

Public Engagement Process

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1,243

Survey Responses

917

Public Comments
Received

Public engagement efforts produced over 2,160 total responses, from online sources and multiple physical events that occurred throughout Austin.

Public engagement was encouraged through the following mechanisms:

- Education Component
- Online Participation
- “Pop-Up” Events
- Public Meetings
- Media Outreach

EDUCATION COMPONENT

The Urban Forestry Board working group and staff targeted their audience through news articles, stakeholder organizations, online social marketing, newsletters, bookmarks, flyers and the installation of “Tree Tags”. Flyers were distributed electronically to 49 stakeholders and to 22 libraries and 24 park facilities. Bookmarks made from 100% recycled content were passed out at pop-up events and at Plan presentations. Approximately two feet tall, and one-and-a-half feet wide, the tree tags contained the value of Austin’s urban forest in relation to energy use, carbon sequestration, watershed protection and air quality. The idea behind these tags was to demonstrate the value trees bring to the community beyond the traditional value of shade and beauty. The tags were hung from prominent public trees throughout the city.

ONLINE PARTICIPATION

Online participation played a critical role in the ability to reach out to a large number of stakeholders. Several tools were created to allow people to participate remotely at any time during the two phases of the engagement process.

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PHASE 1 - SPRING 2012

An online survey called the “Tree Be-Leafs: An Urban Forest Opinion Poll” was distributed to over forty internal and external stakeholders and generated over 876 responses. The survey was designed to address broad topics related to Austinites and their tree values. Additionally, four Spanish language surveys were taken capturing a small audience of a hard-to-reach population.

PHASE 2 - SUMMER 2013

SpeakUpAustin.Org hosted a discussion board yielding over 100 individual comments. Three surveys (367 responders) were created to generate feedback concerning performance indicators, policy elements, and funding prioritization.

In addition to specific discussion and survey questioning, an email account was created that allowed people to submit comments that were broad in topic and specifics. Community members had access to the online tools twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week so that people who could not attend a public meeting had the opportunity to make their voices heard.



What should be done for trees and vegetation in our public spaces?

“POP-UP EVENTS”

Community meetings have no problem attracting the people most passionate about the topic at hand. The challenge comes when trying to involve people who would not normally take the ten minutes required to engage in conversation or fill out a survey. The “Pop-Up” events were intended to capture a random sampling of those hard-to-reach people. Instead of them having to come to us or take time to go online and find the surveys, we went to them and asked them a basic question: What should be done for trees and vegetation in our public spaces? Community members were invited to answer this question on leaf-shaped sticky notes, and place those notes on a five-foot tall 3D tree model. These events yielded over five-hundred leaf-notes with individual comments.



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PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two meetings were hosted for this process and both featured Urban Forestry Board members, Urban Forest Program staff, and staff members from other City of Austin departments. The first public meeting was hosted in April 2012 at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center. The public was invited to review and comment on Urban Forest Plan Vision Statement, Components, and Guiding Principles. Concurrently the Urban Forest Opinion Poll “Tree Beliefs Survey” was being conducted online with 900 responses generated

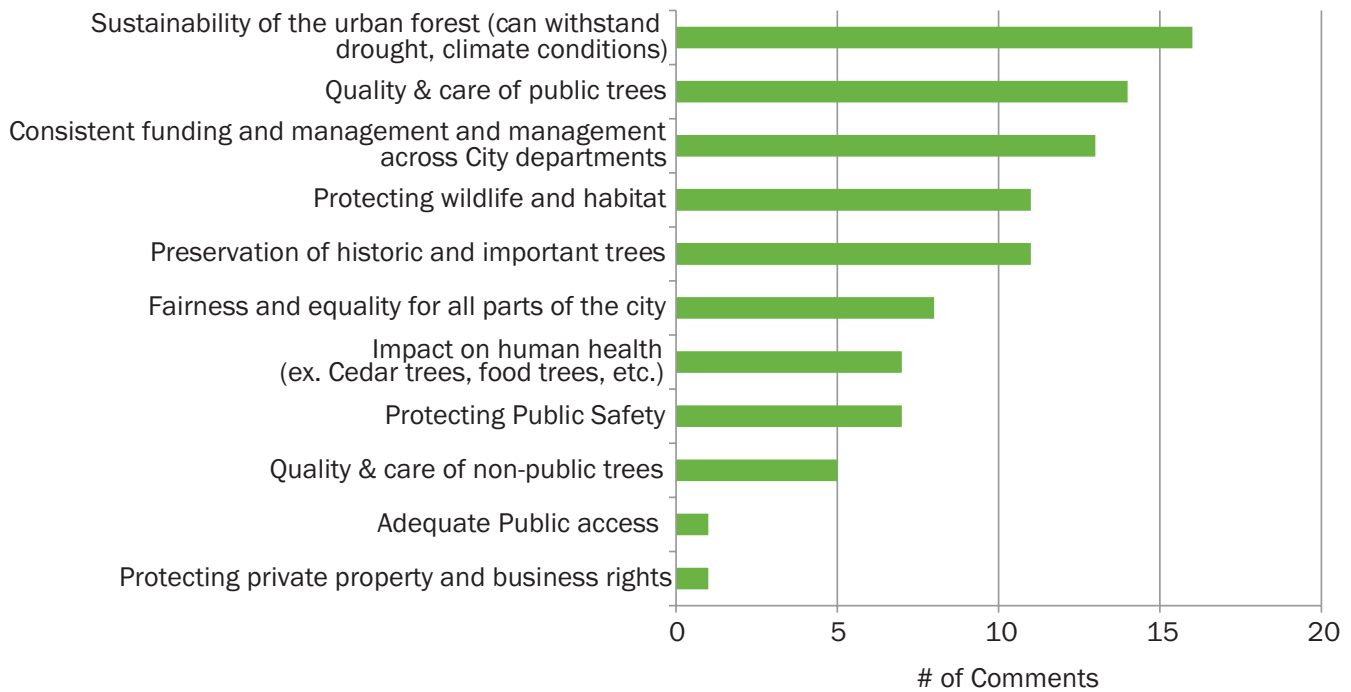
The second public meeting was hosted in August 2013 at the Daniel E. Ruiz Branch Library. The event consisted of a public workshop followed by an open house. The public workshop portion was organized around specific parts of the plan. Participants were asked to rank the plan’s policy categories using paper money to demonstrate which of the policy programs should receive the resource priority.

Additionally, attendees were able to plot where the City is now compared to where it should be in the future for urban forest care, and mark which of the plan’s policy sections are a priority for them. The prioritization process aligns with the online prioritization survey and helps clarify areas the community is most concerned about. Prioritization will help guide resource use when departments begin the process of implementing the plan and allocating resources. The open house portion of the meeting allowed for conversation between board members, staff, and community members.

MEDIA AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

In the initial 2012 outreach, KUT Radio Changing Austin segment and an Ahora Si article directed people to participate in the online survey. In summer 2013 KUT Radio interviewed Urban Forester, Angela Hanson and asked people for online participation or to attend the August community workshop.

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There were also stories in the Austin American Statesman’s Metro Section, the Austin Post, and several other small stories on televised news. News releases also promoted the public events and online tools. Online public engagement and the community workshop were promoted via social media tools such as the @austintexasgov Twitter (24,000 followers) and City Facebook account which reaches 6,000 people. The invitation to engage in the planning process also went out numerous times through the Urban Forestry Program’s Facebook page (625 people) and through the monthly newsletter. Forty-nine stakeholder groups and organizations were also specifically emailed an invitation to engage in the Plan’s development.

To ensure transparency a complete and detailed compilation of all the comments received have been made public on the Austin Urban Forest Plan webpage.

