



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Robert Goode, Interim Assistant City Manager 

FROM: Jorge Morales, P.E., CFM, Director
Watershed Protection Department 

DATE: April 13, 2023

SUBJECT: **Staff Response: Efforts to address Trash in Creeks (Resolution No. 20200123-108)**

A previous version of this memo was released in error on 4/10/2023.

Following the staff presentation on Trash in Creeks at the September 27, 2022, City Council Work Session, Council requested a follow-up that describes the City's next steps to reduce trash in our waterways. This memo reviews current programs and related opportunities for improvement as well as steps the Watershed Protection Department (WPD) and peer departments are working on with the goal of improving efficiency and effectiveness of the extraction, interception, and source reduction of trash moving through our watersheds.

Current programs, recent improvements, and strategies in progress to address trash in creeks:

- In 2022, Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) implemented the Clean Creeks Program which includes a crew of six full-time staff that manually extract trash from creeks and riparian corridors. ARR provides monthly debris removal from over 30 sites, and leadership is currently collaborating with WPD to identify additional strategic sites for regular maintenance in context of the 2020 Trash Study.
- ARR is in the process of finalizing updates to their Comprehensive Plan, with an overall goal of reaching Zero Waste in Austin. The Plan is slated to reach Council in 2023.
- ARR provides sweeping of boulevards and bike lanes twice per month and residential streets are swept up to six times per year.
- ARR staff assist other departments with encampment cleanups that can directly impact litter in creeks. ARR also administers the Violet Bag Program, which empowers people experiencing homelessness to maintain spaces around them by providing trash bags and kiosks near known encampments. Downtown Austin Community Court manages the Violet Keep Safe Storage facility, a transition storage service that helps people experiencing homelessness keep their possessions safe while navigating their way around the community and out of homelessness.

- The Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) collaborates with ARR and WPD in the recently reinvigorated “Leave No Trace” program. An annual report on the recent education/outreach effort is forthcoming.
- PARD maintains the recycling and trash receptacles in Austin’s parks and trail system, connects with patrons through staff Park Rangers and manages extensive encampment cleanups.
- WPD Field Operations Division staff removes debris that obstructs culverts in addition to a dedicated crew of full-time staff that remove trash from Lady Bird Lake four days per week.
- WPD Field Operations Division uses a combination of in-house crews, contractors, and partnerships to provide vegetation and litter management at 1400+ combined acres of WPD-maintained assets such as ponds, creeks, channels, and open space properties including over 1,200+ stormwater controls.
- WPD, ARR and PARD partner with The Other Ones Foundation (TOOF) to assist with litter cleanup in creeks and near encampments.
- WPD and ARR fund additional trash collection for the Waller Creek Tunnel and litter collection from inlet filters downtown, in the lower Waller Creek Watershed.
- WPD partners and contracts with Keep Austin Beautiful (KAB) which implements volunteer cleanup efforts including programs such as “Adopt-A-Creek” and “Clean Lady Bird Lake.”
- WPD has recently initiated a program for citizens to maintain and “Adopt-A-Storm Drain” in addition to its storm drain marking program.
- Austin Water has installed bottle-filling water stations to help shift the paradigm away from single-use plastic bottles.
- The City coordinates with organizations such as the Downtown Austin Alliance, Austin Parks Foundation, Shoal Creek Conservancy, The Trail Conservancy and the Waterloo Greenway Conservancy which supplement litter removal in the downtown area.

Watershed Protection will work with ARR, PARD, Law and other peer departments to evaluate the following strategies:

- Evaluate the feasibility of policies that would reduce or eliminate the use or sale of polystyrene or plastic single use materials that negatively impact Austin’s water quality, as was proposed in Florida. Feasibility of policies would need to include examining options available within Texas State law.
- Review and modernize existing City Code Chapter 10-5 article 3 that addresses prohibitions and fines related to littering. Strengthen and diversify penalties and improve enforcement capabilities.
- Support the aims of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality’s 2021 Recycling Market Development Plan to bolster the market for recycled plastics. The City of Austin is a member of the US Plastic Pact and working together to take measures to eliminate problematic and unnecessary plastics by 2025, including:
 - Stimulate the elimination of problematic or unnecessary plastic packaging and/or products.
 - Incentivize the use of reusable, recyclable, or compostable plastic packaging.
 - Stimulate the demand for recycled plastics.
- Designate a manager or “Trash Coordinator” that will coordinate existing city, county, and non-profit staff and volunteer efforts, track programmatic success, ensure implementation of trash-reducing initiatives, and develop new and/or novel management strategies for extraction, interception, and source reduction of trash. Manager would focus on improved efficiency and

effectiveness of existing code, criteria, policies, and programs through a singular action plan with measurable success indicators as well as a centralized event schedule to maximize the efficiency and equitability of efforts.

- Explore existing law and code related to overflowing dumpsters to evaluate requirements designed to reduce overflowing/export of trash and the ability of the City to enforce these requirements. This may include criteria for capacity per structure/use as well as requirements for physical barriers that retain displaced trash around the periphery of dumpsters especially those that service food trailer courts and other businesses that provide eating areas in the Critical Water Quality Zone (CWQZ). Affected code sections include 25-8-261 on placement; 13-1-8 on plazas could include food trailer courts and increase requirements; 6-3-5 for bus stops; 10-3-93 or 25-2-812 with sanitation requirements for food trailers; and 15-6-112.
- Change policy at city facilities in and around waterbodies, including, but not limited to:
 - Limit City procurement and distribution of single-use plastic and polystyrene in all City of Austin facilities.
 - Research the ability of the City of Austin to prohibit certain single-use containers on water bodies.

The Trash in Creeks effort began in 2020 and includes a wide range of memos and reports including the following three key deliverables which can be found [here](#):

- Trash In Creeks: A field survey of trash intensity and source types in Austin, Texas
- Trash in Creeks: Benchmarking solution space and resources
- Trash in Creeks: Program Inventory, Analysis and Outcomes

Should you have any questions related to the attached reports or this memo on litter in Austin's waterways, please contact me at jorge.morales@austintexas.gov or 512-974-3438.

cc: Jesús Garza, Interim City Manager
CMO Executive Team
Shay Roalson, Austin Water, Director
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