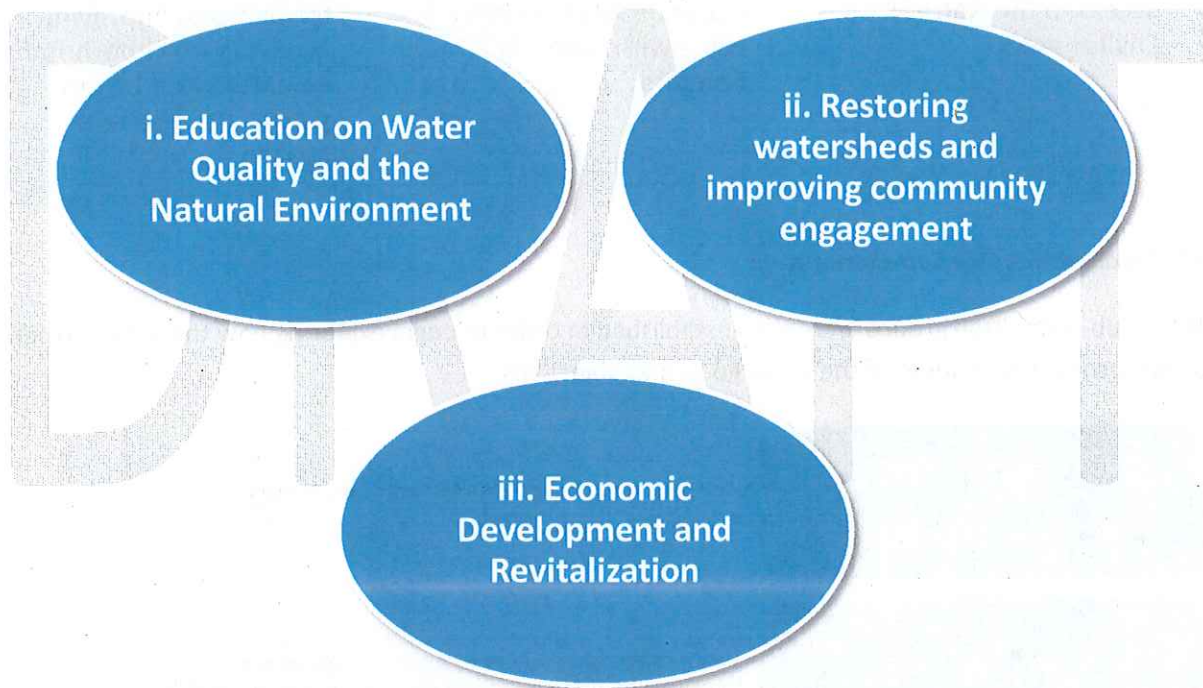
San Antonio Metropolitan Health District (SAMHD) Healthy Neighborhoods Community Health Workers (CHW) have partnered with environmental educators at the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) to connect residents serviced by Healthy Neighborhoods with opportunities to engage in outdoor recreational activities 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.

### III. Strategic Planning – Project Centered to Thematic Focus

Currently, work plans and factsheets detailing the San Antonio River Basin’s involvement with Urban Waters are project specific, creating an illusion of exclusivity to specific agencies or initiatives. Shifting to a more thematic narrative, where goals and objectives are highlighted rather than the projects the partnership has previously supported, would encourage additional stakeholders to assess where their priorities overlap with ours. We hope to effectively communicate that this coalition holds opportunities for all interested parties to access resources and technical assistance.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, the local San Antonio Urban Waters Partnership hosted the first of several planning sessions, aimed at identifying partner and stakeholder priorities, as well as pinpointing subject matter experts and organizations that should be part of the evolving partnership.

#### a) *Breakout Sessions and Emerging Themes*



The chosen facilitator determined the aforementioned themes based on national priorities documented in an Urban Waters Federal Partnership factsheet, found [here](#).

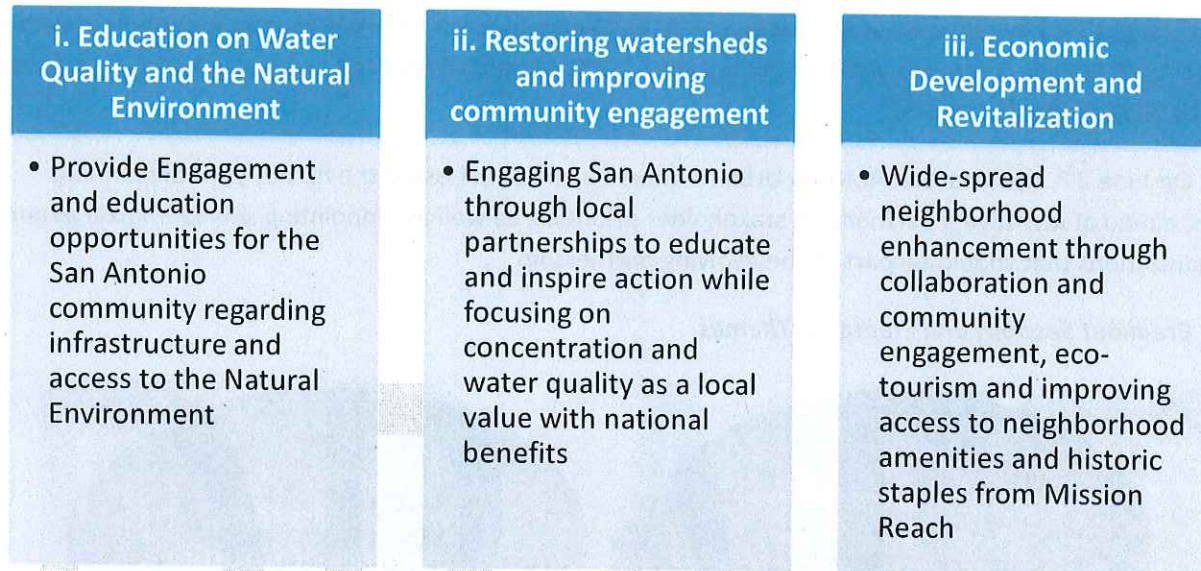
Social enterprise is essential to a prosperous community. Participating stakeholders engaged in productive discussions around the idea that improvement in the quality of urban waters and access to open spaces can lead to economic development. However, investments must be placed back into the neighborhoods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

Several local community partners were also concerned that a stronger community voice was not present during the initial Strategic Planning Session, as was as the topic of environmental justice. **EPA Region 6**



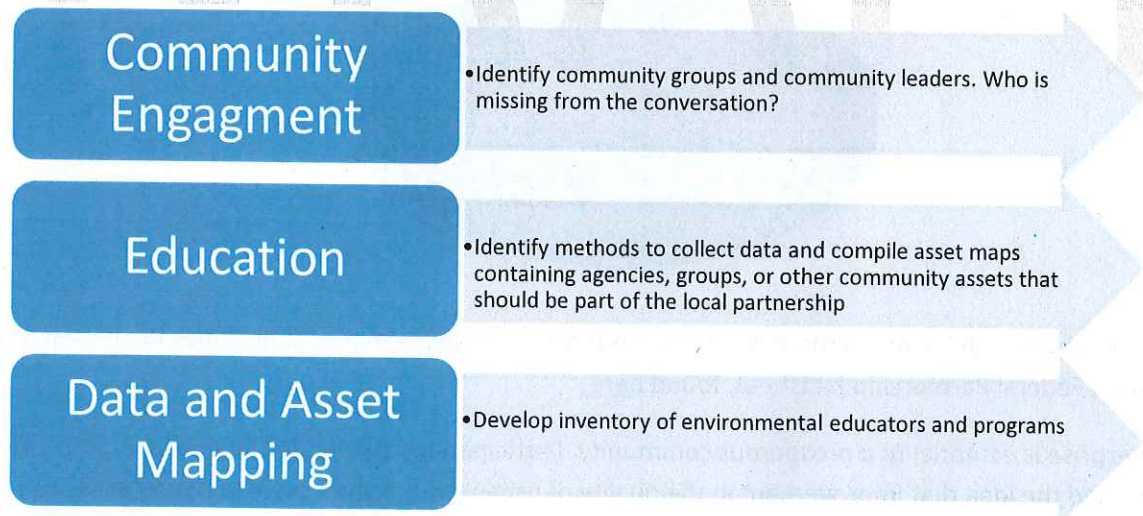
representatives also suggested that we provide stakeholders with continuous opportunities to share themes that maybe weren't addressed at the initial Strategic Planning Session.

After a series of breakout sessions and discussions, participating stakeholders were convened once more to debrief and draft closing statements that captured shared goals and objectives for each of the three themes:



**b) Local Partnership Sub-Committees**

Three sub-committee groups were then established in order to begin exploring how the local partnership can begin accomplishing some of the initial goals and objectives:



Detailed minutes for this initial planning session can be found [here](#).



## **1. Data and Asset Mapping**

The Data and Asset Mapping sub-committee met on July 5th. Alamo MPO outlined various data resources and maps available via their and other organizations where partners and stakeholders can access in order to develop asset maps of their target areas. As the group discussed how target areas would be prioritized, it was suggested that the group connect with local neighborhood association to host a [Walkable Community Workshop](#), sponsored by Alamo Area MPO. The program design assists neighborhoods in identifying infrastructure improvements to encourage walking and bicycling to restaurants, schools, businesses and parks. Reports summarizing the workshops are provided to elected officials and affected agencies for planning purposes. The reports provide a means to begin dialogue between the residents and community leaders. The MPO hopes to continue the program and believes strongly it supports the planning efforts of partnering agencies and municipalities in the region. On July 12th, Alamo Area MPO met with a representative from Hot Wells/East Pyron Neighborhood Association in order to work out details for the workshop, scheduled Thursday, October 19th from 5-8pm.

Additionally, we discussed the importance of storytelling, memories, and its connection to the river. We have a series of web pages that we are designing to mark the Tricentennial. John Reynolds with the department of History at the University of Texas at San Antonio is compiling maps and archaeological sites all bearing on the early history of Bexar County.

## **2. Education**

## **3. Community Engagement**

## **IV. Next Steps...**

### **Appendix A.**

#### **June 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Planning Session 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

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